

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
13 December 2011

Subject: REVIEW OF AREA FORUMS AND AREA PARTNERSHIPS

**All Wards
Scrutiny Committees
Cabinet Member for Partnerships: Councillor T Swales**

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with feedback from a review of Area Forums and Area Partnerships and to examine a range of alternative models for future delivery.
- 1.2 In September 2008, the Council agreed to the creation of Area Forums as part of its political structures. The Area Forums were identified as member-led fora established to improve community engagement, provide more local delivery of the Council's priorities and provide opportunities for Ward Members to take a role in community leadership.
- 1.3 The operation and success of the Forums has been kept under review, including two reviews by Overview & Scrutiny Committees in 2009 and 2010. Improvement plans have been developed to enhance their role going forward. The Area Forums have important links to the 5 Area Partnerships of the Local Strategic Partnership and communication and representative links are provided between the Forums and Partnerships. Further details on the Area Forums and their role are contained in Appendix 1.
- 1.4 In 2001, the Council established 5 Area Partnerships based around the market towns and their surrounding rural villages. The Partnerships were community-led fora open to residents, local groups and representatives of Parish, District and County Councils. Their role was to identify local issues and needs, develop and deliver projects and lobby and influence service providers. All of the Partnerships have successfully delivered a substantial number of projects of benefit to local communities and are continuing to do so. The Area Partnerships remain a key mechanism for delivery and engagement at a very local level with a range of partners in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. They also fulfil a range of principles contained within the Government's concepts of Localism and the Big Society and key elements within the Localism Bill. Further details on the Area Partnerships and their role are contained in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 The Hambleton LSP has recently reviewed its structure and approach and a new streamlined joint structure with Richmondshire was formally adopted in March 2011, including the creation of the Joint Strategic Forum. Joint working is still seen as the way forward. There is also the recognition that this is a significant partnership for the Council which has adopted the Community Plan to be delivered through this mechanism.
- 1.6 As part of the ongoing review of Area Forums, discussions were held in July 2011 at all of the Forums regarding their future operation. Key issues raised about the current operation of the Forums were:
 - Good Member debate and engagement;

- Low levels of attendance, awareness and interest in the Forums, particularly by local communities and Parishes;
- Little evidence of local delivery – more evidence of discussions
- Poor linkage between Forums and Cabinet and Forums and overall Council priorities;
- Little evidence of Members using Forums to support their role as community leaders

1.7 Feedback from each of the Forums is summarised as follows:

- Easingwold – continue to operate as at present, but more emphasis on advertising and promoting the Forum.
- Bedale – current position to be maintained and Area partnerships to be consulted.
- Stokesley – Parish council liaison meeting to be reinstated, regeneration group to remain, Area Forum meetings to be discontinued;
- Thirsk – Forum to be retained, greater efforts made in terms of promotion and the introduction of an open session at the start of each meeting for the community to raise issues.
- Northallerton – to continue as at present and to report in 1 year on success and effectiveness.

1.8 In considering the future delivery of the Area Forums it is recognised that maintaining the types of “area Forums” is not sustainable and potentially less distinct as time goes on as to the respective roles of each and therefore the opportunity has also been taken to review the structures, linkages and key issues with Area Partnerships and to examine a range of alternative models for delivery going forward. This review focused on the following issues:

- Improving the levels of engagement and effective communication between the Area Forums, the Area Partnerships and their communities
- Improving the effective use of resources
- Addressing member concerns about democratic accountability and decision making

1.9 It is recognised that the North Yorkshire County Council Area Committees also are part of the local architecture and a forum for County Councillors to discuss issues within a district context. However, they do not have a community engagement function and no longer consider funding applications relating to the delivery of community projects. There have been discussions with the County Council about the role and purpose of the Area Committees and possible integration at a more local level. The County Council have resolved to retain the Area Committees and there seems little appetite to integrate either than encouraging County Councillors to attend the local fora.

1.10 Four models for delivery have been considered as part of this review:

- Option 1 – retaining the current position
- Option 2 – partial integration of Area Forums and Area Partnerships
- Option 3 – full integration – this option reflects the model and approach currently adopted at Richmondshire
- Option 4 – removal of Area Partnerships

The options are shown in Appendix 2.

1.11 Each option has a range of associated risks and benefits. A detailed options analysis is shown in Appendix 3.

1.12 In moving any of these options forward, the significant community effort in delivering local outcomes needs continuing recognition and support. Therefore in the first instance a round table discussion with the Area Partnership and Strategic Forum chair is suggested with the aim of understanding the steps necessary to move to option 3 and a revised model based around "Community Forums".

2.0 DECISIONS SOUGHT:

2.1 To consider the models for delivery and determine the preferred option.

2.2 Where a change to the delivery model is agreed in principle, to request that consultation takes place with all key stakeholders the results of which will be considered in February 2012 with a plan for implementation.

3.0 LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES:

3.1 The Council Plan has a key aim relating to Partnerships – encouraging our residents to become more involved in making decisions and delivering services which impact on their local communities. In achieving this priority, we will provide direct support to the five Area Partnerships so that they can develop a Local Action plan. We will also support the delivery of the Action Plan. By working in this way we will help people to come together to take decisions, shape their area and improve their communities.

4.0 RISK ASSESSMENT:

4.1 There are no significant risks. Overall the risk of agreeing with the recommendations outweighs the risks of not agreeing them and is considered acceptable.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 None.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND EFFICIENCIES:

6.1 The Council currently provides officer support to all of the 5 Area Forums via the Assistant Directors. It provides financial support to the 5 Area Partnerships through a Partnerships Officer and other minor revenue expenses amounting to £7,900 per Area Partnership. The alternative models for delivery will allow the staffing resources to be more effectively directed and will provide non-cashable savings of approximately £6,000.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

7.1 Any amendment to the role and future of the Area Forums will require an amendment to the Council's constitution.

8.0 SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998:

8.1 None.

9.0 EQUALITY/DIVERSITY ISSUES:

9.1 Area Forums and Area Partnerships provide an opportunity for all sections of the community to be engaged in decision-making at a local level.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

10.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1) Option 3 be accepted in principal as the preferred option.
- 2) Consultation with all key stakeholders takes place and that feedback and a plan for achieving Option 3 is received in February 2012.

SANDRA WALBRAN

Background papers:	None
Author ref:	Sandra Walbran
Contact:	Sandra Walbran Assistant Chief Executive 01609 767235

Area Forums and Area Partnerships – Delivery Mechanisms

Hambleton Area Forums

In September 2008 the Council agreed to the creation of Area Forums as part of its political structures. The aims for the Area Forums were very specific - to improve the Council's community engagement, to provide the basis for more local delivery of the Council's priorities and an opportunity for Ward Councillors to undertake their community leadership role. When the Area Forums were established a nominated Member representative was requested to attend the LSP Area Partnership meetings to represent the District Council and ensure effective communications between the two structures. The Area Forums receive an update report at each meeting on projects in the Area Partnerships Action Plan that the District Council is leading on.

Area Forums meet quarterly with 20 meetings being held per year in the 5 market towns. Other than staffing and administration (printing, postage etc) the cost to the Council is approximately £1200 per annum for room hire. Staff costs include attendance by Assistant Directors (and Officers if required) and the preparation and presentation of Reports.

Since the Areas Forums were established on average 5 reports per meeting are prepared with an update on the Area Partnership's Community Plan appearing as a standing item. Other regular agenda items include update on the LDF and flood alleviation measures and performance monitoring of HDC's service provision eg. Streetscene/Waste & Recycling. Ad hoc reports include requests for information on specific planning applications and the clarification of HDC policy. At the round of Area Forum meetings held in June 2011 a total of 36 Reports were presented and responses to 10 community questions were prepared.

Reviewing the operation and success of the Forums has been an ongoing process and there has been on-going dialogue involving the lead officers, Forum Chairmen and individual Members. Two reviews of the Area Forums have been undertaken by the Safety and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The main recommendations from these reviews were to:

- improve publicity and marketing
- reducing the frequency of meetings to one annual meeting with ad-hoc meetings called as and when local issues arise
- reinstating the Parish Council Liaison meetings
- exploring partnership working with NYCC.

These recommendations have not yet been politically implemented.

Hambleton Area Partnerships

In 2001 the District Council supported the establishment of 5 Area Partnerships - community led forums based around the 5 market towns and their surrounding rural areas. Each Partnership is chaired by a member of the local community (with the exception of Stokesley which is chaired by a District Councillor) and is open to local residents and groups, with representation from Parish, Town, District & County Councils. Each has a constitution and bank account and has the capacity to apply for and manage funding for projects.

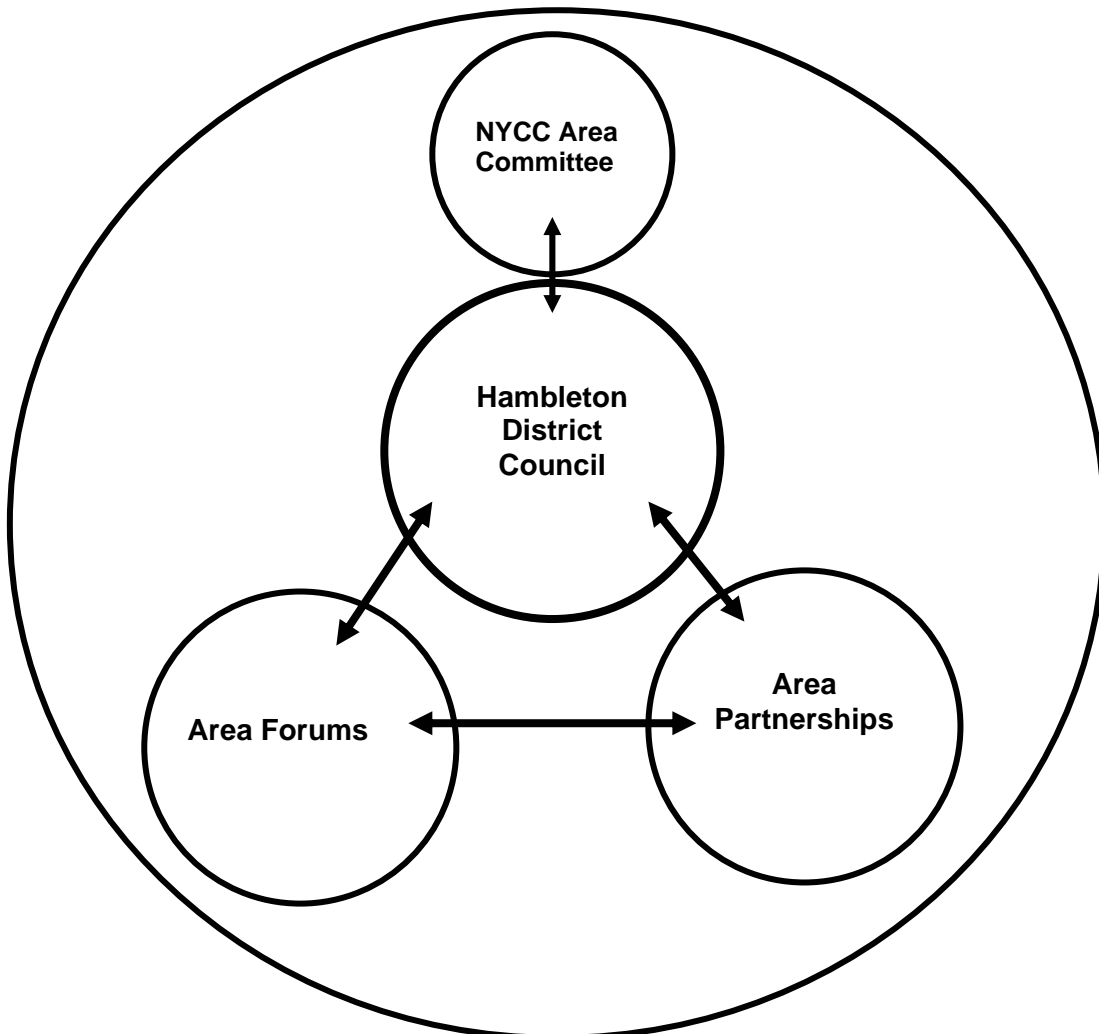
The role of the Area Partnership is to identify local issues and needs, develop and deliver projects and lobby and influence service providers through the Hambleton & Richmondshire Strategic Forum. Each Partnership has successfully delivered a significant number of projects of benefit to the local community. Over the last two years the priority for Area Partnerships across Hambleton has been the identification of community priorities and support for community-led projects that seek to turn such aspirations into reality. Projects include the establishment of diversionary activities for young people, the delivery of the Renaissance Market Town 'vision' and the completion of small scale public realm improvement

schemes. The withdrawal of Yorkshire Forward funding and the long term implications of the Localism Bill will influence the activities undertaken by each Partnership and the Partnership's role in the wider community.

Four of the five Area Partnerships meet bi-monthly and the frequency of meetings of the Thirsk Regeneration Initiative is under review. Other than staffing and administration costs (printing, postage etc.) the key cost to the Council is for room hire. In 2010-2011 the cost to the Council for each of the 5 Area Partnerships amounted to £7,900.

Delivery Models - Options

Option 1: Retain the current structure

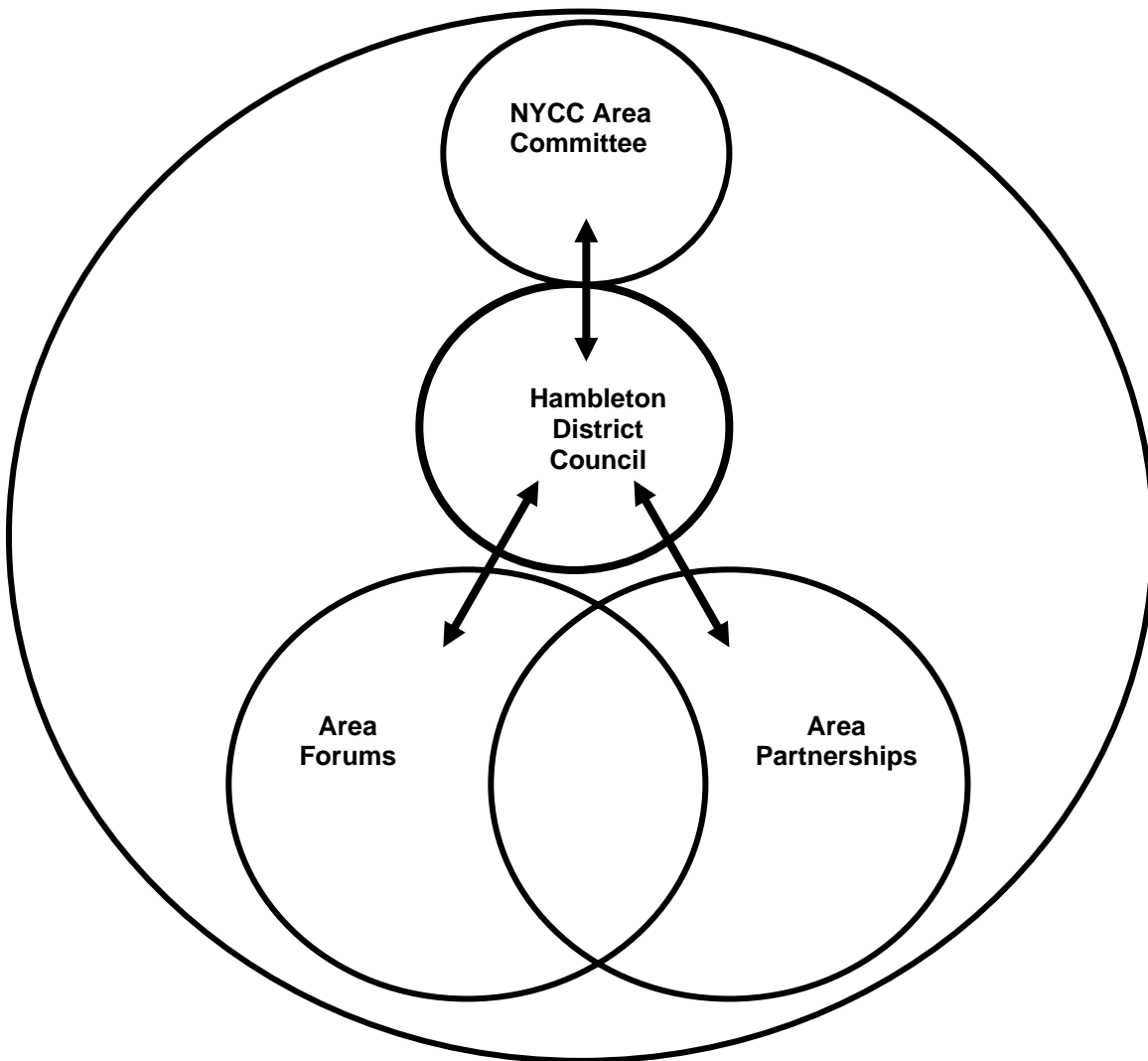


Summary:

No change to existing structure, reporting procedure and frequency of meetings.

Risks	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Member and public engagement • Continuing concern about democratic accountability and decision making • Council capacity to support both fora is reduced – efficiencies required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing delivery within communities based on need • Community interest and engagement is maintained • Communities retain ability to lobby and influence service providers

Option 2: Partial Integration: Joint Meetings

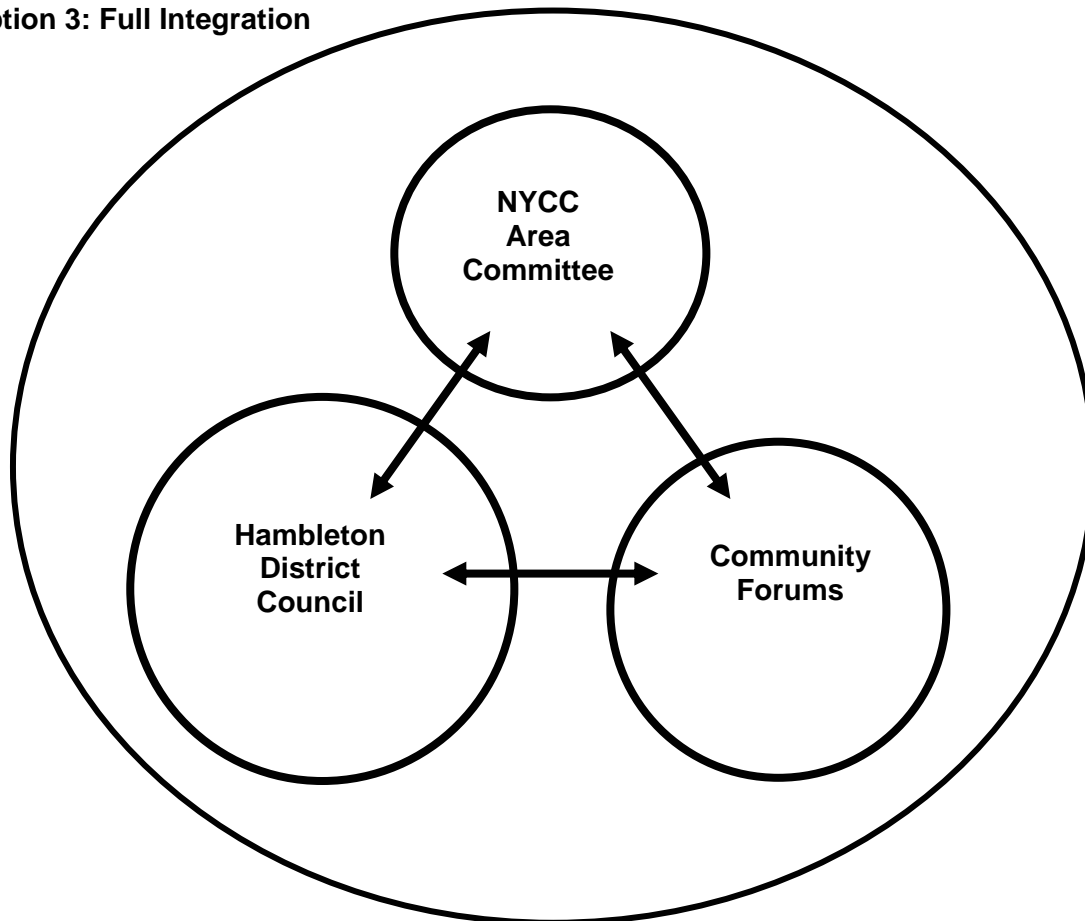


Summary of option

Area Forums and Partnerships will meet quarterly at the same time and at the same venue. Meetings will be held prior to NYCC Area Committee Meetings. Terms of Reference and primary functions will remain unaltered. Agenda's to be shared to consider HDC performance issues and community engagement/project delivery. Task Groups which provide the 'delivery mechanism', meet on a needs basis.

Risks	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity and length of meetings leads to disengagement • Tensions are created over mandate and responsibility for leading • Community engagement may reduce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Member engagement and the demonstration of roles as community leaders • More efficient use of council resources • Increased understanding by communities of the role of Members and the Council's priorities

Option 3: Full Integration



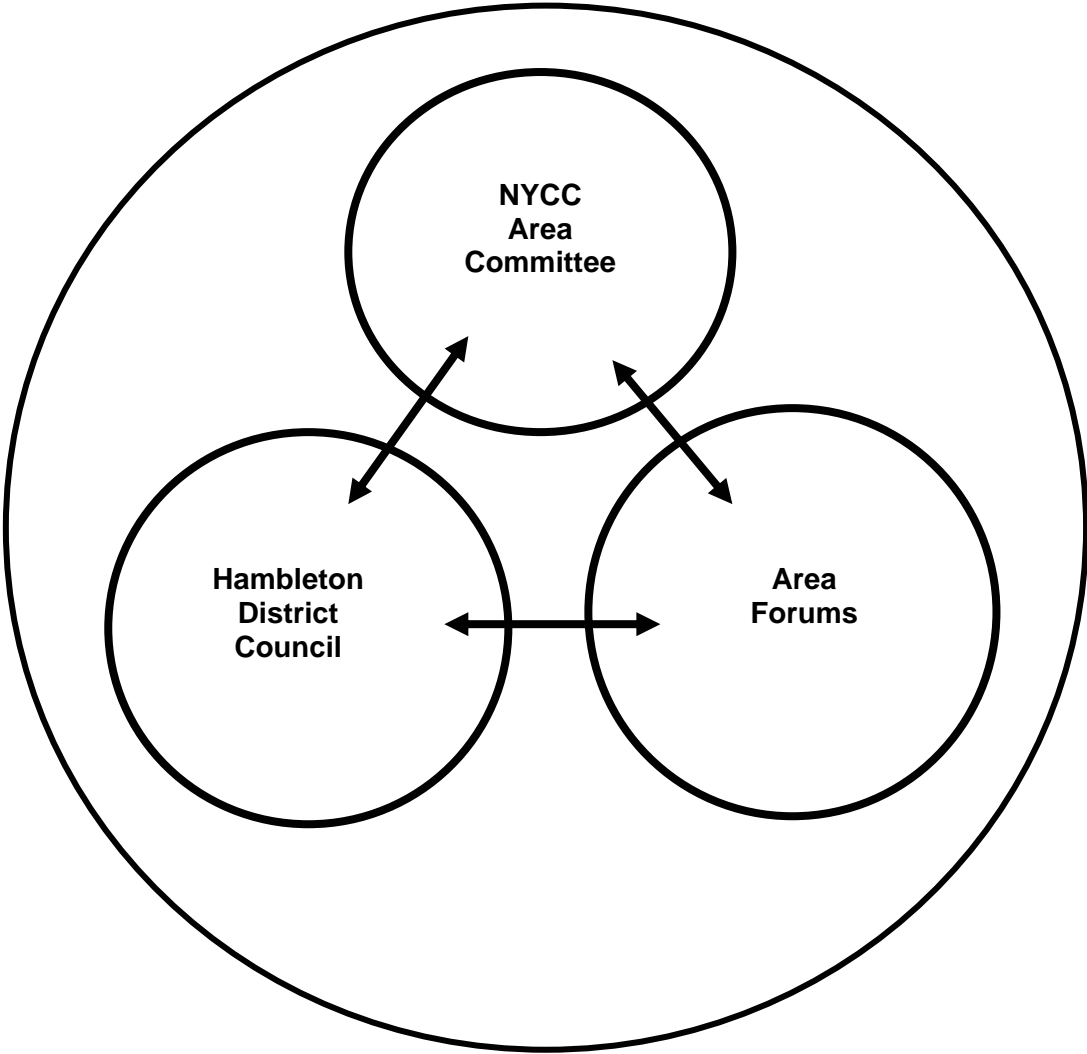
Summary

Both the Area Forums and Area Partnerships to fully integrate and become ‘Community Forums’ with meetings held four times a year. Task Groups meet on a needs basis. Meetings will be scheduled to fit with the NYCC Area Committee timetable to ensure items of interest are raised with the Community Forum members.

Membership of the Forums will consist of statutory partners and stakeholders such as the police, voluntary sector and representatives of community groups as well as local businesses and residents. Parish & Town Council representatives will also be encouraged to attend Forum meetings where local issues are to be considered. Decisions of the Forums, such as funding allocations, will be reached by a consensus. It is envisaged that this full integration option will allow a range of items to be discussed by the Forum’s members, such as strategic level concerns, local level issues, funding allocations and the delivery of community projects.

Risks	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived loss of community ownership and disengagement • Community engagement may reduce • Council priorities overtake community priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater coherence and ownership between Members and communities issues and matters of importance for the Council and the locality • More efficient use of resources • Decision making more streamlined and transparent, improved democratic accountability

Option 4: No Area Partnerships



Appendix 3:

Options analysis – Area Forums / Area Partnerships

	<p>Option 1 - No Change</p> <p>No change to existing structure, reporting procedure and frequency of meetings.</p>	<p>Option 2 - Partial Integration</p> <p>Area Forums and Partnerships will meet quarterly at the same time and at the same venue. Meetings will be held prior to NYCC Area Committee Meetings. Terms of Reference and primary functions will remain unaltered. Agenda's to be shared to consider HDC issues as well as community engagement/project delivery. Membership of the Committee will consist of equal representation from both the Area Forum and the Area Partnership groups. Sub Groups which provide the 'delivery mechanism', meet on an ad hoc basis.</p>	<p>Option 3 - Full Integration</p> <p>Both the Area Forum and Area Partnership to fully integrate and become a 'Community Forum' with meetings held four times a year. Sub Groups meet on an ad hoc basis. Meetings will be scheduled to fit with the NYCC Area Committee timetable to ensure items of interest are raised with the Community Forum members.</p> <p>Membership of the Forum will consist of statutory partners and stakeholders such as the police, voluntary sector and representatives of community groups as well as local businesses and residents. Parish & Town Council representatives will also be encouraged to attend the Forum meeting where local issues are to be considered. Decisions of the Forum, such as funding allocations, will be reached by a consensus.</p> <p>It is envisaged that this full integration option will allow a range of items to be discussed by the Forum members, such as strategic level concerns, local level issues, funding allocations and the delivery of community projects. An elected Member will take the role of Chairmanship in the first year, thereafter, it will be the responsibility of each Forum to determine.</p>
<p>What would this option entail?</p>	<p>No further action required – maintain the status quo.</p>	<p>To ensure successful integration a phased approach would be required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further consultation with Elected Members, key partners, Chairs and current members of the Area Partnerships ▪ Agreement reached that partial integration will be undertaken ▪ Endorsement from Hambleton & Richmondshire Strategic Forum. 	<p>To ensure successful integration a phased approach would be required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further consultation with Elected Members, key partners, Chairs and current members of the Area Partnerships ▪ Agreement reached that partial integration will be undertaken ▪ Endorsement from Hambleton & Richmondshire Strategic Forum.

<p>How does this option improve the levels of engagement and effective communication between the Area Forums, the Area Partnerships and their communities?</p>	<p>This option does not improve the levels of engagement and effective communication between the Area Forums, the Area Partnerships and their communities</p>	<p>Partial integration will improve the dissemination of information between Elected Members, key partners and the wider community. With meetings held at the same time and at the same venue the sharing of information will more effective and debate more informed.</p>	<p>Total integration will significantly improve the dissemination of information between Elected Members, key partners and the wider community. With meetings held at the same time and at the same venue the sharing of information will more effective and debate more informed.</p>
<p>How does this option improve the effective use of resources?</p>	<p>Maintaining the status quo will not improve the effective use of resources.</p>	<p>Less frequent meetings will require less HDC Officer support (including clerical and admin. support) and will reduce the number of meetings Elected Members are required to attend. Less frequent meetings will also reduce room hire costs.</p>	<p>Less frequent meetings will require less HDC Officer support (including clerical and admin. support) and will reduce the number of meetings Elected Members are required to attend. Less frequent meetings will also reduce room hire costs.</p>
<p>a) What will it cost</p>	<p>Room hire costs for Area Partnerships 2010-2011: £456.96 Budget for room hire costs for Area Forums: £1200</p>	<p>Room hire for 20 meetings per year. Costs of officer time – Partnerships Officer, Lead AD and admin costs.</p>	<p>Room hire for 20 meetings per year. Costs of officer time – Partnerships Officer, Lead AD and admin costs</p>
<p>b) What will it save?</p>	<p>No significant savings made.</p>	<p>This model for delivery will allow the staffing resources to be more effectively directed and will provide revenue savings of approximately £6,000.</p>	<p>This model for delivery will allow the staffing resources to be more effectively directed and will provide revenue savings of approximately £6,000.</p>
<p>How does this option address Member concerns about democratic accountability and decision making?</p>	<p>This option does not address Member concerns about democratic accountability and decision making.</p>	<p>The decision-making process is more transparent and should decisions on the allocation of public funds be required an elected 'Grants Committee' drawn from both organisations will given the decision-making mandate. Relevant parties available for decision making and dissemination of information.</p>	<p>Decision making more streamlined and transparent, improved democratic accountability It is envisaged that this full integration option will allow a range of items to be discussed by the Forum members, such as strategic level concerns, local level issues, funding allocations and the delivery of community projects. An elected Member will take the role of Chairmanship in the first year, thereafter, it will be the responsibility of each Forum to determine.</p>

<p>What other benefits will this option deliver?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing delivery within communities based on need ▪ Community interest and engagement maintained ▪ Communities retain ability to lobby and influence service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater awareness in the community of the pressures on HDC. ▪ Better understanding of community need and aspiration. ▪ Strengthening of the Strategic Forum 'brand' ▪ Perception that HDC is responding to the need to make efficiency savings whilst retaining its well-established community engagement mechanism. ▪ Improved Member engagement and the demonstration of roles as community leaders ▪ Increased understanding by communities of the role of Members and the Council's priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater awareness in the community of the pressures on HDC. ▪ Better understanding of community need and aspiration. ▪ Strengthening of the Strategic Forum 'brand' ▪ Rationalisation of existing 'Fora' will overcome confusion expressed by members over the roles and responsibilities of Area Forums and Area Partnerships. ▪ Greater understanding of the work undertaken by Elected Members. ▪ Perception that HDC is responding to the need to make efficiency savings whilst retaining its well-established community engagement mechanism. ▪ Greater coherence and ownership between Members and communities issues and matters of importance for the Council and the locality
<p>What risks are associated with this option?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of Member and public engagement ▪ Continuing concerns about democratic accountability and decision making ▪ Council is unable to adequately support both fora due to level of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complexity and length of meetings leads to disengagement ▪ Tensions are created over mandate and the responsibility for leading community engagement may reduce ▪ Alienation of members of the community who may feel that the Forum is a District Council body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived loss of community ownership and disengagement ▪ Community engagement may suffer ▪ Council priorities may take priority over community aspirations.

<p>How does this option support the Council Plan?</p>	<p>The Council's Plan states that 'We will provide direct support to the five Area Partnerships so that they can develop a Local Action Plan. We will also support the delivery of the Action Plan. By working in this way we will help people to come together to take decisions, shape their area and improve their communities.'</p>	<p>The Council's Plan states that 'We will provide direct support to the five Area Partnerships so that they can develop a Local Action Plan. We will also support the delivery of the Action Plan. By working in this way we will help people to come together to take decisions, shape their area and improve their communities.'</p>	<p>The Council's Plan states that 'We will provide direct support to the five Area Partnerships so that they can develop a Local Action Plan. We will also support the delivery of the Action Plan. By working in this way we will help people to come together to take decisions, shape their area and improve their communities.'</p>
<p>How does this option support the Community strategy?</p>	<p>A key priority of the Hambleton Sustainable Community Strategy is the delivery of initiatives to address the key issues which affect the quality of life for residents of Hambleton. The Area Partnerships provide the key delivery mechanism by which such issues are addressed at a local level.</p>	<p>A key priority of the Hambleton Sustainable Community Strategy is the delivery of initiatives to address the key issues which affect the quality of life for residents of Hambleton. The Area Partnerships provide the key delivery mechanism by which such issues are addressed at a local level.</p>	<p>A key priority of the Hambleton Sustainable Community Strategy is the delivery of initiatives to address key issues which affect the quality of life for residents of Hambleton. The Area Partnerships provide the key delivery mechanism by which such issues are addressed at a local level.</p>
<p>Are there any equality & diversity implications?</p>	<p>No implications: Area Forums and Area Partnerships provide an opportunity for all sections of the community to be engaged in decision-making at a local level.</p>	<p>No implications: Area Forums and Area Partnerships provide an opportunity for all sections of the community to be engaged in decision-making at a local level.</p>	<p>No implications: Area Forums and Area Partnerships provide an opportunity for all sections of the community to be engaged in decision-making at a local level.</p>
<p>Are there any other issues we need to consider?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wider strategic issues e.g. what other District Councils are doing and the resources available to support the voluntary sector. ▪ Public perception should no effort be made to achieve further efficiency savings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Should changes be implemented then the views of current members of the Area Partnerships and Parish Councils should be taken into account during the transition process to ensure engagement with the new structure is effective. ▪ The impact of, and HDC's response to, The Localism Bill, Neighbourhood Planning & the 'Big Society'. ▪ Wider strategic issues e.g. what other District Councils are doing and the resources available to support the voluntary sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Should changes be implemented then the views of current members of the Area Partnerships and Parish Councils should be taken into account during the transition process to ensure engagement with the new structure is effective. ▪ The impact of, and HDC's response to, The Localism Bill, Neighbourhood Planning & the 'Big Society'. ▪ Wider strategic issues e.g. what other District Councils are doing and the resources available to support the voluntary sector.