

Report for:	Standards Committee 12 May 2015  Full Council – 14 May 2015	Item number	
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Title:	Abolition of Area Committees and Area Forums
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Report authorised by :	Nick Walkley, Chief Executive <i>Bernie Ryan P.P. Nick Walkley.</i>
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Lead Officer:	Bernie Ryan –Assistant Director of Corporate Governance
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Ward(s) affected: N/A	Report for Non Key Decision
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1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 To propose to full Council the abolition of Area Committees and Area Forums.

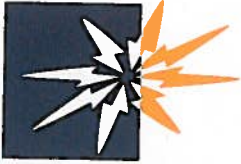
2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Standards Committee recommend to Full Council that they:

- 2.1.1 Approve the abolition of area committees and area forums, and  
2.1.2 Direct the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance to make any necessary and consequential amendments to the council constitution  
2.1.3 Note that a report proposing ward budgets will be prepared for a Cabinet Member signing in June 2015.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 A review of Area Committees and Forums started before the 2014 local elections responding to concerns that they are no longer the most



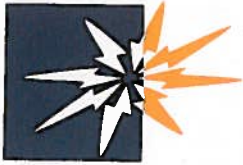
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effective tool for Councillors to engage with local communities. Attendance has been variable and it is felt that the process has become rather transactional and outdated.

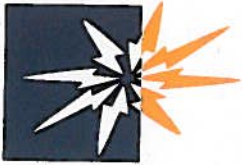
- 3.2 The vision underpinning the Council's latest Corporate Plan is 'to work with communities to make Haringey an even better place to live.' Key to that goal is changing the way we engage with residents, 'developing new approaches to resident engagement, focused on building community capacity.' Effective engagement with residents is also essential to ensure the services we deliver are focused on their needs.
- 3.3 It is also important to note that establishing ward budgets is not proposed in isolation. We are developing a new community strategy, voluntary sector strategy and community buildings strategy, all of which will require a renewed focus on how we engage with residents and the local leadership role Councillors play. The Community Strategy will propose a framework of principles and specific policies aimed at promoting active citizenship. It will also highlight and strengthen the important leadership role that Councillors play as catalysts of community activity.
- 3.2 A proposal will be brought forward in June for a Cabinet Member signing that will propose the establishment of ward budgets.
- 3.3 Other options considered included maintaining the status quo in terms of continuing with the area committees and forums. However, given the approach and issues set out above it is not felt to be an appropriate option.

## 4. Background information

- 4.1 There are currently seven area committees across the borough, which replaced the previous system of ward based area assemblies following the 2010/11 Governance Review.
- 4.2 The area committees are:
- Crouch End, Hornsey and Stroud Green
  - Muswell Hill (covers Muswell Hill, Highgate, Alexandra and Fortis Green)
  - Northumberland Park and White Hart Lane
  - St Ann's and Haringay
  - Tottenham (covers Seven Sisters, Tottenham Green and Tottenham Hale)
  - West Green and Bruce Grove
  - Wood Green (covers Bounds Green, Noel Park and Woodside)



- 4.3 Generally the area committees meet four times a year. Attendance currently varies across the committees, with a range of 5-15 in Wood Green to 75-80 in Muswell Hill.
  - 4.4 The protocol on area committees adopted in 2012/13 states that they will be provided with 'guidance on local expenditure which it may be possible for the Committee to have responsibility for', but there is no dedicated budget for local priorities.
  - 4.5 The system as it currently operates does not align with the priorities within the Corporate Plan and it is questionable whether the committees reach out to the wider community. There are also no resources available to the area committees to provide funding for projects that could develop community capacity and resilience.
  - 4.6 In recent years, a number of London Boroughs have reviewed their systems of neighbourhood/ward committees/forums and mechanisms for engaging their community. There have been a variety of approaches adopted; some have continued with forums but on a more informal basis and without dedicated officer support. Others now focus on providing small amounts of grant funding distributed on a ward basis with priorities set by residents and ward councillors.
  - 4.7 As a result, it is proposed to abolish the area committees and replace them with a system of ward budgets. A further paper dealing with the establishment of ward budgets will be presented to the June Cabinet meeting.
  - 4.8 The Council Constitution will need to be amended to remove Section 5 of Section B of Part Three 'Responsibility for Functions – Full Council & Non Executive Bodies' and any consequential amendments (for example to the Part One of the Constitution and the Articles of the Constitution at Part Two) will also be made.
5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer and financial Implications
- 5.1 The Chief Financial Officer confirms that the Council currently has a budget of £66k to support the current system of Area Committees & forums. The majority of this budget (£55k) covers the special allowance payment for the 7 area committee chairs with the remaining budget covering clerking, venue hire and other incidental costs supporting the committee.



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**6. Assistant Director of Corporate Governance comments and Legal Implications**

- 6.1 Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 and sections 15-19 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 allow the Council to delegate functions to council committees, comprising of councillors on a proportionate basis.
- 6.2 S9E of the Local Government Act 2000 provides that the Leader of a local authority executive may arrange for the discharge of any of its functions by an area committee. An area committee in this case must be established in order to discharge functions in respect of part of the area of the authority, and the members of that committee must be the members elected for the electoral divisions or wards which fall wholly or partly within that part of the area.
- 6.3 Full Council established area committees in principle on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011 and approved the necessary changes to the constitution on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2011.
- 6.4 Once agreed for dissolution by Council, the relevant elements of the Council Constitution dealing with area committees will need to be amended.

**7. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments**

- 7.1 Arguably, devolving functions to local areas can assist in engaging with hard to reach groups, many of whom comprise protected groups under the Equality Act. However it does not appear that the area committees in their current form did in fact increase engagement with such groups, particularly in the east of the borough.

**8. Head of Procurement Comments**

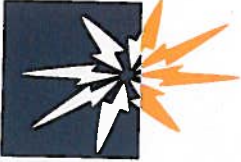
Not applicable

**9. Policy Implications**

Not applicable

**10. Reason for Decision**

- 10.1 The current system of area committees has not been an unqualified success across the borough. There are no financial resources available to the committees, limited officer time available to facilitate these formal committees and attendance at them varies considerably. It is suggested



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that an alternative system of ward budgets would enable ward councillors to focus on and engage with their localities in a more productive way, and proposals for the new scheme are to go before Cabinet at the June meeting.

11. Use of Appendices

12. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985