

# TOWNSHIP FORUMS

## Terms of Reference

August 2004

# TOWNSHIP FORUMS

## Introduction

These Terms of Reference have been agreed by the Board of Wigan Borough Partnership (WBP), following consultation with all Forum members and with other members of WBP. They replace the Terms of Reference dated May 2003. The Terms of Reference are intended to provide a consistent framework within which all Forums will operate and allowing flexibility, where appropriate, for Forums to respond to the needs and characteristics of their township.

Township Forums are not part of Wigan Council's governance arrangements but report to WBP, which is the Local Strategic Partnership for Wigan. Forums are clearly non-political bodies that must, at all times, strive to conduct their business without bias or prejudice. The Code of Conduct, which forms part of this Terms of Reference, will help Forum members achieve this.

The boundaries for each Forum area have been agreed by WBP and each Forum has been consulted on these. The Township Manager for each area will provide, on request, a definition of the township area.

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed a minimum of once a year by the Board of WBP – any Forum wishing to amend or alter any detail of the Terms of Reference must refer their request to the Board. In the first year of operation of these revised Terms of Reference, forums will be asked to review how well they are working after six months.

## Purpose and Objectives

Township Forums have been established to help agencies in Wigan to listen to and respond to communities across the Borough. This will be achieved by building a local partnership that brings together information and action from agencies and communities in a township. The Forum will build on what is already happening in an area and look for improvements over time.

Township Forums provide an opportunity for organisations in an area to meet regularly. These organisations provide services and support local people who need services. They discuss what currently happens in an area, and what needs to happen, in order to help plan and develop future work.

The purpose of Township Forums is to;

### **Co-ordinate**

Making sure that everyone involved in the township has had the opportunity to understand the work of others, and their roles and responsibilities, by promoting opportunities to work together and by being aware, and making others aware, of what is happening in the township.

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## **Influence**

Providing opportunities for people in neighbourhoods to affect decisions made about their area, by including them in the development of local action plans.

## **Challenge**

Requiring organisations to explain and evidence the decisions they take, by regular reporting to Forums and in neighbourhoods.

## **Involve**

Bringing people and agencies together and providing them with ways to contribute, valuing and responding to the ideas and views that are expressed.

## **Communicate**

Increasing knowledge and understanding of the township by sharing views and ideas about the area, between those who live there and those who offer services, and by sharing good practice with other township areas.

The objectives that Township Forums need to deliver are;

- **Identify and understand the needs and opportunities of their township**, by finding out what action local people want and need, developing ideas and plans and by setting priorities based on clear evidence;
- **Review local services**, by understanding and monitoring what is provided and matching this with what is needed, taking account of the needs of different users of services in the township;
- **Contribute to agencies' plans**, by putting forward new ways of working and by helping them test out new approaches;
- **Get people interested**, by making information available and by encouraging local people to play their part in improving the area where they live;
- **Work well as partnerships**, by being organised, fair and open and by being prepared to take the lead locally.

## **Delegation Arrangements**

To ensure that action is taken and monitored between meetings, the Forum will;

- delegate to the Township Manager responsibility for co-ordinating the work of officers and others in achieving the Forum's aims;
- establish Sub Groups, where appropriate, to monitor the progress of specific areas of work in detail;
- establish task groups, from time to time, to carry out projects which have a specific time-limited purpose;
- identify a lead member, or sub-group, to report on progress for each section of the Forum's action plan.

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## Membership

Township Forums will include all local organisations in their work by developing a Core, Associate and Consultee membership, which they will review at least annually.

All members will be required to keep to the Forum Code of Conduct (attached at Annex A) which forms part of these Terms of Reference. Each member of the Forum will be asked to sign the Code of Conduct before attending a meeting, and agree to keep to the Code when they are taking part in Forum meetings or representing the Forum outside of meetings. If a member is considered to have breached this Code of Conduct they will be asked to consider the importance of following the principles outlined. If they feel unable to work to these principles, they will be unable to continue as a member of the Forum. The Code of Conduct must be monitored during every Forum meeting, and this should be recorded in the meeting summary. This could be carried out by the Chair, by a nominated Member for each meeting or by the full membership. Forums may also wish to remind Members of the main points from the Code of Conduct at the start of each meeting.

**Core Members** will be asked to attend all Forum meetings. The following job roles will be Core Members on every Forum;

- All councillors representing wards within the township (where a ward covers more than one township, 40% of the electorate must be resident in a township before the ward councillors are entitled to sit on the Forum).
- A minimum of six community representatives or 1 representative per 5000 population, of the township, whichever is the higher. This is a minimum standard that any Forum can exceed.
- Positive Futures Area Manager
- Engineers Champion
- GM Police Township Inspector
- Township Manager
- Township Co-ordinator

In addition, Forums can involve as Core Members other senior officer advisors and co-opt other roles, that have a local responsibility (eg. Member of Parliament), as they wish.

If co-opted members are used, the Forum must agree, before a co-opted member takes up their seat, if they are entitled to vote. There is no limit to the number of Core Members that a Forum can have but it is recommended that numbers are kept at a level that will not make it difficult for the Forum to work in practice.

All Forums must have clear and effective methods for involving young people in the work that they do. The methods available to Forums include;

- reserving a minimum of two places for young people's representatives, being guided by the Positive Futures Area Manager on how these should be filled, with each Forum

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deciding whether they are core members able to vote, based on likely consistency of attendance

- structured and formal reporting between the Forum and Youth Council, updating issues and action taken
- local action groups involving young people accessing the Township Forum through Area Youth Forums, to discuss specific issues
- forum members attending introduction to youth work training

Forums should also make every effort to encourage a membership that reflects the diversity of the population in their township and organisations that represent other special interest groups should be invited to join.

Forums must promote locally, and to boroughwide groups of special interest including the Community Empowerment Networks and, as an example, the Over 50's Forum, the opportunity for community organisations to be involved in the Township Forum. All eligible organisations expressing interest will become a member of the Forum, with Core Members being selected based on the network of groups and individuals the organisation has regular contact with in the township. Those organisations with smaller or less representative networks will be invited to be Associate or Consultee members. All community organisations expressing interest will be asked to complete a standard application form but the final decision on core membership will be made by the Forum itself.

In order to be eligible, a community organisation will;

- have a written statement explaining its aims and purpose
- be open to anyone in their area but may target particular client groups eg. women, young people, older people etc
- meet regularly and keep a formal record of its meetings
- have a clear and agreed process for selecting their representative on the Forum
- agree to the Code of Conduct

**Associate Members** are named individuals representing services or organisations in an area that will be involved in Forum meetings from time to time, as the agenda requires. They will also be involved in sub groups and task groups and will receive all meeting summaries. Associate Members will not be entitled to vote.

**Consultee Members** are local organisations that will be involved by the Forum in events and consultation. They will be regularly updated on Forum progress. Consultee Members will not be entitled to vote.

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## Substitutions

Organisations that are invited to be Core Members of a Forum are asked to agree their nominated representative who will attend meetings. All organisations (other than ward councillors) will also nominate, in advance, a permanent substitute representative who will attend if the nominated representative is unable to. Substitution should not be routine but exceptional and must be explained to the Chair of the Forum before the meeting. All substitutes will be required to sign the Code of Conduct before attending a meeting and will be eligible to vote when they attend.

## Frequency of Meetings

As part of Wigan Borough Partnership, Forums will meet on a cycle agreed by the WBP Board. Meeting dates will need to be set that will allow Forums to report progress and receive information as required by the Board.

## Attendance

Attendance at Forum meetings is required from all Core Members. If two consecutive meetings are missed, or a total of three meetings in a twelve month period, members will be asked to discuss their non-attendance with the Joint Chairs and their organisation may be asked to nominate an alternative representative. This applies to all Core Members of the Forum. Joint Chairs should accept reasonable explanations for why people are not able to attend.

## Taking Decisions

Township Forums are not initially expected to have decisions to make. Forums do not have budgets of their own and have not been given any specific delegated powers at this stage. However, Forums will need to prioritise action within Township Plans and will be asked, from time to time, for their views on decisions that service agencies need to make.

Where this is needed, it is expected that Forums will reach a consensus through discussion and debate. Evidence of partnership working that is already established in the Borough suggests that this approach generally works well. Nevertheless, there may be occasions when Forum members feel that a vote would be helpful and the arrangements that should apply, should this become necessary, are outlined in Annex B.

Where a decision to be taken or recommendation to be made by a Forum is likely to impact on another township area, the Forum for the area affected should be invited to discuss the issue and be involved in the decision or recommendation.

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## Public Involvement

Township Forums, as a way of working, are intended to provide for real and effective community involvement in local discussions, as a full partner. From time to time, Forums may wish to invite members of the public to attend meetings in order that they may express a view or share their experience of a specific issue, or simply to observe how Forums work. Non-members could also be invited to take part in action groups that will look at specific issues in more detail, outside of Forum meetings. Regular reporting of Forum activity is made through newsletters, Borough Life and through the local press. Meeting summaries are available through the Wigan Council website.

Forums should plan to host at least one public meeting during the year, in addition to their normal business meetings, at which it reports on the progress it has made during the previous twelve months.

Forums will also need to consider their view on allowing the media to attend Forum meetings. A good working relationship with the media is important and will be invaluable in helping Forums get their message across locally. As Forums develop and feel that they are working effectively they may wish to invite the media to observe their work. Forums will need to put in place arrangements to exclude the media where confidential information is discussed.

## Chairing Meetings

Each Forum will elect Joint Chairs by a simple election process – one to be a councillor and one a community representative. Every councillor and community representative will be eligible to stand, nominate and vote. Each Forum will decide, in advance of an election, how the Joint Chairs will share responsibility, for example by chairing alternate meetings. The arrangement made by the Forum must result in each Chair having an equal time in the role. Forum Chairs will both be involved in setting agendas for Forum meetings.

The election of Joint Chairs should be held by the end of September each year. As Forums adopt these revised Terms of Reference from September 2004, they should plan to elect Joint Chairs by January 2005.

Township Forum Joint Chairs will meet as a group at least three times a year, to discuss progress and future development.

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## Township Forum Code of Conduct - Annex A

### Why have a Code of Conduct?

This Code of Conduct sets some ground rules for those involved as members of the Forum and will apply whenever and wherever members are representing the Forum, or where people might reasonably assume that they are representing the Forum. It reflects other Codes of Conduct that apply to officers and councillors working in the Borough across a range of agencies and many community organisations also use a Code of Conduct. It aims to safeguard the interests of organisations and individuals who come in to contact with the Forum and the interests of Members of the Forum and complements the work of the Compact in Wigan, which describes the commitment that the voluntary, community and public sectors have made to each other about the way they work.

### Principles

Members of the Forum, and its associated groups, agree to work to the following principles;

#### **Equality**

The Forum recognises that all Members, and any people that the Forum works with, have the right to be treated fairly, without discrimination or harassment, irrespective of their age, gender, race, religion, colour, sexuality or any disability. The Forum will work to promote the principles of equality and diversity in its area and to tackle discrimination against people, especially those who experience disadvantage.

Members will treat others with respect, will listen and take account of other people's views. Members should be prepared to show their commitment to the work of the Forum by respecting the priorities set by meeting agendas, by listening fully to speakers and participants as they make their contributions and preparing for meetings by, for example, reading papers sent out in advance.

The Forum will not ask anyone working on its behalf to act in an unfair or inappropriate way - it is important that decisions made by the Forum are seen to be fair and reasonable and are not open to being criticised for being biased or one-sided.

#### **Openness**

The Forum will only restrict the availability of information about its activities where this is required under law. Members of the Forum, unless bound by confidentiality, will be prepared to give reasons for their actions and decisions. Members should disclose their membership of any relevant organisations when they join the Forum and inform the Chairs of any changes in their status.

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## **Confidentiality**

Members will treat confidential information received through the Forum as private and will not disclose it to anyone else without permission. They will not use any information they receive through the Forum for personal, political or commercial gain and will not pass it on to others who might use it in this way. The Township Programme has a formal process to be used when making comments to the media that Forum Members must respect. The Township Manager for each Forum area should be approached for advice before Forum Members make comments to the media.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

Members have a duty to declare, to the Township Forum, any direct or material interest that they, or the organisation they represent, may have in any matter that is discussed by the Forum. Every action and decision made by a Member of the Forum should be carried out with impartiality and integrity and not be influenced by business, political or personal relationships outside of the work of the Forum. All actions and decisions should be taken after reasonable consideration of the best interests of the township area.

It is the responsibility of individual Members to declare fully and promptly any matter in which their personal or professional interest might influence, or might be thought by a member of the public to be influencing their judgement. If there is a declared conflict of interest, the member concerned will not be involved in any decision in respect of this matter but may take part in any debate on the issue, at the discretion of the Chairs of the Forum.

## **Breaking the rules**

Any complaints or allegations concerning possible breaches of this Code of Conduct should be made, using a complaints form available from the Township Manager, to the Chairs of the Forum. If the complaint remains unresolved, or if the complaint relates to the Chairs of the Forum, it will be referred to the Chair of the Board of Wigan Borough Partnership.

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## Township Forum Voting Arrangements - Annex B

### Majority View

Where a consensus cannot be reached through debate, the majority decision will be taken with the views of any members that disagree with the majority view recorded in the meeting summary (if the members concerned want that to happen). If a majority view cannot be reached, discussion will continue or be postponed to a future meeting.

### Eligibility

All councillor and community representative members will be eligible to vote.

### Casting Vote

There will be no casting vote – if a vote is tied, the discussion on the issue concerned will continue or be held again at a future meeting.

### Quorum

If 40% of the voting membership (or six voting members, whichever is the greatest number) have been present when a decision is made, it will be considered valid.