

# NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

## Terms of Reference

### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a forum to promote understanding of the democratic arrangements and functions of public sector organisations in a geographical neighbourhood and to inform, consult and involve the public on issues of local importance.
- 1.2 To enable local communities and the public to raise issues of local concern and highlight priorities to public sector organisations and influence the decision-making processes that direct service delivery.

### 2 Key Roles

- 2.1 To promote an understanding among local people of the functions of public sector organisations and their democratic arrangements and how individuals can influence and take part in those arrangements.
- 2.2 To act as a forum for consultation and engagement with the local authorities and public sector and voluntary sector organisations forming part of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire.
- 2.3 To advise public sector organisations in the District of local issues and priorities and to seek explanations for actions taken. This does not extend to individual planning or licensing applications unless they are of widespread significance or personal or private matters relating to individual members of the public and businesses.
- 2.4 To agree key actions to be achieved between meetings by public sector providers with a report on action taken to be given at the ensuing meeting.
- 2.5 To act as the focus for consultation on proposals for local service delivery emerging from the Sustainable Communities Act 2007.
- 2.6 To provide an opportunity for public sector and voluntary sector organisations to inform and consult with the public on proposals affecting a neighbourhood.
- 2.7 To develop and commission local community initiatives, including the development of local skills, raising aspirations and improving the quality of life locally.

### 3. Neighbourhood

- 3.1 The term “neighbourhood” is used to describe a cluster of towns and parishes that have been aggregated for the purpose of administering a neighbourhood forum. Each forum groups parishes with a broad affinity of interests while recognising the practical implications of supporting a proliferation of forums in the District.
- 3.2 The extent of the neighbourhood forums is described at Appendix A.

### 4. Attendance

- 4.1 Attendance at forum meetings is open to all public sector and voluntary sector organisations that provide services or support in a neighbourhood, to members of the public who live or work in the area and to business and commercial interests with local premises.
- 4.2 Elected members from the relevant electoral divisions and wards of Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council respectively, together with elected members of town and parish councils within each neighbourhood are encouraged to attend.

4.3 Other public sector organisations, such as Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, the National Health Service, registered social landlords and governing bodies of educational establishments, as well as voluntary sector organisations and community groups, are encouraged to be represented at neighbourhood forum meetings.

## **5. Speaking at Forum Meetings**

5.1 Members of the public are encouraged to attend forum meetings, to contribute to discussions and raise issues of local concern. Persons who are speaking will be encouraged to be concise and avoid repetition, thereby ensuring sufficient opportunity for others to contribute.

## **6. Neighbourhood Panel**

6.1 Each neighbourhood forum shall have a panel of up to 10 persons comprising representatives of public sector and voluntary sector organisations active in the area of that neighbourhood. Membership of the panel shall be as follows -

- one representative of Cambridgeshire County Council who shall be an elected member for an electoral division within the neighbourhood,
- one representative of Huntingdonshire District Council who shall be an elected member for a ward within the neighbourhood,
- three representatives of parish councils within the neighbourhood which shall include one representative of a town council if such exists within the neighbourhood and who shall be elected members of those authorities, such representatives to be chosen by the parish councils within that neighbourhood,
- one representative of Cambridgeshire Constabulary,
- one representative of Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service,
- one representative from the health service, and
- one representative of the registered social landlord with the largest number of properties in the neighbourhood.

6.2 The remaining place and any places unfilled by organisations listed in paragraph 6.1 shall be filled by appointment by the panel from public sector and voluntary sector organisations providing services or support within the neighbourhood, subject to the membership of the panel not exceeding 10 persons. In so doing, the panel shall have regard to the desirability of achieving a panel membership that is representative of the organisations active in the neighbourhood.

6.3 In the event of a member of the panel being unable to attend a meeting, he or she may be substituted by another representative from that organisation. In the case of an elected member of a local authority, the substitute shall be another elected member as defined in paragraph 6.1 or an employee of that authority.

6.4 The purpose of each panel is to –

- present information on issues affecting a local community,
- moderate any requests for information/action that need to be referred elsewhere,
- set priorities for action emerging from the forum,
- monitor the performance of the forum,
- progress chase requests for information/action,
- ensure that feedback takes place from forum and panels meetings to the Local Strategic Partnership thematic groups and to public sector organisations as appropriate, and
- resolve issues emerging from meetings and report back to ensuing meetings.

6.5 The panel shall meet in public at the conclusion of a forum meeting (or as soon as practicable thereafter) to consider actions emerging from the forum meeting.

## **7. Communication**

- 7.1 A representative of a public sector or voluntary sector organisation shall notify the officer supporting the forum of any item that he or she wishes to be included on the agenda for the next ensuing meeting at least 10 working days prior to the meeting.
- 7.2 Public sector and voluntary sector organisations are encouraged to use the neighbourhood forums as an opportunity to inform, consult and involve the public about matters affecting the neighbourhood.
- 7.3 Responsibility for investigating and pursuing actions, priorities and requests made or agreed at forum and panel meetings will rest with the relevant elected member or representative of the public sector organisation at that meeting. That person will arrange for issues raised to be resolved, where practicable, prior to the next meeting and will inform the officer supporting the forum of the action taken. A verbal or written update will be presented at the next ensuing meeting, where appropriate.
- 7.4 The forums and panels will feed back to the appropriate thematic groups of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership, as illustrated in the diagram attached as Appendix B.
- 7.5 Any issues as to the roles and internal relationships or practices of a forum or panel where resolution cannot be reached locally will be referred to the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership for determination.
- 7.6 A report will be submitted annually to individual partners and the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership evaluating the performance and effectiveness of the neighbourhood forums and panels in Huntingdonshire.

## **8. Chairman**

- 8.1 Each forum and panel shall be chaired by a chairman who, in the first instance, shall be the elected member of Huntingdonshire District Council appointed to represent the authority on the neighbourhood panel. A vice chairman shall be chosen from among the persons comprising the panel for each neighbourhood. The first chairman and vice chairman shall serve until May 2011. The chairman and vice chairman shall be appointed annually thereafter with effect from the first neighbourhood meeting following May in each year and shall serve for one year.
- 8.2 A chairman or vice chairman may resign at any time and if so, a new chairman or vice chairman shall be chosen as set out in paragraph 8.1 for the remainder of the year until the next normal date of appointment for that position.
- 8.3 In the event of a chairman being absent from a meeting, the meeting shall be chaired by the vice chairman. If neither the chairman nor vice chairman is able to attend a meeting, then a chairman shall be chosen for the duration of that meeting from among the other representatives on the panel who are present.
- 8.4 The role of the chairman is outlined in Appendix C.

## **9. Officer Support**

- 9.1 The administration of each neighbourhood forum and panel will be undertaken by Huntingdonshire District Council in the first instance.
- 9.2 This support will take the form of
- arranging meeting dates and venues,
  - advertising meetings to the general public
  - agenda preparation and dispatch of associated materials

- attending meetings to take notes and providing procedural advice to the forum and panel,
- collating a summary of action taken following a meeting for submission to the next ensuing meeting, and
- forwarding any issues to the thematic groups of the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership, as appropriate.

## **10. Meetings**

- 10.1 Neighbourhood forum and panel meetings will take place quarterly and will be open to the general public.
- 10.2 The location and venue for meetings will be decided by the officer supporting the forum in consultation with the chairman, having regard to the availability and convenience of the accommodation.

## **11. Decision making**

- 11.1 Issues will be presented to the forum by the chairman and representatives of the public sector and voluntary sector organisations in attendance in the order in which they appear on the agenda, unless agreed otherwise by the chairman.
- 11.2 Members of the public are encouraged to play an active part in forum discussions and to raise issues of local importance or significance.
- 11.3 Panel members will discuss in public the issues raised at the end of each forum meeting and, where action is necessary, prioritise the most important issues to be addressed, taking account of the views expressed by the public present at the forum. Decisions will be reached by consensus where possible. Where a consensus cannot be reached, a decision will be made by simple majority vote and the chairman will have a casting vote in the event of an equality of voting.
- 11.4 Each member of the panel is entitled to one vote.

## **12. Press and Public Relations**

- 12.1 Neighbourhood forums and panels will be open and transparent in their decisions and actions and will communicate them effectively to the public.
- 12.2 Publicity for neighbourhood forums and panels will be co-ordinated by Huntingdonshire District Council. Press releases for neighbourhood forums and panels will be approved by all of the public sector, voluntary sector and relevant partner organisations named in the publicity before it is finally agreed by the chairman of that forum and panel.
- 12.3 Forum and panel meetings shall be open to the press and the agenda, reports and minutes will be available for inspection at the offices of Huntingdonshire District Council and on its website in advance of each meeting, wherever possible.
- 12.4 Public sector and voluntary sector organisations are encouraged to distribute publicity material locally in the neighbourhood, in liaison with Huntingdonshire District Council, and for maintaining local contacts with, for example, parish magazines or newsletters.

### **13. Resources**

- 13.1 While the neighbourhood forums and panels do not currently have their own budgets, all public sector and voluntary sector organisations are encouraged to support the process, for example by waiving charges for the use of local venues.
- 13.2 Should any funding becoming available in the future, the mechanism for allocating this resource will be agreed on an ad hoc basis having regard to the scheme/grant involved.
- 13.3 All travelling and subsistence expenses incurred by representatives of public sector and voluntary sector organisations incurred in their attendance at forum and panel meetings will be met by their respective organisations.

### **14. Conduct at Meetings**

- 14.1 High standards of conduct are expected from the representatives of public sector and voluntary sector organisations at forum and panel meetings. Elected members must abide by the Members Code of Conduct of their respective authority when engaged in the business of forums and panels. They should apply the rules concerning the declaration of personal and prejudicial declarations of interest at forum and panel meetings.
- 14.2 Where it is clear that a decision in which an elected member has such an interest is likely to arise at a particular meeting, the authority concerned may nominate a substitute member (with no interest to declare) to attend that forum or panel meeting or a part of the meeting in his/her place.
- 14.3 Where a member of a panel has failed to attend 3 consecutive panel meetings, the seat will be declared vacant. In the event of the vacancy occurring in respect of one of the organisations listed in paragraph 6.1, another representative will be appointed to sit on the panel by the relevant organisation. In the case of any other vacancy, another person will be chosen by the panel in accordance with the procedure set out in paragraph 6.2.
- 14.4 If an elected member declares a prejudicial interest he or she can speak once on the item (in accordance with the model code of conduct) but must then leave the meeting until the discussion and voting (if any) on the item is concluded. The member must not vote on that item. If a member declares a personal interest, he or she may speak, remain in the meeting and vote on the item.
- 14.5 Members of the public speaking at forum meetings should not engage in personal criticism or slanderous comment regarding individual employees of public sector organisations, nor attempt to use the forum as a means of pursuing personal objectives.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS – EXTENT

### Huntingdon Forum

#### *Cambridgeshire County Council Electoral Divisions*

Brampton & Kimbolton, Buckden, Gransden & The Offords, Godmanchester & Huntingdon East and Huntingdon.

#### *Huntingdonshire District Council Wards*

Alconbury & The Stukeleys, Brampton, Godmanchester, Huntingdon East, Huntingdon North and Huntingdon West.

#### *Town and Parish Councils*

Alconbury, Alconbury Weston, Brampton, Godmanchester, Grafham, Huntingdon, Perry and The Stukeleys

### North West Huntingdonshire Forum

#### *Cambridgeshire County Council Electoral Divisions*

Norman Cross and Sawtry & Ellington.

#### *Huntingdonshire District Council Wards*

Ellington, Elton & Folksworth, Sawtry, Stilton and Yaxley & Farcet

#### *Town and Parish Councils*

Alwalton, Chesterton, Barham & Wooley, Brington & Molesworth, Buckworth, Bythorn & Keyston, Catworth, Conington, Denton & Caldecote, Easton, Ellington, Elton, Farcet, Folksworth & Washingley, Glatton, Great Gidding, Haddon, Hamerton, Holme, Leighton Bromswold, Little Gidding, Morborne, Old Weston, Sawtry, Sibson-cum-Stibbington, Spaldwick, Steeple Gidding, Stilton, Water Newton, Stow Longa, Upton & Coppingford, Winwick and Yaxley

### Ramsey Forum

#### *Cambridgeshire County Council Electoral Divisions*

Ramsey, Somersham & Earith and Warboys & Upwood

#### *Huntingdonshire District Council Wards*

Ramsey, Somersham and Warboys & Bury.

#### *Town and Parish Councils*

Broughton, Bury, Colne, Old Hurst, Pidley cum Fenton, Ramsey, Somersham, Warboys, Wistow and Woodhurst

## **St Ives Forum**

*Cambridgeshire County Council Electoral Divisions*

Somersham & Earith, St Ives, The Hemingfords & Fenstanton and Warboys & Upwood

*Huntingdonshire District Council Wards*

Earith, Fenstanton, St Ives East, St Ives South, St Ives West, The Hemingfords and Upwood & The Raveleys

*Town and Parish Councils*

Abbots Ripton, Bluntisham, Earith, Fenstanton, Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey, Hilton, Holywell-cum-Needingworth, Houghton & Wyton, Kings Ripton, St Ives, Upwood & The Raveleys and Woodwalton

## **St Neots Forum**

*Cambridgeshire County Council Electoral Divisions*

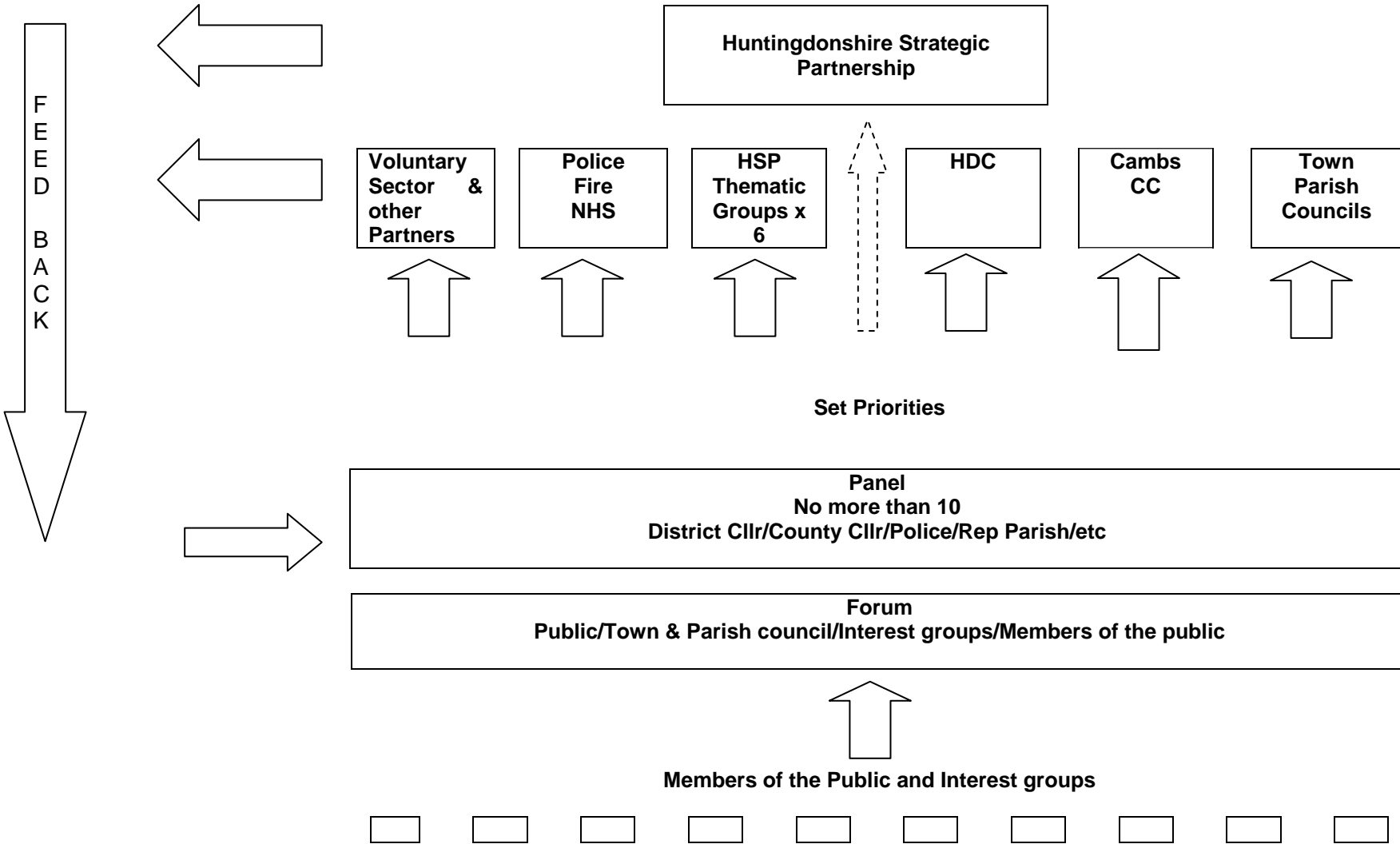
Brampton & Kimbolton, Buckden, Gransden & The Offords, Little Paxton & St Neots North and St Neots Eaton Socon

*Huntingdonshire District Council Wards*

Buckden, Gransden & The Offords, Kimbolton & Staughton, Little Paxton, St Neots Eaton Ford, St Neots Eaton Socon, St Neots Eynesbury and St Neots Priory Park

*Town and Parish Councils*

Abbotsley, Buckden, Covington, Diddington, Eynesbury Hardwicke, Great Gransden, Great Paxton, Great Staughton, Hail Weston, Kimbolton, Little Paxton, Offord Cluny, Offord Darcy, St Neots, St Neots Rural, Southoe & Midloe, Tetworth, Tilbrook, Toseland, Waresley and Yelling





### ROLE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM AND PANEL CHAIRMAN

#### Overall responsibility

The chairman will play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of the forum and panel in all aspects of their role. The chairman's responsibilities will include -

- liaising and co-ordinating with panel members and others to ensure that the key roles of the forum are being achieved,
- oversight of performance delivery through regular dialogue with the other members of the panel,
- being aware of and closely in touch with key strategic and performance issues (such as those relating to the Local Area Agreement and Local Strategic Partnership for Huntingdonshire) to ensure effective leadership of the Panel, and
- recognising and responding to diversity to ensure an inclusive approach to community engagement,

#### Leadership

The chairman will be responsible for -

- leading the forum and panel and setting their overall agenda, in consultation with other public sector and voluntary sector organisations and members of the panel, and
- ensuring the effectiveness, performance and evaluation of the forum and panel and that their terms of reference are appropriate for their needs.

#### Chairing Meetings

The chairman will be responsible for the effective chairing of meetings, including -

- ensuring the agenda is adhered to and that meetings are brought to a timely conclusion,
- allowing sufficient time for complex or contentious issues to be discussed,
- encouraging participation by the public and allowing sufficient opportunity for issues of local concern to be raised,
- making sure that meetings receive timely, accurate and clear information,
- facilitating an effective contribution and involvement from those present at meetings,
- developing partnership work through consensus management, securing agreement and clarity over actions,
- maintaining an appropriate environment to allow presentations and questions and supporting any guest speakers prior to and during the meeting as necessary, and
- promoting and advancing an understanding of local democracy and the democratic arrangements of public sector organisations.

#### Communication

The chairman will act as the spokesperson for the forum and panel to the wider community and ensure that there is -

- effectively communication with panel members,
- an understanding of the local concerns raised by the public and that these are prioritised where necessary,
- a constructive and effective relationship between public sector and voluntary sector organisations represented on each panel,
- effective reporting of action taken by public sector and voluntary sector organisations in response to issues raised at forum meetings, and

- ensuring that issues raised are fed back to meetings of the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership thematic groups.

### **Development and evaluation**

The chairman will -

- assess the performance of the forum and panel and encourage an evaluation of their meetings,
- ensure that panel members play an effective part in the neighbourhood engagement process,
- address the development needs of the forum and panel both as a whole and individually to ensure team and individual effectiveness,
- raise any issues of concern about the effectiveness of the local forum and panel initially on an informal basis with the chairman of the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership and formally with the Partnership itself where appropriate.

### **Governance and ethics**

The chairman will be responsible for –

- upholding and promoting high standards of integrity and probity and appropriate governance at meetings of the forum and panel.