

Area Committee Review – feedback from June/July round of Area Committees

Eastern:

- The old Local Engagement Fora were well attended, they were led by the community and external partners attended, such as the Police;
- attendance at the Eastern Area Committee meetings seemed very poor;
- they were well publicised, it was useful to have the opportunity to turn up and ask questions;
- the ability to feedback on consultations was good;
- town and parish councils should set the agendas;
- information sharing could be done by email;
- it was the same people who attended each time;
- a lot of people did not have time to attend evening meetings;
- there needed to be things on the agendas that were of interest to residents;
- public participation should not be restricted to the public forum item;
- Faversham Town Council may meet the needs for the Eastern area;
- there could be standing items on town and parish council agendas for issues to be raised at Area Committee meetings;
- Area Committees could provide an independent voice on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR);
- the officer briefings were good; and
- issues that were raised at Area Committee meetings were acted upon.

Sittingbourne:

- More public attendance was needed, councillors could help to promote the meetings;
- encourage external organisations to come and speak about their work/services;
- good work has come out of Area Committees;
- they needed to be accessible to everyone;
- include items on the agenda that residents would be interested in;
- people did not know what they could get from them;
- the name 'Area Committees' could put people off attending;
- consider moving away from only SBC councillors being able to vote;
- maybe change the structure of the meetings and the name to make them more friendly;
- they could be themed;
- networking could take place at the beginning of the meetings;
- consider what challenges there were for residents in their daily lives and make those issues the focus for meetings;
- suggest naming them the 'People's Forum', adopt an appropriate logo and publicise them more;
- invite Kent County Council (KCC) Cabinet Members to come along to talk about their areas of responsibility;
- publicise a 'You said, we did' after the meetings;
- it was important that they were non-political and respectful;
- use online polls for some decisions; and
- promote the online attendance.

Western:

- Very few members of the public attended the Western Area Committee (AC) meetings;
- were AC meetings worth the time of parish councillors and SBC officers when most of the agenda items were also discussed at the Local Councils' Liaison Forum meetings?;
- there were no parish councils in the Sittingbourne area;
- a lot of people were not aware what wards Western covered;
- interest in AC meetings had declined since funding was withdrawn;
- other methods of engagement needed to be considered;
- when workshops were held at previous AC meetings, they were very good but no feedback was provided after;
- more explanation about items was needed;
- AC meetings were a waste of time/money;
- councillors heard the same messages at different meetings;
- there needed to be engagement with parish councils separately on specific issues;
- residents attended more when there was an emotive issue on the agenda; and
- less formal sessions such as a surgery or pop-up café style might be more effective.

Sheppey:

- Sheppey Area Committee was usually well attended, members of the public were more likely to attend area committees instead of other formal Council meetings;
- area committees were a 'talking shop' and a waste of time and money;
- when area committees had funding to allocate, a lot of good came from the projects they supported;
- they were a good opportunity for residents to meet their local councillors, however they should be more easily identifiable at the meetings;
- sound quality at the meetings was poor, could a microphone be provided so everyone in the meeting could hear what was being said?;
- councillors and officers should go on public speaking courses to ensure they could be heard and understood easily, especially for people with hearing problems; and
- PowerPoint presentations should be less wordy and the text large enough for people at the back of the room to read.