

**Report To:** **COUNCIL**

**Date:** 12 July 2016

**Executive Member/  
Reporting Officer:** Councillor John Taylor – Deputy Executive Leader  
Sandra Stewart – Executive Director (Governance, Resources and Pensions)

**Subject:** **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**Report Summary:** The report sets out proposals for the replacement of District Assemblies with more localised Town Councils to provide a new way of working with our communities and partners. The proposals build on the steps taken in developing the neighbourhood offer where encouraging communities to do more was a key priority.

**Recommendations:**

- (i) That District Assemblies be disbanded;
- (ii) That nine Town Councils be created as set out in section 3.6 of the report;
- (iii) That East and West Neighbourhood Forums be created as set out in section 3.7 of the report;
- (iv) That the following Member posts be created :
  - Town Council Co-ordinator;
  - East Area Neighbourhood Co-ordinator;
  - West Area Neighbourhood Co-ordinator;
  - East Area Assistant Neighbourhood Co-ordinator;
  - West Area Assistant Neighbourhood Co-ordinator.
- (v) That the following appointments be made:
  - Town Council Co-ordinator – Councillor P Fitzpatrick
  - East Area Neighbourhood Co-ordinator – Councillor Sweeton
  - West Area Neighbourhood Co-ordinator – Councillor Ward
  - East Area Assistant Neighbourhood Co-ordinator – Councillor Jackson
  - West Area Assistant Neighbourhood Co-ordinator - Councillor Bowerman
- (vi) That the Members Allowance Scheme be amended to reflect the replacement of District Assemblies and that the Town Council Co-ordinator; East Area Neighbourhood Co-ordinator and West Area Neighbourhood Co-ordinator to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance equivalent to the current allowance for a District Assembly Chair reducing the number of allowances payable from 6 to 3 and Assistant Neighbourhood Co-ordinators receive an allowance equivalent to that of a District Assembly Deputy Chair reducing the number of allowances payable from 6 to 2 and the cost of members allowances by £44,299 to be used for community benefit.

- (vii) That the Constitution be amended to reflect the changes.

**Links to Community Strategy:** The Constitution and democratic framework provides an effective framework for implementing the Community Strategy.

**Policy Implications:** There are no policy implications.


**Financial Implications:  
(Authorised by the Section 151  
Officer)** The proposals for replacing the current DA arrangements would see a reduction of 6 DA Chairs and 6 DA Deputy Chairs. The Members Allowance scheme allocates £9,581 for Chairs and £3,914 for Deputy Chairs. This is a total of £80,870. However, an element of this will be needed for SRA for those Members taking similar lead roles under the new arrangement. This would be the equivalent of 3 x District Assembly Chairs and 2 x District Assembly Vice-Chairs, which equates to £36,571, meaning a saving of £44,299 on members allowances.

**Legal Implications:  
(Authorised by the Borough  
Solicitor)** It is important that Elected Members formal engagement arrangements with its community to ensure arrangements are appropriate for the changing environment.

Any changes will need to be reflected in the Constitution.

**Risk Management:** The operational arrangements for the Town Councils and Neighbourhood Forums will need to be clearly set out in the Council Constitution to ensure that proper governance is followed.

**Access to Information:** The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Robert Landon, Head of Democratic Services by:

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## 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Council Constitution provides for the Council to appoint District Assemblies as it sees fit, at present there are 6 District Assemblies as follows:

- **Ashton-under-Lyne** (Ashton Hurst, Ashton St Michael's, Ashton Waterloo and St Peters);
- **Denton** (Denton North East, Denton South and Denton West);
- **Droylsden and Audenshaw** (Audenshaw, Droylsden East and Droylsden West);
- **Dukinfield** (Dukinfield and Dukinfield/Stalybridge);
- **Hyde and Longendale** (Hyde Godley, Hyde Newton, Hyde Werneth and Longendale);
- **Stalybridge and Mossley** (Mossley, Stalybridge North and Stalybridge South).

1.2 The membership of District Assemblies is the ward councillors for the District Assembly area. Formally, District Assemblies are committees of the Council set up under the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000 with decision making powers and as such they are subject to the rules which apply to other committees of the Council, such as access to information rules and they can only consider matters which the Constitution allows.

1.3 District Assemblies were established in 1999 and at the time were a significant move towards enhancing local democracy and improved service delivery in the context of efficiency, transparency and accountable decision making. District Assemblies meet four times a year in various venues in the area. The Constitution provides for public question time at each DA meeting whereby members of the public can submit a question (or have one submitted on their behalf) on matters that are relevant to the Council and the District Assembly.

1.4 Attached at **appendix 1** are the current terms of reference and scheme of delegation for District Assemblies. The Constitution states that District Assemblies have the following general powers:

- To consider, review and monitor all services and activities provided by the Council within the area of the District Assembly, the function to be reviewed by the Council as appropriate.
- To ensure that any services and facilities for which the District Assembly is responsible are managed in the manner which is consistent with the policies approved by the Council.
- To refer to the Executive Cabinet any matters of concern which are of a strategic, policy or resources nature.
- To expend the budget allocated for the District Assembly in accordance with any schemes or policies approved by the Council.
- To appoint or nominate representatives on outside bodies, where appropriate.

## 2. OTHER AREA BASED GROUPS

2.1 District Assemblies cannot be looked at in isolation and there are a number of other area based groups and partnerships operating across the Borough, for example a number of towns have town teams. The Town Teams were established in March 2012 following the Portas review of Town Centres which recommended that local authorities establish 'Town Teams' to provide a clear vision and strategy for town centres, supported by strong operational management arrangements. The aim was that the work of the Town Teams would lead to a shared vision with a clear strategy and action plan of projects and programmes for vibrant and viable town centres. Whilst Town Teams play an important role their focus is on town centres and business and they need to be part of the wider neighbourhood approach. As such their relationship with the Council should be through the proposed new Town Councils and to assist in this relationship the Chair of the Town Council should be on the Town Team.

- 2.2 In addition to Town Teams there are a whole range of community based groups and forums where a more co-ordinated approach could bring benefits.

### **3. FUTURE COMMUNITY BASED DECISION-MAKING**

- 3.1 There is a general acceptance that a review of the approach to member engagement at community level would be useful and that following various iterations of the Neighbourhood Offer the engagement of elected members with their local communities and co-ordination of community activities should be reviewed. In addition it has to be acknowledged that there have been significant reductions in the level of Council funding that is available to community groups. This has necessitated the need for more targeted delivery and an increased need for community co-operation and involvement.
- 3.2 There are a variety of options for changing the structure of community based member meetings ranging from having no area based meetings to very small neighbourhood based arrangements. In Tameside the more obvious areas for community based decision making are ward, town or splitting the borough into geographical areas such as north, south, east and west. It could be argued that splitting the Borough into two areas would mean that the areas remain too large for meaningful neighbourhood engagement and enhancing democracy. The suggested approach is to adopt an approach of East/West Neighbourhood Forums as overarching bodies with a number of more localised arrangements sitting below them. The overarching bodies would undertake the more formal aspects of area working that require a strategic/co-ordinated approach. The core membership of these bodies would be the Chairs of the Town Councils and the relevant Neighbourhood Co-ordinator and Assistant Neighbourhood Co-ordinator.
- 3.3 The membership of the two Neighbourhood Forums will be supplemented as determined by the Forums. At present District Assemblies meet quarterly and a similar approach could be adopted for these new bodies, though the required frequency will be determined by the Forums themselves and the cost of the meetings will need to be met from the Forum budget. The Neighbourhood Forums would not be part of the formal decision making processes of the Council and as such will be able to operate in a way which suits the local areas. As they will not be part of the formal decision-making process they will not be supported by Democratic Services but will be able to invite Council officers and the officers of partner bodies to come to a meeting when it would help deliberations though officers will not attend as a matter of course. However the initial meeting will be supported by Democratic Services as will the establishment of the framework within which they will operated which will largely be determined by the Forums themselves. The focus of the Neighbourhood Forums would be on co-ordinating the community work in their areas and providing information for the area and there operational arrangements will need to reflect this focus.
- 3.4 To properly reflect the make-up of the borough and the various communities there would need to smaller groupings sitting underneath the East and West structure. There are very clear communities based around the towns in the borough which could be used as the basis for forming smaller more neighbourhood based bodies which could have a much more flexible approach as any formal decisions could be taken by the East and West Neighbourhood Forums. Freeing the town based groupings of formal decision making responsibilities would allow them to operate outside of the formal approach required of the current district assemblies and allow them to better engage with existing groups or individuals in the town.
- 3.5 The make-up of these could include councillors and other people representative of the local community as well as informally engaging with others when they see fit. These bodies could operate without formal arrangements and formal support from officers who currently attend all District Assembly meetings as well as not requiring as much input from other public bodies who are also experiencing severe financial restraints, this formal engagement could take place at the East/West level. The Chairs of the Town based bodies could represent

them in the appropriate East/West body to take issues requiring wider support. The area covered would need to be included in any name, these bodies could then be called 'Town Council' which would suggest something similar to a parish council though not with that formal status. The Town Councils would also be the place where members of the public would be able to raise matters with Members through a public question time.

3.6 It is proposed that nine Town Councils should be established covering the following areas:

- Ashton-under-Lyne (Ashton Hurst, Ashton St Michael's, Ashton Waterloo; St Peters)
- Audenshaw (Audenshaw)
- Denton (Denton North East, Denton South, Denton West)
- Droylsden (Droylsden East, Droylsden West)
- Dukinfield (Dukinfield)
- Hyde (Hyde Godley, Hyde Newton, Hyde Werneth)
- Longdendale (Longdendale)
- Mossley (Mossley)
- Stalybridge (Dukinfield/Stalybridge, Stalybridge North, Stalybridge South)

3.7 In addition it is proposed that Neighbourhood Forums be created on an east/west split as follows:

East Area: Dukinfield, Hyde, Longdendale, Mossley, Stalybridge

West Area: Ashton, Audenshaw, Denton, Droylsden

(see plan at **appendix 2**)

3.8 The overall co-ordination of the Town Councils will be undertaken at Member level by a Town Council organiser.

3.9 More detailed operating arrangements will need to be agreed by the Neighbourhood Forums and Town Councils and these will need to be agreed by the bodies themselves and will be considered at their first meetings following discussion by the Chairs.

#### **4. POWERS OF THE TOWN COUNCILS**

4.1 The Town Councils will need to focus on community engagement and contributing to the determination of local need whilst the Neighbourhood Forums will focus on the more strategic aspects and co-ordination of formal partner engagement and the Neighbourhood Forum Co-ordinators, as Chairs of the Forums would take the lead on the liaison with the Council and the Executive to ensure effective co-ordination of matters which need to be brought through the Council's formal decision-making.

4.2 The Town Councils would be facilitated by local members and will co-ordinate community and partner activity at a more local level. This will include ensuring effective co-ordination and support for the work of other area based groups. A key role of the Town Council's will be to engage and inspire communities and partners to be stronger, more vibrant and self-sufficient. The Town Councils will need to engage communities and co-ordinate the work of partners on environmental issues as well as health, prosperity, crime and decreasing financial vulnerability. They will not be to provide services themselves but to contribute to the shaping of service provision and encouraging others to provide. Engagement is dependent on all partners feeling that they get some benefit from taking part. Incentivising community groups is a key element in improving engagement. This will be achieved by:

- Giving them a voice through attendance at the Town Councils;
- Giving them a chance to share the good work they are doing with others;
- Giving them a chance to deliver activities in their community with other community groups.

- 4.3 The advantage of the proposed model is that the meetings can develop in a way that suits the local circumstances and focus on priorities without a rigid structure and process being imposed in the way that has had to be the case with District Assemblies.
- 4.4 A framework for operation would need to be drawn up with the Town Councils and Neighbourhood Forums setting out how they will work and what they would be expected to do, and what support they might look to buy in.
- 4.5 The primary purpose of the Town Councils will be to influence and inform decisions taken which impact on the area. A small amount of money will be allocated to each Town Council to help facilitate their work, the funding is not to buy in services but to either enable them to operate or to support others in the area who are providing services through the provision of small grants.
- 4.6 The primary areas that Town Councils would be expected to influence are:
- (i) **Highways Matters:** to identify and propose traffic calming schemes; to monitor road safety issues including school crossing patrols and education; to make proposals within the area of the District Assembly relating to non-strategic highways matters including powers to regulate parking places for bicycles, motorcycles and other vehicles, stopping up or diverting highways; excluding those which are related to a planning application;
  - (ii) **Highways Maintenance:** : the power to refer to the Council as to the maintenance of principal roads, to propose additions and amendments to the approve programme for the maintenance of local roads, footpaths and street lights and the provision of street furniture;
  - (iii) **Grounds Maintenance:** to make proposals relating to grounds maintenance activities;
  - (iv) **Parks, Gardens and Open Space:** to make proposals regarding the maintenance and management of parks, gardens and open space;
  - (v) **Street Cleansing:** to make proposals concerning the operation of street cleansing activities, including mechanical sweeping routes;
  - (vi) **Young People:** to make proposals concerning the provision of facilities and services for young people other than education and Social Services;
  - (vii) **Community Safety:** To make proposals concerning community safety initiatives;
  - (viii) **Ward Scheme:** To allocate monies through ward budgets in accordance with ward monies scheme,
  - (ix) **Complaints:** to monitor and refer complaints regarding services in the local area;
  - (x) **Environmental Improvements:** to be consulted on environmental improvement schemes
  - (xi) **Street Naming:** to be consulted on and have the facilities to make alternative suggestions in respect of the naming of streets.
  - (xii) **Entertainment and Events:** to be consulted on activities in the local area and the provision of entertainment and support of the arts.
  - (xiii) **Regeneration Initiatives:** to be consulted with regard to regeneration initiatives as appropriate; and
  - (xiv) **Markets:** to be consulted on the operation, management, development and other markets issues.
- 4.7 A key role of the Town Councils will be to help generate income which can be used for community initiatives. There is good practice in this activity being undertaken by District Assembly Chairs and this will need to be built on by the Town Councils working with the Neighbourhood Forums and the Town Centre Co-ordinator who will be responsible for ensuring best practice is shared and encouraging innovation in this and other areas of work.

## 5. RESOURCES

- 5.1 District Assemblies no longer have any financial resources of their own and their role is to influence and inform where resources are allocated rather than determine their own spend. There are, however, Council resources currently allocated to DAs in the form of officer support from a number of areas within the Council and the removal of DAs would free up this officer time (and the time of colleagues from partner bodies).
- 5.2 The proposals for replacing the current DA arrangements would see a reduction of 6 DA Chairs and 6 DA Deputy Chairs. The Members Allowance scheme allocates £9,581 for Chairs and £3,914 for Deputy Chairs. This is a total of £80,870. However, an element of this will be needed for SRA for those Members taking similar lead roles under the new arrangement. This would be the equivalent of 3 x District Assembly Chairs and 2 x District Assembly Vice-Chairs, which equates to £36,571, meaning a saving of £44,299 on members allowances.
- 5.3 The saving from Members Allowances will be used to facilitate the work of the Neighbourhood Forums and Town Councils. It is proposed that £10,000 be allocated to each of the Neighbourhood Forums for use on community initiatives and to facilitate their work. For each of the Town Councils it is proposed that £1,500 be allocated for their administration and the remaining £11,500 by the 19 wards and allocated to the Town Councils, funding for Town Councils would therefore be:

Audenshaw/Dukinfield/Longdendale and Mossley	1 ward	£2,100 each
Droylsden	2 wards	£2,700
Denton/Hyde/Stalybridge	3 wards	£3,300
Ashton-under-Lyne	4 wards	£3,900

- 5.3 In addition at present £500 is allocated to individual Members to spend individually within their wards, this is £28,500 in total. It is not proposed to change this allocated but Members are encouraged to use the Town Councils as a means of co-ordinating the use of ward monies to ensure that best use is made of the funds.
- 5.4 More detailed proposals on the allocation of the available funds will be considered at the first meetings of the Neighbourhood Forums. At this stage it is proposed that some of the funding will be used in a participatory budget form whereby community groups will be able to bid for funds from the pot of money available to the Neighbourhood Forums and Town Councils

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 As set out on the front of the report.

# APPENDIX 1

## District Assembly Delegations

1. To consider, review and monitor all services and activities provided by the Council within the area of the District Assembly, the function to be reviewed by the Council as appropriate.
2. To ensure that any services and facilities for which the District Assembly is responsible are managed in the manner which is consistent with the policies approved by the Council.
3. To refer to the Executive Cabinet any matters of concern which are of a strategic, policy or resources nature.
4. To expend the budget allocated for the District Assembly in accordance with any schemes or policies approved by the Council.
5. To appoint or nominate representatives on outside bodies, where appropriate.
6. The District Assemblies shall have **delegated powers** to deal with the following matters:-

## Environment

7. **Highways Matters:** to identify and approve traffic calming schemes; to monitor road safety issues including school crossing patrols and education; to make Orders within the area of the District Assembly relating to non-strategic matters including powers to regulate parking places for bicycles, motorcycles and other vehicles, stopping up or diverting highways; excluding those which are related to a planning application;
8. **Street Signing:** the power to erect street signs;
9. **Highways Maintenance:** : the power to refer to the Council as to the maintenance of principal roads, to approve programmes for the maintenance of local roads, footpaths and street lights and the provision of street furniture;
10. **Definitive Footpaths and Maps:** to make modifications to the Tameside MBC Definitive Map and Statement;
11. **Grounds Maintenance:** to be responsible for the oversight of grounds maintenance activities;
12. **Parks, Gardens and Open Space:** to be responsible for the maintenance and management of parks, gardens and open space;
13. **Street Cleansing:** to be responsible for implementing, monitoring and reviewing street cleansing activities, including mechanical sweeping routes, within the District Assembly area.
14. **Britain in Bloom:** to determine arrangements for Britain in Bloom related activities;
15. **Gully Emptying:** to monitor and report on gully emptying activities within the District Assembly area;
16. **Play Provision:** to be responsible for the management of local play sites; and



17. **War Memorials:** to be responsible for the maintenance, repair, protection and adaptation of war memorials;

### **11.6.2 Services to Young People**

**Young People:** to be responsible for consultation and implementation of the provision of facilities and services for young people other than education and Social Services;

### **11.6.3 Community Safety**

To implement and monitor schemes and projects within the Council's Community Safety Strategy which have been allocated to District Assemblies e.g. certain community safety initiatives, Business Watch Schemes and the Safe Child Campaign;

### **11.6.4 Local Liaison**

1. **Ward Scheme:** individual Ward Members to approve grants, from their ward budgets in respect of local community groups, subject to such action being reported for information purposes, to the appropriate District Assembly;
2. **Town Twinning:** to be responsible for the co-ordination and development of cultural links with the existing twinned towns, including the oversight of local arrangements for civic visits, and the determination of applications for financial assistance from voluntary Town Twinning Committees from within approved budgets; and
3. **Complaints:** to monitor and refer complaints regarding services in the local area, and the oversight of customer services functions in the area.

The District Assemblies shall be **CONSULTED** in respect of the following matters:-

### **Environment**

1. **Conservation Areas:** to be consulted on the designation of conservation areas;
2. **Environmental Improvements:** to be consulted on environmental improvement schemes; and
3. **Street Naming:** to be consulted on and have the facilities to make alternative suggestions in respect of the naming of streets.

### **Entertainment and Events**

**Entertainment and Events:** to be consulted on activities in the local area and the provision of entertainment and support of the arts.

### **Local Liaison**

1. **Regeneration Initiatives:** to be consulted with regard to regeneration initiatives as appropriate; and
2. **Markets:** to be consulted on the operation, management, development and other markets issues.