To: Members of the Special Sub-Group

Councillors Hayfield, Humphreys, Jenns, Singh, M Stanley and Sweet

For the information of the other Members of the Council

SPECIAL SUB-GROUP

10 November 2015

The Special Sub-Group will meet in the Committee Room, The Council House, South Street, Atherstone on Tuesday 10 November 2015 at 6.30pm.

AGENDA

PART I - PUBLIC BUSINESS

1 **Evacuation Procedure.**

2 **Apologies for Absence / Members away on official Council business.**

3 **Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

4 **Public Participation**

Up to twenty minutes will be set aside for members of the public to ask questions or to put their views to elected Members. Participants are restricted to five minutes each. If you wish to speak at the meeting please contact David Harris on 01827 719222 or email democraticservices@northwarks.gov.uk.

PART A – ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION
(WHITE PAPERS)

5 **Devolution/ Combined Authorities** – Report of the Chief Executive

Summary

To receive a verbal update on any further developments in respect of the proposals for devolution/combined authorities.

The Contact Officer for this report is Jerry Hutchinson (719200).

6 **Area Forums and Scrutiny** – Report of the Chief Executive

Summary

The report details our current arrangements with regard to Area Forms and Scrutiny

The Contact Officer for this report is Jerry Hutchinson (719200).

PART C – EXEMPT INFORMATION
(GOLD PAPERS)

7 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Recommendation:

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Schedule 12A to the Act.

8 **Staffing – Development Control** – Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council

The Contact Officer for this report is Steve Maxey (719438).

9 **Staffing – Housing Private Sector Team** – Report of the Assistant Director (Housing)

The Contact Officer for this report is Angela Coates (719369).

JERRY HUTCHINSON
Chief Executive

For general enquiries please contact David Harris, Democratic Services Manager, on 01827 719222 or via e-mail – davidharris@northwarks.gov.uk**.**

For enquiries about specific reports please contact the officer named in the report.

Agenda Item No 6

Special Sub-Group

10 November 2015

Report of the Chief Executive — **Area Forums and Scrutiny**

1 **Summary**

1.1 The report details our current arrangements with regard to Area Forums and Scrutiny.

Recommendation to the Sub-Group

That Members decide how they would like to see Area Forums and Scrutiny operate in the future

2 **Consultation**

2.1 All Members will receive a copy of the report and have been invited to the meeting.

3 **Report**

3.1 Successive Councils have considered the issue of how our Area Forums and Scrutiny functions operate. A number of changes have been suggested, however it is felt that a further review is undertaken.

Area Forums

3.2 Previous reports to Members have acknowledged that Area Forums are potential very valuable ways of engaging with the public. They are a chance to meet outside of the Council Offices and focus in on particular issues of importance in our towns and villages.

3.3 Experience over a very long period of time has however suggested that the operation and attendance at meetings has not delivered this aspiration.

3.4 Analysis in 2012 indicated that only 19% of those attending Area Forums were not formally attached to the Borough, County or Parish Councils or other agencies. This equated to just short of 6 members of the public per meeting against a population of over 62,000 (0.01%). An exercise in 2010 concluded that about 0.2% of Warwickshire's population attended area forums at that time.

3.5 Figures for the most recent round of meetings, in September 2015, are however more promising and suggest a mixed picture. For Area Forums North and West, this historical trend seems to be continuing. Of the 37 attending the two meetings, only 7 were unaffiliated residents. However for Area Forums East and South, 34 of the 62 attendees were residents. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) attended the Area Forum East meeting which may account for the 14 (out of 32) residents at that meeting, however in June 15 residents also attended (out of 29). Jeff Brown has been to discuss the Daw Mill application at each of the last two South meetings which may account for 20 residents out of 30 at the September meeting and 30 out of 43 in June. The County Council however do not appear to record Parish Council representatives separately for Area Forum South so these figures do not show how many of the "residents" were affiliated to Town or Parish Councils. It does suggest however that greater attendance is taking place in the East and South and it may be related to the fact that issues of great local concern are being discussed, with the PCC and Daw Mill issues.

3.6 Whilst any review will necessarily involve the other partner organisations involved with the Forums, it would be useful to consider again a number of fundamental issues that have been considered by previous Councils:

- What do we want the Forums to do?
- Consultation/Informing/Discourse between the "great and good" i.e. Borough/County Councillors, Parish Councils/Councillors and people likely to turn up to formal meetings. Other, wider consultation could be left to more suitable methods.
- Do we still have an aim of attempting to attract people whom will do not regularly hear from?
- Depending on the above - venues, times, agenda items
- Enhanced role for partners other than the Borough and County Council - Chairing, administration?
- Does the recent experience at Area Forums East and South provide a model for future meetings?

3.7 This is not an exhaustive list and is intended solely to initiate a discussion to resolve a number of fundamental issues regarding this Council's aims and ambitions for the Forums.

Scrutiny

3.8 Since the implementation of the Localism Act 2011, Councils with a "fourth option" enhanced committee system do not need to have a Scrutiny Committee. This Council, in its previous session, did resolve to continue with a Scrutiny Committee, subject to review.

3.9 Since 2009, this Council has had one Scrutiny Committee. Prior to this time it had two – one looking at outward facing services and one considering internal services. It has been noted, nationally as well as locally, that the Scrutiny concept has often struggled to find a meaningful place within Councils, particularly for fourth option Councils were there is greater Member involvement in decisions. This is reflected in this extract from a report in 2012 when the Council last reviewed the issue:

> "If Members agree to keep the Committee system, the Council has to make a decision whether or not to have a separate Scrutiny Board. Scrutiny has had a mixed reputation, particularly in 4th option Councils where the inclusive nature of decision making ensures that a lot of decisions are "pre-scrutinised" and a number of Members on the Scrutiny Board have been involved in the decisions being considered by that Board.
>
> There appears to be a consensus nationally that some element of overview or scrutiny should be retained and this review gives the Council the opportunity to consider whether any improvements can be made.
>
> As mentioned above, one approach could be to have standing Task and Finish Groups to look at 'weightier' matters that are difficult to get to grips with at a single meeting after considering a short report on an agenda that has a number of other issues (some of which are equally serious). There could be an overlap with the points made above about our scrutiny function. It is suggested that the subjects considered at the formal meetings of the Scrutiny Board have been rather ad hoc and

piecemeal and, on some occasions, items may have been placed on the agenda to fulfil the requirement to have a meeting, rather than any conscious desire of Members to consider that subject. By contrast, the development in the last two Councils of detailed Scrutiny Projects, looking at topics such as recycling performance, play areas, industrial units, consultation and the dog warden service have, it is suggested, produced more meaningful outcomes. If the Task and Finish Groups could become 'Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups', then this element of the current scrutiny function could be retained and the "feeding the beast" nature of the formal Board meetings could be removed (or made into an annual meeting only) without any loss of the value of scrutiny overall. It is also arguable that this would confirm the inclusive nature of our decision making arrangements, something seen as a positive feature of the Committee system.

Another option would be to retain scheduled meetings of the Scrutiny Board but to only proceed with the meeting if Members raise enough issues to generate a meaningful agenda.

The increased involvement of the public could also be written into this element. These 'Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups' could include arrangements for ensuring the public's and partners' views are considered. There are a number of ways that this could be carried out and, whilst our Consultation Strategy and action plan is currently being reviewed by the Scrutiny Board, it might be better not to be too prescriptive to allow the best method to be chosen for each subject. However, some common themes are emerging from the work done so far on the consultation, together with some of the points emerging from the Customer Access and Information Technology Strategies, and are summarized below:-

- A review of whether increased public speaking or questions at Boards have been a success and could be extended to other areas.

- Better use of the Council's Citizens Panel and, in particular, the use of the large number of email addresses and mobile 'phone numbers of people who have previously contacted the Council.
- A regular Place Survey, complimented by more issue specific consultation events."

3.10 Not all of these issues were agreed and are included in this report solely to aid Members' consideration.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Meaningful engagement with the public is a difficult issue that all public authorities wrestle with. It should be remembered that this Council undertakes a number of steps to engage the public and the issue of Area Forums therefore is but one of the tools used.

4.2 Similarly, fourth option Councils appear to have struggled with Scrutiny. It is to it credit that this Council keeps both issues under review in an attempt to improve its processes and decision making functions.

4.3 Members are asked to indicate how they would like to see these two areas develop in the future.

The Contact Officer for this report is Steve Maxey (719438)