

Local Area Forum Guide

for Councillors and other LAF members

LAFs are local forums set up to promote the interests of the local area, with a focus on getting things done and advising the County Council and other bodies on local service delivery. There are 19 'local areas' in Buckinghamshire with a LAF set up to represent each local area. In some areas Local Area Forums are known as Local Community Partnerships (LCPs). The LAF meetings are held in public.

LAFs promote the interests of the local area by:

Setting priorities for the area

The LAF will identify the key priorities for the local area, drawing on parish and town plans, County and District Sustainable Community Strategies, and other consultation and community engagement in the area as well as the local knowledge of the LAF members.

These priorities will help shape the issues that the LAF focuses upon and will guide strategic policy and local service delivery by the County Council and other bodies.

The LAF is also a consultation forum for the County Council and other bodies to assist in strategic policy development and local service delivery to meet the current and future needs of the local area.

Influencing and taking action on local issues

The LAF will promote and take account of public service consultation and encourage community engagement at a local level. It will help to identify practical solutions to local issues and champion those solutions with the organisation that is able to implement them.

Decision Making

The LAF is not a decision making body but can make recommendations on matters devolved from the County Council, District Council and other organisations. It will also make recommendations on budget spending delegated by the County Council, District Council and other partners.

Membership of the forums includes county, district and parish councillors. Meetings may be attended by representatives from the police, fire & rescue, the local community, volunteer organisations, NHS etc. The LAF may choose to extend membership to other organisations such as community organisations which have the interests of the community at heart.

Parishes and other organisations may attend more than one forum where issues in adjacent areas affect their communities.

Where to go for more information

Go to the Committees section on the Buckinghamshire County Council website www.buckscc.gov.uk to find information on Local Area Forums. Here you will find dates, venues, agendas, action notes, Member information and the agenda management timetable for deadlines can be found at <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/moderngov/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Alternatively, contact the relevant Democratic Services Officer (see the final page of this booklet for details).

Local Area	Localities and Communities Manager	Democratic Services Officer
Aylesbury Vale District		
Greater Aylesbury	Jackie Wesley jwesley@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383839	Katy MacDonald kmacdonald@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383604
Great Brickhill, Wing and Ivinghoe		Karen Jones kljones@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383627
Wendover		
Buckingham	Mark Grindall mgrindall@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 387542	Liz Wheaton ewheaton@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383856
Winslow & District		
Haddenham & Long Crendon		Katy MacDonald kmacdonald@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383604
Waddesdon		
Chiltern District		
Amersham	Christine Gardner cgardner@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383645	Helen Wailling hwailing@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383614
Chesham and Chiltern Villages		
The Missendens		
The Chalfonts		Maureen Keyworth mkeyworth@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383603
South Bucks District (* indicates LAF not yet established)		
Beaconsfield	Stephen Young spyoung@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 387543	Clare Gray cgray@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383610
Gerrards Cross*		Helen Wailling hwailing@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383614
Beeches		Maureen Keyworth mkeyworth@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383603
Wexham & Iver		
Wycombe District		
Chepping Wye Valley	Madeleine Howe mphowe@buckscc.gov.uk 01494 475378	Karen Jones kljones@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383627
High Wycombe		Clare Gray cgray@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383610
South West Chilterns & Marlow		
North West Chilterns		Maureen Keyworth mkeyworth@buckscc.gov.uk 01296 383603

Public participation

Local people and community organisations are encouraged to attend and participate in LAFs.

At each meeting, time will be set aside for public questions and comments. Questions can be asked at the meeting but priority will be given to those questions of which we are notified beforehand (to be sent to the Relevant Democratic Services Officer ,see back page of this document, one week before the meeting.) Advance notice of questions also means that an answer might be available by the night of the meeting.

Members of the public may also, at the Chairman's discretion, comment or take part in discussion on other items on the agenda.

Petitions

How are petitions received?

Petitions may be received by Buckinghamshire County Council in a number of ways, including via direct submission to the Chief Executive, Head of Service, or County Councillor, or they can be presented at a LAF. The advantage of presenting a petition at a LAF is that the member of the public is able to present it in person and speak about their petition.

The LAF will refer the petition to the relevant Head of Service (or to another organisation for example, district council, NHS).

The petitioner or LAF may also consider that the petition matter is of such significance or of county-wide impact that it should be presented to County Council by a local county councillor. If there are a large number of signatures this could trigger a debate at the County Council meeting.

What happens to a petition after it has been received?

The Council has a petition scheme and the Petitions Officer is the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. Once acknowledged the service concerned will prepare a response to the petition which will be reported back to the LAF for its consideration. The Cabinet Member may also report progress to County Council

If the LAF is not satisfied with the proposed response from the service, it can pass its comments back to the service and Cabinet Member concerned. The final decision on the action to be taken in response to a petition will rest with the Head of Service or Cabinet Member.

On rare occasions, swift action may be required before the LAF is able to meet and consider the response to the petition. In this case, on the guidance of the Chairman, the service concerned may consult directly with LAF members.

If a petitioner is not satisfied with the outcome of their petition they can appeal and should contact Democratic Services for information.

There is now a facility to submit e-petitions at <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/moderngov/mgepetitionlistdisplay.aspx>?
If you click on this link there are instructions on how to submit an e-petition . Contact Democratic Services if you want more information on petitions.

Local Area Plan

Each LAF will identify priorities for the local area and actions to address these priorities. The Local Area Plan is based on discussion at forum meetings; priorities identified through the communities (including parish plans) and planned actions by local authorities and others.

These priorities will be used to shape strategic planning and service delivery by relevant agencies and be reported to the Local Strategic Partnerships; guide the use of devolved budgets; and help set the agenda for the issues that the LAF will focus on.

Devolved budgets

The County Council has devolved budgets to each LAF. Some of these budgets can be used to fund priorities identified through the Local Area Plan and some is designated for specific service expenditure within the local area. Where it is for specific service expenditure, the LAF will be able to influence how it is spent.

It is anticipated that there will be further budget devolution from a wider range of services in subsequent years. Further detail on how the devolved budgets may be spent will be reported to the LAF or is available directly from the Localities and Communities Manager.

Decision making

Voting may be used to arrive at a LAF view is a consensus view is not clear.

With respect to devolved County Council services and budgets, the LAF decision is advisory. The Head of Service will implement the LAF's advice unless there is a fundamental reason not to. A Head of Service decision not to follow the LAF's advice would require a report back to the LAF.

Forward plan

If you would like to raise a particular issue for the forward plan please use the contact officer list on the following page or email admin@buckscc.gov.uk

How often will the LAF meet?

The LAF will normally meet quarterly.

Other meetings may be held in between the quarterly meetings to allow more discussion of a particular matter and to encourage wider participation in the discussion. A LAF may also set up a working group to examine a particular issue or to undertake the practical implementation of a project.

Postponement of meetings

Meetings that are open to the public will normally only be postponed in exceptional circumstances. Any decision to postpone a meeting will be taken by the County Council's Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman of the meeting.

What is the legal status of LAFs?

In simple terms, the legal status of LAFs is that they are informal meetings convened by the County Council, to which all county councillors, district councillors and of each parish and town council within each Local Area are invited to participate. The County Council is also keen that LAFs encourage participation from other organisations, statutory or voluntary, which have the interests of the local area at heart.

The County Council has offered some guidance on the operation of LAFs but has left it up to each LAF to determine its own detailed operating arrangements (for example, frequency of meetings, voting and membership). As the convenor of the meetings, the County Council has reserved the position of Chairman for a local County Councillor.

The recommendations of LAFs are not binding on the County Council. However where the County Council has devolved budgets or decisions to the LAF, it is with the intention that the money will be spent or the decision acted upon in accordance with the wishes of the LAF unless there is a fundamental reason why this should not be so.

The County Council does not rely upon any specific legislation to convene LAFs. Should there be good cause to enter into more formal arrangements in the future, there are a number of legislative mechanisms that could be relevant depending on the purpose of the formal arrangement.

Contact officers

Please see the table on the following page for the contact details of your Localities and Communities Manager and Democratic Services Officer. Please note that not all LAFs are functioning yet but the linked officers will still be able to deal with enquiries relating to the local area.