

MEETING	FULL COUNCIL
DATE	1 May, 2014
TITLE OF REPORT	THE FUTURE OF THE AREA FORUMS
PURPOSE	To decide on the continuation of the Forums
AUTHOR	Councillor Ioan Thomas

1. At the meeting of the full Council on 28th February, 2014, it was decided to move to a system of Area Forums after the Annual Meeting in May, 2013. However, it was noted in the debate that this should be reviewed again in a year.

2. In order to do so, discussions took place at all of the area forums and a questionnaire was sent out to every member through Rhaeadr largely to give an opportunity for members who do not attend the forums to express an opinion.

3. The views of the four Area Forums are noted in the table below together with a note of the attendance levels at the different forums during the year:-

FORUM	ATTENDANCE LEVEL	VIEWS
Gwyrfai	50%	The Area Forum is valuable, fulfils its purpose and should continue in the future
Ogwen	55%	The Area Forum; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • duplicates the work of the Bangor Project Group • is more of a talking shop. Need to refer directly to problems • places too much emphasis on Bangor and not the area
Meirionnydd	69%	The Area Forum; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is effective and important to the members • attendance is quite good in Meirionnydd • holding it at appropriate and informal locations rather than the Council Chamber at Dolgellau is important • it is a means of finding out information of more relevance to Meirionnydd and, as a result, members can follow up on issues • should continue to meet in the future
Dwyfor	70%	The Area Forum; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is beneficial and important for members • a way for Dwyfor area members to discuss openly • should continue to be held in the future

4. With regard to the questionnaire, few have been returned, probably, because most members have had an opportunity to express their views at the individual forums but the main messages at the time of writing the report are:-

- 79% of those who responded found the area forums useful or very useful
- 74% of those who responded were keen for the Council to continue to convene the forums

- The things that were of the greatest value to members were “The opportunity for brief training without having to travel to Caernarfon”, “The opportunity to question Cabinet Members and officers informally”, “The opportunity to raise matters of local concern and work through them with my fellow members.”, “The opportunity to hear from people outside the Council who were attending by invitation” and “The opportunity to be a local forum for engagement on important matters such as the Re-cycling Strategy”

5. It appears, therefore, that, although there is no full unanimity on the issue, the majority are in favour of the continuation of the area forums because they offer a means of holding an open dialogue between local councillors and Cabinet Members, Council officers and officers from other agencies on more local matters that would probably not receive attention at a Scrutiny Committee.

6. Some concern was expressed that the forums have no power as such but that is largely due to the governance arrangements that the Council has to adopt under the Cabinet System. However, the forums do provide more local accountability and provide members for an area with the opportunity to seek to influence those with powers in various fields within the Council and without.

7. The variable success of the experiment across the areas does raise a number of issues requiring attention:-

- The need to think creatively about items that it would be worthwhile discussing at a more local level
- The need for individual forums to learn from the experience of other forums on issues it would be worthwhile to discuss
- The need to give particular attention in the Ogwen area to the problem of possible duplication between the Forum and the Bangor Project Group

8. Subject to the above observations, **I recommend to the Council** that the forums should continue to operate.