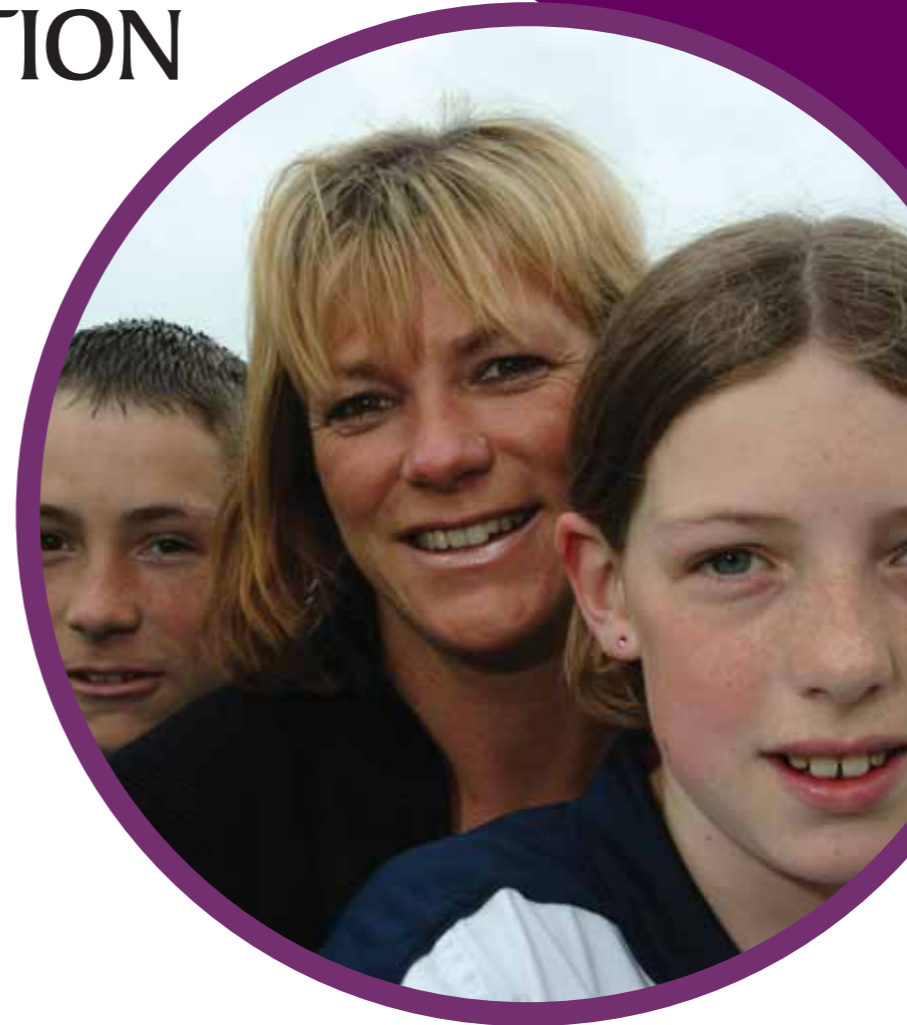


Local Matters in ACTION



Neighbourhood Forums

VISIT US ONLINE: www.cumbria.gov.uk

Neighbourhood Forums



A Platform for Community Engagement: Neighbourhood Forums

Many engagement activities are based around Neighbourhood Forums. These were developed by the Council from 1992 onwards and 60 Forums now cover the whole county. As public meetings they have been useful as a means of engaging local people and allowing them to have an input into shaping services and policies.

Forum meetings vary in style and content from area to area. The agenda is always open for local people and Councillors to put items on. Examples of issues which have been raised at Forums are: economic regeneration projects such as South Lakeland Gateway; youth provision, highways issues including verges and local improvements. Forums usually meet around five times per year, occasionally with additional special one-off meetings addressing particular issues of concern, e.g. a new proposal for a traffic scheme.

A County Councillor usually chairs the meetings, but in some Forums a local person has taken on this role. The chair ensures that vital matters are reported back to the Council, parish, district or other relevant agencies so that the necessary actions can be taken.

What are Neighbourhood Forums for?

- Neighbourhood Forums help local councillors to voice your needs and wishes
- Neighbourhood Forums provide opportunities for people to work together and get things done locally
- Neighbourhood Forums are informal meetings where we can exchange information and discuss matters in person
- Neighbourhood Forums provide an opportunity for small grants to be fairly distributed to community groups
- Neighbourhood Forums help your County Council to target services more effectively



Meetings are well attended; invitations and regular newsletters are sent to all attendees. Over the years the forums have built on the community spirit of the area and have helped to increase the feeling of community and active citizenship.

Local Matters in ACTION

The comments below are taken from an Allerdale meeting:

'The Neighbourhood Forum was very informative and I found out about a lot of different organisations.'

'Keswick Youth Forum is providing the young people the opportunity to have their say and make a difference.'

'A very sympathetic and understanding reaction to what must have been a slightly unusual application.'

'Through going to the Neighbourhood Forums I have been asked to talk on the exercise and encourage more groups to take advantage.'

'Good to see all age groups present and contributing.'



Grants: Each Forum has a set amount of grant money available to voluntary community groups, mainly to help with capital projects. Mostly, these grants are heard at the public meetings with the applicant being asked to give a brief presentation about the project, and the people at the meeting being invited to comment, ask questions and finally indicate whether they are supportive of the grant. The County Councillors take this input into consideration when making the final grant recommendations. **Neighbourhood Forums across the county had a budget of £407,000 in 2005/6 and supported 768 projects.**

Groups: Grants awarded have included applications from playgroups, resident's action groups, sports groups, youth clubs, environmental groups, community centres and local charities.

Projects: Successful applications have been for a wide range of projects including: setting up costs, educational toys, newsletters, notice boards, craft equipment, food co-ops, emergency information, pantomimes and summer play schemes.

Funds: Neighbourhood Forums deal with their grants in different ways and can also have slightly differing budgets. It's always worth having a chat with the Neighbourhood Development Officer for the area your project will be in.

For further information about Neighbourhood Forums including meeting dates and issues for discussion, please look at our web site: www.cumbria.gov.uk/neighbourhoodforums



Offering Practical Support for Communities:

A typical Neighbourhood Forum

The Solway Coast Neighbourhood Forum has a good local attendance and is a good example of how a Forum can represent local people. The meeting in December had 41 people there, including 11 young people. They discussed the Allerdale Borough Council Strategic Plan and were able to make comments to the Director of Finance on priorities and themes as well as voice specific concerns such as poor public transport to Lakes College, fear of crime and childcare problems for mothers returning to work. There was also information from the Solway Coast AONB and advice on applying for funding from their grant budgets. Parish councillors gave accounts of local activities in Holme Low, Silloth, Allonby and Holme St. Cuthbert and young people from Silloth Community College talked about a school visit to Mexico. Discussion ranged from strategic themes of affordable housing and heritage protection to more local concerns of street lighting, seats in bus-shelters, village Christmas trees and youth clubs – all part of the important fabric of community life.

Christine and Peter Johnstone were at the meeting representing the West Cumbria Older Persons' Forum and commented that they were impressed by the mix of age groups. *'It may be that, with the area being so rural in its makeup, it engenders a closer working relationship and understanding of other peoples' worries, concerns and difficulties and allows for ideas, and in some cases possible solutions to be arrived at... we were made welcome and able to talk to other members present and hopefully will attend other Forums so that we can take Older Persons' issues up with the authorities that can make a difference.'*

The meeting finished with an allocation of grant funding from the Neighbourhood Forum budget to six local groups. All the grants were under £300 but show how small amounts of funding can help a variety of community ventures from a vintage car rally to toys for a toddlers group. The annual community grants budget is £5,000. Allocations tend to be fairly small but applicants receive advice on other possible funding sources, organisation and help with contacts and information. Sometimes this assistance is more valuable to a community group than the funding itself.

