

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum Task Force – initial thoughts on future direction

TWBC was defined as a weak council by the Audit Commission following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004. The major theme of the inspection findings for the Council was the lack of strategic capacity and leadership. **There had been limited effective interaction and partnership with the community and key stakeholders.**

The recent March 2006 Audit Commission appraisal commented that: “The CPA report highlighted the absence of community involvement and influence on the Council’s direction and weaknesses in strategic leadership. **The Council is addressing its deficiencies, but impact to date has been limited.** The Commission went on “The Council is proactively encouraging community involvement and engagement in the development and setting of Council priorities”.

Role of the RTW Town Forum

The Town Forum is one of the key features by which TWBC are seeking to address the Audit Commission criticisms but the role of the Forum and the commitment of TWBC to it are inadequately defined. The Town Forum Task Force has been set up to identify problem areas and provide solutions. The initial Task Force meeting has produced the initial thoughts and proposals which are set out in the table below.

PROBLEM	SUGGESTED SOLUTION
TWBC strategic aims following the recent restructuring are not clearly articulated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheila Wheeler / Melvyn Howell to give full briefing to the Town Forum.
TWBC has not set out explicitly what it is seeking from the Town Forum and has not assisted the Town Forum in this definitional exercise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TWBC should set out explicitly a limited number of issues on which they seek the views and recommendations of the Town Forum.
TWBC, councillors, and partner agencies have not provided clear and unequivocal commitment to the Town Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TWBC councillors should commit to attend all Town Forum meetings unless they have good reason not to do so. • Borough Council leadership to formally receive and review minutes of Town Forum.
TWBC has not established clear lines of accountability and reporting with the Town Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TWBC with Town Forum should agree formal mechanisms for receiving recommendations. • TWBC should establish formal reporting lines from Councillors/Officers and partner agencies to the Town Forum.
The composition of the Town Forum does not fully reflect the broad concerns of the Town’s residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum to make contact with other stakeholders (CAB, Age Concern etc) and provide a formal route to TWBC. • Town Forum should take an active role in testing residents’ opinions through surveys and other strategies. • Town Forum should in any event take a proactive thought leadership role on issues of strategic importance to the Town.
The profile of the Town Forum in the Town is not commensurate with the contribution that TWBC appears to require.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite attendance of TW Courier reporters at all Town Forum meetings. • The Town Forum to issue a Press Release at the end of each meeting setting out recommendations to TWBC.

Matt Goodwin - submitted for RTW Town Forum meeting, Monday 24.04.2006