

Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Neighbourhood Working Sub-Group

Thursday, 1 February 2007

Present: Councillors Doreen Dickinson, Daniel Gee, Miss Margaret Iddon, Keith Iddon, Adrian Lowe and Marion Lowe

Also in attendance:

Richard Crossley – Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG),

Donna Hall – Chief Executive, Chorley Council

Gary Hall – Director of Finance

Jamie Carson – Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

John Lechmere – Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment

Gordon Bankes – Democratic Services

Paul Lusk – Partners in Change

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Councillor Adrian Lowe was appointed to act as Chair of the Neighbourhood Working Sub-Group.

2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTEREST

No Member declared any interests in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Greg Morgan.

4. NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING: SCRUTINY INQUIRY

The main theme for the meeting was “Would neighbourhood working add value”. The Sub-Group interviewed the following selected witnesses in connection with the ongoing inquiry into Neighbourhood Working:

- Richard Crossley, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
- Donna Hall, Chief Executive, Chorley Council
- Gary Hall, Director of Finance
- Jamie Carson, Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

Members of the Sub-Group put forward the following questions along with the responses.

Question 1

What, in your view, is neighbourhood working?

Please consider: What makes this way of working different and special? What does it do, that traditional approaches do not?

Richard Crossley:

Neighbourhood working is the local organisation, co-ordination and delivery of core citizen and community services within neighbourhoods.

This answer begs other questions:

How do we define 'local' and 'neighbourhood';?
Which services?

It's different and special because

- a) it is about mainstream services – not solely about 'projects'
- b) its long-term, not time-limited
- c) it provides a framework for residents, service providers and councillors to take a strategic view of a neighbourhood, to analyse the issues, to work out and deliver solutions.
- d) its flexible, and so can focus on the issues of the neighbourhood – which will vary neighbourhood to neighbourhood.

Donna Hall:

It is when all organisations, key partners come together such as the Police, Connexions, Schools in a locality to meet the challenges of the area. In particular it meets the particular issues and makes progress on the key issues.

It needs to be differential.

It refers to local organisations with local co-ordination and delivery of core services in a defined neighbourhood.

The defined neighbourhood depends on the number of people in the area, the geographical footprint and issues.

Gary Hall:

Reference was made to the capacity to develop the issue and to make it effective is dependent upon resources. To get it right the Council must have the resources both financial and staff, as its role as community leader.

Question 2

**What evidence is there that it achieves better services?
If so, how? How does it achieve these results?**

Richard Crossley:

The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programme has an on-going evaluation – the reports are all on our web-site. Attached is a summary of the last full report.

The evidence is that neighbourhood management is most effective in the short term in tackling issues such as local crime, and environmental services. The evidence also shows it brings added value in terms of:

- Coherent solutions to problems that often cross service provider boundaries
- Promotes networking and improved relationships between service providers at the local level
- It can improve accessibility of services
- Provides an environment of innovation and new working practices
- Brings residents and service providers together
- Helps strengthen community involvement

Donna Hall:

Reference was made to extra funding being made available. Pathfinder has had small amounts of Government funding approximately £250,000 per year. Reference was made to possible partnership arrangements with adjoining local authorities such as South Ribble Borough Council.

Jamie Carson:

There has been local neighbourhood working in Adlington, Chorley East as well as with the Parish Councils, with evidence of an increase in ownership of services.

There had been an increase in local cohesion particularly for 50-60 youngsters using Parklands School.

Chair:

The Chair made reference to the fact that one of the recommendations coming out of the inquiry would be the size of the area for neighbourhood working, dependent upon the size and effectiveness. Members expressed their confusion with Neighbourhood Working and how it related to the recently established Community Forum.

Question 3

You will have seen that the Inquiry brief sets out different 'models' of neighbourhood working. Do you think this captures the range of models? What others would you add?

Richard Crossley:

This does capture the range of models: though there is an almost infinite number of variations within each broad model.

It's also possible to mix and combine models. For example, an area management model can provide a political and administrative structure within which one or a number of neighbourhood management initiatives can flourish. The key is to make sure responsibilities are devolved to the appropriate level, and there is clarity and transparency about responsibilities and decision-making. Complex and/or unclear decision-making chains work against effective local delivery and community engagement.

Donna Hall:

Smaller groups are more innovative, particularly street neighbourhoods with smaller needs and a particular project.

Schools could be used as a hub for the community as many Pathfinders have used schools as they have an important role in the community.

Question 4

How, in your view, is neighbourhood working already happening in Chorley? How far can we build on this? How might it be developed in future?

Donna Hall/Jamie Carson:

The recent restructure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate touches on this with neighbourhood working already being carried

out in Coppull, active Parish Council areas and the work of Clayton Brook Together.

In Blackburn there are street champions that report issues and are technically the eyes and ears of the area.

Question 5

**What benefits should we expect from neighbourhood working in Chorley?
Shall and will neighbourhood working reinforce the Sustainable Community Strategy and other strategic targets?**

Richard Crossley:

Neighbourhood working provides an opportunity for effective co-ordination and delivery of some services. The benefits you should expect are:

- Services better co-ordinated and more responsive to neighbourhood needs.
- Effective engagement at neighbourhood level between residents, councillors and service providers.
- Residents feeling they have opportunities to influence how services are delivered, leading to improved confidence in the Council.
- Ward councillors having improved mechanism for taking up issues that concern their ward.

Its vital that any neighbourhood working does reinforce the Sustainable Community Strategy and other strategic targets. It should provide an on-going mechanism to inform the district strategies and help in the delivery of them.

Question 6

What costs might this involve? Not just financial cost but also time and disruption

Richard Crossley:

Clearly there are costs involved, and the Council will need to weigh the costs against the expected benefits.

The pathfinder model – employing a neighbourhood manager with a small team, including community outreach, covering populations of between 5,000 and 15,000 – could cost £150k - £200k per annum. More than one NM initiative could result in some shared cost thus reducing the cost per neighbourhood.

This model isn't a prescriptive one – so it would be possible to do something at much less than this.

These costs have to be put in the context of the amounts of money spent in the areas. The pathfinders were largely focussed on areas suffering multi-deprivation. Rough estimates by the pathfinders on the public money going into the neighbourhoods (including education, health, police, etc) ranged between about £70m per year to £120m per year. So neighbourhood management costs are about 0.2% of the money already being spent.

Gary Hall/Donna Hall:

There are hidden costs such as change to the organisation.

The Council has a dual role as Community Leaders and driving forward Local Strategic Partnerships.

Delivery of efficiencies can reduce cost.

Chair:

The Chair pointed out that it was important that whatever came out of the inquiry's recommendation there must be adequate budget to make the recommendation effective. It must be resourced properly to make it work. There may be a need to work with other agencies.

Question 7

How might we measure the costs and benefits?

Richard Crossley:

The costs are mainly hard costs and therefore relatively easy to quantify: new posts, current staff time, councillor time, office costs and transport costs.

The benefits are much hard to quantify: I feel nationally, not enough work has been done on this. They could include, depending on what issues were addressed:

- Reduced crime
- Reduced time dealing with complaints (a note of caution on this: complaints may increase in the early days as a more accessible service gives more opportunities for people to report issues)
- Increased health (though increased life expectancy could also count as a cost!)
- Increased participation by residents
- Reduced feeling of fracture between local government and citizens

Its worth bearing in mind that many costs are immediate (setting up costs etc) but many of the benefits are long-term.

The approach should be to decide what you are looking to achieve by neighbourhood working; then decide how you'd like to achieve it; then how much this will cost.

Donna Hall:

The satisfaction of residents is the most important factor. The work to be done on Neighbourhood Working should send messages back to the Council that we are not doing things right or that we are doing this wrong. It should challenge the work of the Council. We must use what resources we have and build on the excellent work of parish councils.

Consideration to be given to looking at two areas, the Clayton area and the other a rural area, the two dimensions to the area of Chorley.

Chair:

The Chair pointed out that we should build in some costings for options.

Question 8

In your experience, what do you consider are the main threats to successful implementation of neighbourhood working?

Richard Crossley:

- Balancing up-front costs against possible long term benefits
- Most local councillors welcome neighbourhood working: but a few are threatened by it, particularly if residents and community organisations are empowered in the process
- Councillors using neighbourhood management for party political purposes gets in the way of resident engagement and effective neighbourhood decision-making
- Effective neighbourhood working often requires a cultural shift amongst staff: some senior and middle managers are sometimes reluctant to give up their control
- Getting genuine buy-in from other services (though the pathfinder experience is that police, and to a lesser extent Health, have been willing to actively engage with it)

Question 9

Is devolved control or influence over budgets and resources important to the success of neighbourhood working?

Richard Crossley:

It was the belief that it was one of the tricks to devolve appropriately. If budget control remains centralised then it makes local decision making more difficult.

Question 10

Do you consider that party political consensus is important to achieving services?

Richard Crossley:

It certainly helps – see answer above on the threats.

Question 11

**What is government policy on neighbourhood working?
How can the government help? How will policy develop in the foreseeable future?**

The Government supports it, and wishes to encourage it, without being prescriptive. It sees neighbourhood working as something that can deliver improvement in some services, and also can help empower citizens to play a more active role. The Local Government White Paper states the Government's support for the approach. Practical support for neighbourhood working – through the pathfinder programme and through the Safer Stronger Communities Fund – has focussed on the most deprived neighbourhoods. This is unlikely to change.

But the Government is keen that lessons learned and good practices are available to all local authorities. Information is available on the Government web-sites, and we are supporting the development of the National Neighbourhood Management Network to continue to provide support and information (www.renewal.net/NNMN/).

The meeting concluded that it was essential for better co-ordination of services in the chosen areas and that the recommendations can be accommodated within existing capacity and financial resources available.

Chair