

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

**Thursday, 8 February 2007**

**Present:** Councillor Adrian Lowe, Keith Iddon, Miss Margaret Iddon, Roy Lees, Marion Lowe and Rosemary Russell

**Officers Present:** John Lechmere (Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment) and Tony Uren (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also in attendance:** Paul Lusk (Partners in Charge)

## 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor D Gee.

In the absence of the Chair of the Environmental and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and with the consent of the Members present, Councillor A Lowe assumed the Chair of the meeting.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest by any of the Councillors in any of the agenda items.

## 3. NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING - SCRUTINY INQUIRY

The Chair reminded the Members that the second session of the Sub-Group had been convened to interview further witnesses selected to assist the on-going inquiry into neighbourhood working. The purpose of the meeting would be to ascertain the witnesses' views on the differing approaches to neighbourhood working that the Council could consider.

The Chair introduced and welcomed the following persons invited to the meeting:

- Ed Cox, Local Government Information Unit facilitator of Togetherwecan Network.
- Steve Lomas, Chorley Council's Director of Housing Services and Chief Executive (Designate) of Chorley Community Housing.
- Liz Morey, Chorley Council's Community Development Officer.
- John Pye, Neighbourhood Manager (Great Lever), Bolton Council.
- David Rigby, Places for People.
- Inspector Ian Roberts, Lancashire Constabulary.

The Chair advised the guests and the Sub-Group members that the purpose of the meeting was to obtain their respective responses to a number of prepared questions aimed at seeking their views on the approaches to neighbourhood working that the Council should consider. The views of each of the guests in reply to the following questions are summarised below:

### Question 1

**“What, in your view, is neighbourhood working?”**

Steve Lomas:

A joint approach between different organisations, with each body being committed to the delivery of services at a local neighbourhood level.

David Rigby:

A joint approach to the delivery of services in a defined area, with each organisation working towards the delivery of an agreed agenda and action plan.

Liz Morey:

Focusing an agenda for the delivery of services within a geographical area perceived by residents to be a "neighbourhood".

Inspector Ian Roberts:

A system that allows separate neighbourhoods and/or communities to communicate their problems to the Police or other bodies and for those problems to be solved by a multi-agency approach.

John Pye:

It is important to take account of the fact that differing problems and concerns in different neighbourhoods require separate solutions.

Effective neighbourhood management is dependent on the following three key elements:

- A Neighbourhood Manager working locally.
- Community involvement and leadership.
- A planned, evidence-led proactive approach to the resolution of the problem issues.

Ed Cox:

Effective neighbourhood working is dependent on the following three factors:

- Effective planning of neighbourhood services should define the delivery and improvement of services.
- Neighbourhood management and governance will determine how decisions are taken on the management of services, in respect of which the role of Councillors will be important.
- A focus on capacity building and community improvement.

## **Question 2**

**"What other partners do you think should be involved?"**

John Pye:

Successful neighbourhood working is not restricted to a defined membership model but can benefit from the participation of whichever organisation that is required to resolve problem areas. A competent Neighbourhood Manager would be able to determine the relevant bodies to be approached to improve services within the area.

Childrens services and the involvement of local schools tend to be overlooked.

Co-terminous boundaries for local services assist a more co-ordinated approach to neighbourhood working.

Inspector Ian Roberts:

Any partner that can add value to the initiative and contribute to the solution of problems should be welcomed.

The representatives of the partner organisations should be able to make decisions on behalf of the relevant partners.

Liz Morey:

A form of neighbourhood working currently exists in that several community groups are already actively operating in a number of areas. However, there is currently no effective focus and linkage between the activities of the separate groups.

There is a need to secure the greater involvement of children, young people and older people in local issues and decision making.

Ed Cox:

The new Local Government White Paper lists the partners and organisations that should participate in neighbourhood working arrangements.

Councillor Mrs R Russell:

Representatives from local Churches, Charities and Voluntary and Community Groups can add value to neighbourhood working in some instances.

### **Question 3**

**“How are you now achieving neighbourhood working? From your experience and observations, what are other people doing to achieve neighbourhood working?”**

David Rigby:

The Clayton Brook Together Group is a well established group set up to deal specifically with one of the target areas identified by the Chorley Community Safety Partnership. The Group comprises representatives of Chorley Council, the Police and several local community groups committed to improving services within a tightly defined geographical area. The Group identifies gaps in existing service provision and seeks to collaborate with other agencies and bodies to bridge the service gaps. The Group has been successful in contributing to a reduction of crime in the area and the implementation of a number of road traffic schemes.

Neighbourhood Working bodies should be representative of the whole community, and should aim to \*\*\* to the concerns and needs of local residents before attempting to take action to address those needs.

It would be important to recognise the differing priorities , concerns and needs of the separate communities and neighbourhoods, which would, consequently, require differing solutions.

Ed Cox:

The Local Government Information Unit has identified a number of different techniques and approaches to community consultation and involvement. Any arrangements agreed for neighbourhood working would need to take account of the following fundamental principles:

- Any arrangement agreed for neighbourhood working must be reasonable and capable of maintaining the participation and collaboration of the respective partners.
- Neighbourhood working can be built on existing structures, but should ensure that co-ordination of partners' actions led to effective partnership working.
- The effectiveness of neighbourhood working would also be reliant on adequate resourcing.

#### **Question 4**

**“How do the respective bodies organise themselves and operate at local level?”**

Inspector Ian Roberts:

The Police's Neighbourhood Policing Teams are responsible for areas that are co-terminous with the Borough Wards. A Police Community Beat Manager is assigned to each area and is supported by three Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The town centre has its own Community Beat Manager and supporting PCSOs. A separate Police Sergeant is responsible for each of the Chorley East, South and West areas.

The effectiveness and impact of local 'PACT' meetings varies from area to area. It is frequently difficult to persuade residents to attend meetings. In some instances, an arrangement would allow the Police and local Councillors to visit residents within the community (especially elderly and disabled residents) might be more beneficial.

#### **Question 5**

**“What steps can be taken to improve community involvement and engagement?”**

Liz Morey:

There needs to be credible and valid reasons for the involvement of local residents and groups. The neighbourhood working arrangements need to be capable of demonstrating that the views of local residents will be taken on board in the decision-making process. The initiatives must, ultimately, solve local problems and deliver service improvements.

Councillor Mrs M Lees:

The timing of local meetings was crucial in encouraging people to attend community meetings.

#### **Question 6**

**“What are the experiences of residents' groups in the Borough?”**

Steve Lomas:

There are already in existence several voluntary and community groups and organisations operating within the Borough that are working effectively with the local authority and other agencies (eg Tenants' and Residents' groups, the Tenants' Forum, Faith and Community Groups). Many of the groups meet independently and oblivious of each other and their work needs to be harnessed and co-ordinated.

### **Question 7**

**“What part do elected Members of the District Council play?”**

Ed Cox:

Elected Members need to be at the heart of neighbourhood management initiatives. The role of Councillors in the linkage between the strategic policies and plans of the Borough Council, Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement and the delivery plans at local level will be crucial.

Manchester City Council's web-site contains a model for neighbourhood management that defines the role and responsibilities of each partner organisation.

John Pye:

One of the contributory factors to the success of the Great Lever Pathfinder Neighbourhood Partnership in Bolton is that the venture has been championed and supported by its Chair, a member of Bolton Council.

A Councillor's involvement in neighbourhood working should not seek to replicate their normal constituency work.

### **Question 8**

**“Would you like to see neighbourhood working developed in Chorley?”**

Steve Lomas:

Yes. The network of groups and bodies that currently exists could form the nucleus of a neighbourhood management structure.

The Council could consider the appointment of a dedicated Neighbourhood Officer and Chief Officers could be designated as Neighbourhood Management Champions according to their respective disciplines.

Liz Morey:

Yes, but it is important that the Council bases its arrangements around the groups and organisations that are currently operating within the Borough.

A 'neighbourhood' can be perceived to be an area where residents are able to navigate the whole area on foot and are familiar with each of the physical features of the areas (eg Churches, schools, parks, etc). Local residents are better able to identify area concerns and problems and monitor performance of service providers within the area.

The Chorley Community Safety Partnership gave credence to operation of the SWITCH, PAiCE and Cbt organisations in the three target areas of Chorley South West, Chorley East and Clayton Brook. These organisations are partly

funded by the Community Safety Partnership and have been instrumental in terms of neighbourhood capacity building and volunteer training within their respective areas. The bodies assist and support each other and are committed to assisting the communities they serve. Other similar residents groups that may exist in other parts of the Borough could form the basis of neighbourhood management organisations.

John Pye:

Whilst the Great Lever Neighbourhood Partnership in Bolton manages a limited budget for action within the area, its principal role is to monitor the performance of relevant partners and measure outcomes.

Sub-Group members:

Neighbourhood management bodies may be able to affect improvement of services within the respective area under a restricted budget, if sufficient resources are available.

### **Question 9**

**“Do you think the Council should concentrate neighbourhood working in a few areas? If so, how should these be chosen? If not, would it be better to roll out neighbourhood working in a single programme or phase it in more gradually?”**

Inspector Ian Roberts:

Neighbourhoods are notoriously difficult to define, as not all residents agree on the boundaries that define specific neighbourhoods. However, whichever boundaries are ultimately accepted, a defined neighbourhood should not cover too large an area.

A number of residents do not believe that they live in any particular neighbourhood, but simply in the Chorley Borough area.

Liz Morey:

A neighbourhood is largely defined and determined by the perception of its local residents.

Steve Lomas:

The Council should focus its neighbourhood working initiatives in a few identified areas, selected on the basis of need. In terms of neighbourhood management, the appointed bodies should focus their deliberations on the delivery of services to meet local needs and aspirations and on means of measuring outcomes.

### **Conclusion:**

At the conclusion of the ‘question and answer’ session, the Chair thanked each of the invited guests for their attendance and contribution to the debate. Their responses and viewpoints would be taken into consideration when the final report and recommendations of the Sub-Group were being compiled.

Chair