

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

Thursday, 1 March 2007

Present: Councillor Greg Morgan (Chair) Councillors, Peter Baker, Alan Cain, Anthony Gee, Daniel Gee, Keith Iddon, Miss Margaret Iddon, Roy Lees, Adrian Lowe, Greg Morgan, Rosemary Russell and Shaun Smith

Officers Present: John Lechmere (Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment)

Also in attendance: Paul Lusk (Partners in Change)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

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 this fourth 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: "What approaches to neighbourhood working should we consider?"

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

- Adrienne Banks – Lancashire County Council, Neighbourhood Engagement Policy Officer
- Cindy Lowthian – Lancashire County Council
- Chief Inspector Chris Bithell – Lancashire Constabulary
- Derek Ormerod – Chairman of Ulnes Walton Parish Council
- Lynn Rowett – Clerk of Ulnes Walton Parish Council

The Sub-Group received a presentation from Adrienne Banks, the Neighbourhood Engagement Policy Officer of Lancashire County Council.

The session for this Sub-Group will hear about plans and proposals being considered by Lancashire County Council. Two aspects are of particular interest for the Sub-Group:

- 1) The County was consulting on a strategy for neighbourhood engagement in County services. This could include devolving some powers and budgets to recognised neighbourhood structures including neighbourhood management, partnership, parish councils etc. The quality parish council scheme was seen as a possible model for this recognition.
- 2) The County had also worked with the Regional Government Office to identify three or four pilots for 'neighbourhood arrangements' especially to explore engagement in the Local Area Agreement process (this directs public funds from different sources to meet key targets and priorities across the county; those can be 'tailored' around neighbourhoods). One of these pilots will be in Chorley. It

was likely to be word-based and the neighbourhood was to be agreed by the Local Strategic Partnership.

The session took the form of a discussion amongst these authorities and taking account of the experience and aspirations of the public services and the community leaders, what was the best approach for Chorley.

There was currently out for consultation a document entitled Engaging Communities and Neighbourhoods. Consultation period being 22 January 2007 to 21 April 2007. The consultation paper sets out the County Council's proposals for getting people at a local level involved in what they do and how they do it and ultimately taking responsibility for owning and managing local services and facilities themselves.

It was determined that most neighbourhood issues could be resolved locally. Lancashire County Council was committed to drawing on local knowledge and experience to influence and shape future decision-making and service planning.

It was pointed out that Lancashire County Council had introduced Liability Programme setting out a programme of activities to bring LCC closer to the community. The Locality Focus Programme had identified four key strands for future development:

- To support members as community advocates
- To engage effectively at the local level
- To open ourselves up to the public
- To engage effectively with partners and stakeholders

Much was made of examples of neighbourhood arrangements/structures being:

- Parish and Town Councils
- Neighbourhood Management
- District Area Committees/Councils
- Market Town Partnerships

Four Local Area Agreement Pilots had been established one of which was Clayton Brook in Chorley. Local people would have a say as to how they should respond. The pilots would last for 6 months and had just started. Recommendations are due in June 2007.

The Clayton Brook area was chosen by LCC and was driven by local people.

The witnesses were requested to comment on how LCC proposals and involvement could help to develop neighbourhood working further?

The Police and Parish Council witnesses were asked:

- What is your view on how we can take neighbourhood working forward in Chorley?
- How can we improve on what we already have?

The following issues were asked of the witnesses.

Who should give direction at the neighbourhood level? What part can and should be played by:

- Elected members of the District and County Council
- Parish Councils
- Partnership and fora (Clayton Brook Together is one example of what this might mean)

Is it essential to have one neighbourhood manager or could this role be shared across a number of agencies as a team?

The Parish Council representatives were asked:

- How might Parish Councils in Chorley respond to the opportunity to take a role in neighbourhood management?
- Explanation of the quality council schemes and the possible benefits?

The Police were asked:

- The established model of neighbourhood working based around Community Beat Managers and PACT meeting. How might this develop and change in response to new opportunities to develop neighbourhood arrangements.

Other witnesses commented on the presentation

Derek Ormerod

The Local Government White Paper would give an opportunity for enhancement of 2 tier working and effects on neighbourhood working.

The Parish Plan for Ulnes Walton gave a brief overview of the Parish and its details.

Adrienne Banks

Lancashire County Council would support new Parishes where they are required. Some areas of Chorley do not have Parishes, such as Chorley Town Centre and therefore are not represented. Some Parishes are very strong with quality status given.

There was a need to raise the profile of the area advocate. These need to be proactive.

The Clerk for Ulnes Walton Parish Council gave a good example of a project that had been carried out by the Parish Council with the assistance of Lancashire County Council. A grant application has assisted the project. Such projects must have the backing and expertise of the higher authority whether at County or District level. Parishes do not have the resources to look at projects or strategies and that is how the County can assist.

Chris Bithell

The Police already carry out Neighbourhood Policy. It was asked of him where he thought Neighbourhood Policy could develop further and improvements made coming from what was heard.

The area must be decided. Could be a Ward.

The area of Wards and Neighbourhood policy areas are not the same. He wanted the neighbourhood working across the Chorley area.

Must be realistic and not make promises. Local problems to be solved at local level with a vehicle to express themselves. Priorities such as anti social behaviour, speeding, alcohol drinking.

A local management team should have the power to solve problems and issues. Need to look at existing resources and re-align existing budgets rather than make increases in funding. A good example was given of the Digmoor area of Skelmersdale in West Lancashire.

Must get the model right from the beginning. Neighbourhoods could change depending upon the issue.

Some areas may have single issue problems such as street lighting.

Duplication of effort and resource were a concern.

Must have a local co-ordinator ie elected Councillors or paid officer.

It was asked by Paul Lusk to Adrienne Banks whether there were any plans to devolve services particularly to the Parish Councils. In response it was pointed out that the County had statutory duties to provide services but were in the process of identifying services which could be devolved.

Currently the Parish Council did not have the capacity to take on extra work.

Conclusion

The Chairman thanked each of the invited guests for their attendance and contribution to the discussion and pointed out that although the issue of neighbourhood working was complex any responses and viewpoints would be pulled together and taken into consideration when the final report and recommendations of the Sub-Group were being compiled.

Chair