

**MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP -
NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING**

MEETING DATE Thursday, 18 September 2014

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor June Molyneaux (Chair), Councillor Kim Snape (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Julia Berry, Charlie Bromilow, Mike Handley, Mark Jarnell, Paul Leadbetter, Matthew Lynch and Dave Rogerson

OFFICERS: Simon Clark (Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor

OTHER MEMBERS: Councillor

14.NW.1 Declarations of Any Interests

14.NW.2 Review of Neighbourhood Working

The Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods presented a report to the Group that provided an overview on the neighbourhood working processes that had been adopted by the Council to date. Neighbourhood working was launched in Chorley following a report to Executive Cabinet following an Overview and Scrutiny review into neighbourhood working that was undertaken in 2007.

The accepted recommendations made by that review were implemented and resulted in the establishment of neighbourhood teams, support for working with existing neighbourhood based groups and a funding mechanism to support local initiatives. The new ways of working reinforced the role of the ward Councillor in neighbourhoods and offered support for relatively deprived and poorly organised neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood profiles were developed that assisted in understanding the issues within the neighbourhoods, that were as diverse as health, housing, deprivation indices as well as attempting to map service provision within those areas.

Each year Members undertook an organised tour of their neighbourhood area with Council officers and other agency officers from partner organisations such as Lancashire County Council and housing providers. The tour identified those issues that Members felt needed to be addressed, however little reference to the neighbourhood profiles was made and often the issues determined for resolution predominately related to street scene and infrastructure matters.

In 2012 a review of the neighbourhood working model was instigated by the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods which resulted in a number of changes. The definition of neighbourhood working was approved as “working with our partners to improve the quality of life, health and wellbeing of all our citizens and to improve the environment of the neighbourhoods in which they live”.

Approval was also granted to redraw the boundaries of the neighbourhood areas, increasing their number from seven to eight and it was agreed to improve the level of representation at the twice yearly round of neighbourhood area meetings to include County Council and Parish Council representation. In addition officers from other agencies were included and were individually tailored to each of the neighbourhood meetings.

A process was established that encouraged each neighbourhood area to identify three priorities for delivery in a financial year that were costed and subject to Executive Cabinet approval as part of the annual budget setting process and a set of rules for the conduct of the neighbourhood meetings that included the selection of a Chair and that decisions would be made by consensus as opposed to a more formal voting system.

The Chair of the neighbourhood area meetings have a number of responsibilities that include, the chairing of the twice yearly neighbourhood area meetings (currently January and June each year), liaise with lead officers on behalf of the group to scope predetermined neighbourhood priorities, convene additional meeting of the group to reach consensus on the actions necessary to deliver priorities, to determine with lead officers the proposed cost of delivering each neighbourhood priority, including any on-going recurrent costs and act as a single point of contact for officers and group members alike.

In addition the review provided guidance on the areas of work that the neighbourhood priorities would cover, that included, additional works and schemes to improve areas of open public space over and above business, work and projects that support the formation of new community groups or sustain existing ones, leading and supporting community events that meet the principles and definition of neighbourhood working and activities and work that promote community cohesion such as initiatives that integrate demographic groups into the life of the community.

It excluded issues that are the sole responsibility of another agency and the Councils only input would be as a lobby, borough wide issues that are subject to existing partnership arrangements, for example, health and community safety, or activities which were universally delivered across the borough.

Up until 2012, it was fair to say that neighbourhood working had been seen as a stand-alone service or at best, an extension of community development. It was therefore essential that, in line with the agreed definition, neighbourhood working started to transcend all Council delivery and integrate with Council and partner services.

The restructure of the Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods Team, undertaken earlier this year has established a core service to start the process of embedding a neighbourhood working culture across all service areas and is therefore vital that neighbourhood working is not seen only in the context of delivery of a set of specific project type priorities or as a community development programme but as a means of

establishing local need and, where practicable, putting solutions in place at a local level that meets those needs.

To that end a number of work streams were being progressed with a view to providing a fully neighbourhood focussed service that included Time Credits, the establishment of the HEN restructure and development of Neighbourhood Action Plans.

Members can play a key role in the Council's neighbourhood working policies by working alongside neighbourhood officers and community groups. The work can often be challenging when balancing competing demands such as the different needs of deprived or more affluent areas, or dealing with different ethnic, faith and cultural backgrounds. Neighbourhood working needs to be done out in the actual communities and not just through meetings.

Residents can contribute in making their neighbourhoods a better place to live in and must be encouraged to get involved, whether in more formal activities such as neighbourhood/community groups meetings or in less formal settings such as 'clean up' days, or community days and events. A wide range of techniques are needed to encourage and give residents the confidence to get involved.

Members agreed that strengthening partnership working was key to the successful implementation of a neighbourhood working regime that was embedded throughout all communities across the borough. Partnership structures brought together agencies such as the police, council, housing associations and others to tackle problems that no single agency can solve alone. Problems could be solved by using local knowledge gained through experience, talking to local people and front-line workers, as well as being 'out and about' in the neighbourhoods.

The Council have also been leading the way in encouraging people to get involved in volunteering with the launch of the SPICE Time Credit's project. This scheme rewards people for volunteering by offering an hour of their time for an hour's time credit that can be spent on a wide range of activities. This scheme is linked to the civic pride campaign that is being developed by the Council and is aimed at encouraging residents to take pride in where they live, by encouraging them to get involved in volunteering and take a more active role in their communities.

The Group felt that this needed to be built into the neighbourhood working agenda as the time credit scheme also enables residents to get involved in the design and delivery of public and community services and would help to create a strong and diverse network of volunteers and volunteer organisations in their neighbourhoods.

The implementation of Neighbourhood Action Plans was seen as a fundamental aspect of encouraging the residents to take ownership of the actions and practices agreed to be undertaken within the community. A holistic approach that encompassed everyone across the borough was needed.

14.NW.3 Scoping of the Review

Objective

The development of a neighbourhood working footprint that will encourage sustainable engagement with neighbourhoods across Chorley.

Desired Outcomes:

1. To encourage residents to have the confidence to engage with and deliver projects in their neighbourhoods.
2. To create a sense of pride for residents across Chorley.
3. To strengthen existing partner relationships and to establish new ones.
4. To develop Neighbourhood Action Plans across the borough.
5. To develop the role of the ward Councillor in neighbourhood working.

Next steps

1. To consult with existing stakeholders including Parish Councils, County Councillors and representatives from Housing Associations to understand the strength of engagement.
2. To converse with established community groups on the delivery of successful projects in their neighbourhoods and how to get residents involved.
3. To understand how the Council's Civic Pride campaign and programme of campaigns links in to Neighbourhood Working.
4. To investigate areas of best practice amongst our neighbouring authorities.

The group posed several questions that they wanted to determine during the review that included:

- Are the Neighbourhood Areas geographically correct?
- Does the Council require additional meetings to co-ordinate and deliver the neighbourhood priorities that are identified each year?
- How does the Council identify the differing needs of the communities it serves?
- Is the Council engaging with the right partners?
- Is the definition of Neighbourhood Working correct?
- How are actions and projects communicated?
- How is Neighbourhood Working promoted across the borough?

These questions would most likely form the basis of the questions to be asked of the various stakeholders.

RESOLVED – That the scoping document be completed and presented to the next meeting of the Group for approval.

Chair

Date