

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

**MEETING DATE** Thursday, 13 November 2014

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

**OFFICERS:** Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services), Simon Clark (Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods), Louise Elo (Neighbourhoods Manager) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Dave Rogerson

**14.NW10 Declarations of Any Interests**

Councillor Matthew Lynch declared an interest in Item 4 as a Parish Councillor for Astley Village Parish Council.

**14.NW11 Minutes**

**RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Neighbourhood Working meeting held on 30 October 2014 be confirmed as correct record for signing by the Chair.**

**14.NW12 Neighbourhood Working at South Ribble Council**

The Chair welcomed Rebecca Heap, who was the Neighbourhoods Co-ordinator for South Ribble Council and had come to talk to the group about how Neighbourhood Working was currently implemented by their authority.

The 'My Neighbourhood' approach was launched in 2012 as South Ribble Council's new way of working with communities. It pulled together what were previously disparate teams within the Council, to work more efficiently and effectively together to solve issues and undertake community projects.

The Neighbourhood Forums replaced the previous Area Committees; these forums are informal public meetings that are held quarterly around the Borough across the five Neighbourhood Areas of Central, Eastern, Leyland, Penwortham and Western Parishes. Each of the meetings are only one hour in length and a Ballot Box is used to

pick up an business as usual enquiries so that the meeting can concentrate on bigger issues or more important items of business.

South Ribble is an area that is widely diverse. There are rural areas, areas of deprivation and social isolation, an acutely aging population to contend with along with some affluent areas. Some areas, dependent on their location also associate themselves with other towns such as Preston.

Initially the forums were aimed at identifying and agreeing local priorities, interactive workshops were held, using maps to add context and support discussion and were extremely well attended by the communities. Other partner agencies such as the local neighbourhood policing teams were also invited.

Residents have direct access to Councillors, there are no appointments or questions submitted in advance and local councillors are involved with all aspects of the meeting giving cross party ownership. Initially some Councillors were wary of this method, but support and training was given and confidence as grown. Members have embraced this way of working and there has been a notable reduction for the need for Councillor Surgery's.

There was an informal approach to the format of the forums. The use of visual displays was preferred to that of formal reports or speeches to communicate messages. People could pick out what they were interested in and made notes or express their views using sticky notes. From these comments and existing plans, the Neighbourhoods team were able to whittle the suggestions down to twenty potential projects per area. At the second forum, residents voted with sticky dots for their top ten. From these results, feedback from other consultation and in line with local knowledge from Elected Members, the team narrowed them to 10 priority projects and 10 reserve projects.

The 10 priority projects for each area make up the body of each of the My Neighbourhood Plan. The projects were listed and each project had one or two sponsor Members and a Cabinet Member allocated to it. A start date and end date was also allocated and updates or next steps are reported as progress is made.

All the plans were created in consultation with residents, public services and community groups, to find out what local projects people wanted. A big part of bringing the projects together was the input and involvement of the local community. The priorities contained within each of the plans were highlighted by local residents who wanted to make the areas in which they live better.

Once an item is completed or the forum chooses to change it, it can be replaced by another priority as agreed by Councillors. The Council is committed to delivering all of the Neighbourhood Plans across the borough and each of the forums are made up of Councillor that represent that area and led on an annual basis by an elected Chair.

Every My Neighbourhood forum has a 'core fund' provided by the Council to spend on local initiatives. This figure can change according to the projects contained within the plan and can attract additional funding from other sources with the help of officers from within the Council. For bigger projects, where there are links to the Council's Corporate Plan, capital funds, such as Section 106 funding from developments may also be available for use.

The Plan is a living document which changes regularly and they are always looking for new ideas and improvement projects, along with innovative ways of working to solve any issues. Residents are urged to submit any comments or queries and attend their local neighbourhood forums.

The Task Group received some information on the type of projects that were currently being undertaken within the South Ribble Neighbourhood Plans that included enhancements to Greenbank Road conservation area, supporting a new Gregson Green community centre and developing a Townsway Community Orchard. Further details on each of these projects were given and how some of the projects had developed from an initial concept or idea that residents had expressed. No limits were given as to the size of a project, even if costs were high. Ways of attracting additional funding or working with other partner organisations were looked in to before projects were dismissed. Realistic views are given as to what can or cannot be achieved and some frank discussions have taken place. Overall, as long as no false promises are made and every avenue has been explored, residents have accepted that some things cannot be done at this present time. Any proposed capital expenditure over the £75,000 threshold would be submitted to Executive Cabinet for approval.

Communication was considered paramount to the success of the service and each of the My Neighbourhood areas had its own Facebook page that is updated regularly. This helps to raise awareness of the projects and the forums in the community and attracts volunteers to get involved.

There is a cost to the promotion and supporting documentation provided for each of the forums, this includes advertising banners and publication of the My Neighbourhood' Plans. The team has a budget of £10K for publicity and promotion with an additional £5K available if needed. The use of community venues across the borough and absence of the democratic processes has helped to save costs. The initial proposal was to undertake four meetings a year for each of the areas. However, this has recently been reviewed and there are proposals to reduce this to three meetings each year going forwards. Each area will also publish a newsletter to provide regular updates in addition to social media.

The Council had been nervous initially of the new proposals and didn't really know what to expect, or if the public would be responsive. However, the new format has been extremely well received and the work undertaken on the projects to date has been outstanding.

An invitation was extended to all the Members of the Task Group to attend any of the Neighbourhood Forums across the borough of South Ribble and the Chair, Councillor June Molyneaux, thanked Rebecca for attending the meeting.

#### **14.NW13 Parish Councils - Strength of Engagement**

The Members of the Task Group are keen to strengthen existing partnerships and as part of this commitment wished to consult with existing stakeholders including Parish Councils to understand the strength of engagement and explore ways of working better together in the future.

The Chairs of Euxton, Astley Village, Clayton-Le-Woods and Withnell Parish Councils were invited to attend the meeting to give their views on the following questions:

- What do the Parish Councils expect from the Neighbourhood Working process?
- Is there anything extra that the Parish Councils could bring to the process?
- How can the Borough Council and the Parish Councils work together more effectively on projects in their area?
- Could the Parish Councils contribute financially to the Neighbourhood priorities/projects?
- Does the Parish Council see any barriers that prevent them from effectively engaging with the Council, and if so what are they?
- How can the relationship between the two Councils be strengthened?

### Euxton Parish Council

Parish Councillors Katrina Reed (Chair) and John Bamber (Vice Chair representing Euxton Parish Council) attended the meeting.

They commented that the Neighbourhood Working process allowed for the Councils help with schemes that the Parish Council may not be able to afford completely and that it was nice to know that there was an additional avenue whereby they could ask for help and advice as some things were outside their scope and they needed the relevant expertise or legal knowledge. They did however feel that more council officers needed to recognise that the parish council had a wealth of local knowledge about the local area and its residents and that improvement could be made to the relationship between the two councils.

Euxton Parish Council produces and widely distributes a parish newsletter that asks for the residents views on what projects/works they would like to see undertaken in their area and these are also put forward for the neighbourhood priorities. The parish council has an open door policy, whereby any group or resident can contact them about any matter. Other than the circulation of their newsletter, they do not actively go out into the community and recognised that they could be more proactive with the schools in the area.

There was an understanding that other parish councils represented within the same neighbourhood area had much reduced budgets than themselves and that they did not expect the same levels of contributions to a project to be impressed upon. They also commented that many of the people who reside in the Euxton part of Buckshaw Village do not consider themselves to be Euxton residents.  
(Councillor Matthew Lynch left the meeting).

### Astley Village Parish Council

Parish Councillor Laura Lennox, Chair of Astley Village Parish Council attended the meeting.

They felt that the Neighbourhood Working process gives the parish council the opportunity to work together with the borough council to achieve something more than business as usual and meets both Astley Village Parish Council and Chorley Councils objectives and priorities.

The Parish Council is able to bring local knowledge to the table and have been in a position to be able to contribute financially albeit a smaller amount than other partner

organisations. They are also able to encourage other local organisations/groups to get involve with the projects and contribute if necessary or are able.

Many residents don't understand the hierarchy of Local Government tiers and they would like to see better consultation and greater communications between the borough and parish council. This would help to alleviate some of the disputes that often arise over ownership of assets and footpaths in the area.

Astley Parish Council are always willing to contribute financially if it's of a benefit to its residents and is sustainable.

The only barriers that they could see are when people don't agree and they also felt that officers can have a hard time in some instances as people don't always understand the objective at the end. There can be many complaints received throughout the process and at times improved communications could help but can sometimes just be down to timings.

They also felt that the neighbourhood meetings work quite well but that some of the projects could do with some parameters. It was nice when the neighbouring parishes supported one another in a common goal and overall they were happy with the whole process at present.

(Councillor Matthew Lynch returned to the meeting).

Parish Councillor Mick Muncaster, Chair of Clayton-le-Woods Parish Council attended the meeting.

Clayton-le-Woods Parish Council is able to support quite a lot of projects financially. It is the biggest parish council in the borough of Chorley and as such is financially healthy. Its neighbouring parish of Whittle-le-Woods often make requests to them for financial backing and support. A lot of larger projects and works have now been completed and as the parish council are only undertaking general maintenance work they have taken steps to reduced their parish precept.

The parish council are happy with the relationship between the borough council and themselves and can see no barriers that would affect this.

They engage with their residents on a regular basis, they produce an annual newsletter, hold monthly meetings and have a public speaking procedure in place. They have also erected six notice boards around the parish and are currently working on the development of a new website.

They employ a lengths man that works in conjunction with the Brothers of Charity to undertake general maintenance around the area with the exception of major roads. In addition they employ specialists to undertaken specific work such as additional grass cutting as and when required.

Most ideas for projects or issues that occur are communicated to the parish clerk and discussed at the parish meetings. The Parish Council does not actively go out into the community as they feel that the residents know where they are if needed.

The Chair of Withnell Parish Council was unable to attend the meeting.

In addition all the remaining Parish Council have been asked for their views to the questions and any responses will be submitted to a future meeting of the Group.

The Task Group discussed the answers that had been given at the meeting, there was a feeling that many of the parish councils were very established in their ways, preferring to sit back and let residents come to them if they had a problem or suggestion to make. Members felt that they could be more proactive in their approach, particularly when looking for projects to propose as a neighbourhood priority.

#### **14.NW14 Next Steps**

Representatives from the following community groups would be invited to the next meeting:

- Buckshaw Village Community Association
- Clayton Brook Community House
- Community Futures
- Primrose Street Residents (Virtual Group)

Chair

Date