

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

13 SEPTEMBER 2005

Present: Councillor Perks (Chairman) and Councillors Bedford, Brownlee, Culshaw and Mrs M Gray.

05.CoP.22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Birchall, Morgan and Mrs I Smith.

05.CoP.23 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declaration of personal or prejudicial interests by Members in any of the agenda items.

05.CoP.24 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 5 July 2005 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

05.CoP.25 SCRUTINY INQUIRY INTO JUVENILE NUISANCE – UPDATE

The Panel received and considered a report of the Head of Corporate and Policy Services updating the Members on the progress that had been made to implement the recommendations contained on the Panel's report on its recent inquiry into juvenile nuisance throughout the Borough.

The Panel were pleased to note the actions that had so far been instigated, but were reminded that a number of the recommendations were dependent on collaboration with other agencies and organisations. In some instances, the suggested measures were solely the responsibility of the external organisations. Consequently the implementation of these proposals were sometimes hindered by the limited resources and capacity of those bodies.

In the context of the Inquiry report, the Chairman also drew attention to the new arrangement introduced for the funding of the Chorley Safety Partnership, which would alter the previous system of direct funding of individual partnerships. The Chorley Community Safety Partnership, had expressed its concern at the potential impact of the new arrangements on its ability to operate effectively in the future and was represented as the Country-wide body responsible for the distribution of the funding.

It was AGREED:

- 1. That the officers be requested to encourage both the Lancashire County Council to commit adequate funding to the Youth and Community Service and other appropriate organisations and bodies to commit funding for the suggested projects aimed at reducing levels of juvenile nuisance.**
- 2. That the Community Safety Co-ordinator be requested to keep the Panel informed of developments in relation to the future funding of the Chorley Community Safety Partnership.**

05.CoP.26 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE COUNCIL'S DECISION MAKING PROCESS – SCRUTINY INQUIRY

(a) Background Report

The Panel were presented by the Chief Executive with a report which outlined the background and rationale behind the proposals to establish Area Forum pilot schemes in three areas of the Borough in line with the Council's new approach to community engagement, which had been identified as a priority objective in both the Community Strategy Action Plan for 2005/08 and the revised Corporate Improvement Plan.

The Cabinet had agreed, on the recommendation of the Area Forum Working Group, to establish Area Forum pilots to cover the three areas of Lostock Ward, Coppull Parish and Clayton Brook (within a clearly defined boundary). Subsequently, arrangements had been made for three preliminary consultation meetings to take place in early September in each of the three pilot areas, as an opportunity for officers to explain the Forum plans and seek the views of local community bodies on the plans before firm proposals were drawn up. It was expected that the three initial Forum pilots would be held in February/March 2006.

The report was noted and welcomed.

(b) Comparative Information

The Panel were presented with two separate schedules, which had been compiled from the results of the recent surveys of Lancashire Districts and which contained comparative information on the arrangements operated and in 13 surrounding districts in relation to (i) Area Forums/Committees; and (ii) the allowance of public speaking and/or questions at Council/Committee meetings.

(c) South Ribble Borough Council – Presentation on Area Committees and Public Speaking

The Chairman welcomed Mr R Matthews (Head of Area Committee Development at South Ribble Borough Council) who had been invited to attend the meeting to make a short presentation on the experience of South Ribble Borough Council on both the operation of Area Committees and the facility for public participation in Council and Committee meetings.

The relevant points of Mr Matthews' presentation are summarised below.

(i) Area Committees

- South Ribble Council established in 2000, as part of the modernisation agenda, 8 Area Committees which cover the whole of the Borough. The boundaries of the area covered by each Committee comprise, on average, 3 or 4 Borough Wards.
- There is no pre-determined cycle or timetable of meeting dates. The Committee meet, on average, seven times each year on suitably convenient dates within the Council's meetings timetable.
- Committee meetings are held in community buildings in the respective areas, commencing at 7:00pm
- Attendance at Committee meetings averages around 28 persons.

- There are regular meetings of the 8 Committee Chairmen and training sessions are organised.
- Press releases are normally issued after each meeting.

Membership of Committees

- Only Borough Council Members of the Committees are allowed to make decisions.
- Co-opted Members (eg Lancashire County Councillors, Parish Councillors) are able to participate in debates when the public debate session has closed, but cannot vote on decisions.

Functions

- The Committee have power to make decisions on issues falling within the remit and terms of reference of the Committees on matters such as Tree Preservation Orders, Traffic Regulation Orders and use of Section 106 Agreement monies in the areas in which the sum was generated.
- The decision-making powers of the Area Committees would generally be delegated for exercise by officers.
- The Committee used to have authority to determine small scale planning applications prior to the extension of delegated powers to Officers in order to meet Government guidelines.
- Regular topics debated at Committee meetings include juvenile nuisance; highways and transportation issues; licensing and planning matters.
- Presentations can be made by Officers and invited guests on relevant topics.

Budget

- Each Committee is allocated an annual budget of £5,000, provided that the money is spent on projects and activities which accord with the Council's policies and do not commit the Council to on-going maintenance expenditure.
- The Committees each produce an Annual Plan and Annual Report and can bid for Regeneration Action Plan monies.

Operation of Committees

- Each Committee is co-ordinated and serviced by a Senior Manager and Committee Administrator.
- A laminated sheet explaining the role and objectives of the Committee and how the public can become involved in the public debates is produced at each meeting.
- There is an opportunity for the public to raise any issue of concern or ask questions of the members and co-opted members at the meetings.

- Attendees are also allowed to complete question forms, with the queries being answered on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Mobile microphones and loop systems are used at the Committee meetings.

(ii) Public Speaking/Questions

- The Borough Council allows the public to attend and participate in all of the Council's Cabinet and Council meetings held in public. A notable exception is the Standards Committee.
- Members of the public are allowed to make statements and ask questions of Councillors and Officers at the meetings without prior written notice.
- Members of the public can ask questions on a pro-forma to be answered by Cabinet Members at the next Council meeting.

(iii) Member/Officer Questions

The following additional information was given by Mr Matthews in response to queries raised by the Members and the Assistant Head of Democratic Services.

- The Area Committees represent only one element of the Council's commitment to public participation and engagement in its business (other measures including the Citizen's Panel, Customer Focus Groups, etc).
- The major Partners involved and represented at each Area Committee meeting are the Lancashire County Council, Parish Councils, the Police and the local MAPS Team. Representatives from the Primary Care Trust are invited to attend meetings occasionally, when required.
- There is currently a degree of duplication with the role of PACT meetings, but this is currently being addressed.
- Normally only one Service Manager attends the Committee meetings, with a Committee Administrator. Other Senior Officers are invited to attend meetings, when required, whenever they are required to present or report specific matters. Questions raised by members of the public that are unable to be answered at the meeting, receive written answers on the agenda for the following meeting.

(d) Appointment of Sub-Groups

The Chairman recommended the appointment of two Sub-Groups made up from the membership of the Panel to examine in depth the following two distinct strands of the inquiry:

- Establishment of Area Forums/Committees;
- Means of allowing members of the public to speak and/or ask questions at Council and Committee meetings.

Each Sub-Group would need to agree its own work programme and timetable for its particular sphere of activity as outlined in the inquiry project outline document. The Groups would need to compile their own project plan, identify potential witnesses, select the Authorities it wished to visit and agree, as far as possible, a timetable for future interviews and site visits. The Groups would be expected to visit other neighbouring Authorities to examine how their arrangements are managed and operated. The Area Forum Working Group would also be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed Area Forum pilot schemes in Chorley.

At the conclusion of the findings and assessment, the Panel shall then be able to make recommendations on the arrangements and method they considered to be most effective and practicable and the format then considered would best suit the needs of the Borough.

It was AGREED:

- 1. That two Sub-Groups be set up to examine the separate issues of Area Forums/Committees and Public Speaking/Quotations at Council/Committee meetings and that the Officers be requested to determine the preferences of each member of the Panel for membership of the Sub-Groups, taking account of the preferences indicated by the Members present.**
- 2. That arrangements be made for the Area Forums/Committees Sub-Group to visit Hyndburn, Rossendale and South Ribble Councils and the Public Speaking/Questions Sub-Group to visit Hyndburn, Ribble Valley and South Ribble Councils, to examine the respective arrangements operated by those Authorities.**
- 3. That each member of the two Sub-Groups be provided with the details of the respective visiting arrangements and allowed the opportunity to attend the visits, without Officer accompaniment, provided that a checklist of information required is provided to the Members.**
- 4. That Members of the Area Forum Working Group be also allowed the opportunity to accompany the Area Forums/Committees Sub-Group on its Authority visits.**

05.CoP.27 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, 2005/06

The Panel received, for information the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2005/06, which had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting.

Chairman