

**CHORLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL AND
SOUTH RIBBLE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

JOINT SCRUTINY MEETING

31 MARCH 2010

**SAFER CHORLEY AND SOUTH RIBBLE (COMMUNITY SAFETY)
PARTNERSHIP – REVIEW OF PILOT MERGER**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

A pilot merger between Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership (The Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership) has been in place over the last two years. The purpose of the report is to advise members on the progress being made on the pilot merger and to enable Members to inform decisions on the way forward.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

1. Members note the good progress being made on Community Safety in Chorley and South Ribble;
2. Members support the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership's view that a collaborative model, as outlined in the report, is the way forward, pending the outcome of the expected review of the Lancashire structure of Community Safety Partnerships.

3. BACKGROUND

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 promotes partnership working to reduce crime and disorder and places a statutory duty on police and local authorities to develop and implement a strategy to tackle problems in their area. In doing so, responsible authorities are required to work in partnership with a range of other local public, private, community and voluntary groups and with the community itself.

The general view is that no single organisation can hope to reduce crime on its own and that local organisations need to work together to develop comprehensive solutions to improve the community's quality of life. The above Crime and Disorder Act required statutory crime and disorder reduction/Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) to be set up. Until April 2008 Chorley and South Ribble operated two separate Community Safety Partnerships.

The Crime and Disorder Act 2007 required each CSP in England to produce a Strategic Crime Assessment. In order to produce this new assessment efficiently the CSP from Southern Division of Lancashire Constabulary decided to work together and develop a joint assessment to meet the needs arising in South Ribble, Chorley and West Lancashire. That joint assessment led on to a consideration as to whether the three CSP might be able to operate together at a strategic level, whilst also improving local service delivery.

After a number of key factors were considered including crime levels and types of crime, socioeconomic factors, population demographics and geographic vicinity, it was decided that a merger between Chorley and South Ribble would be piloted.

The pilot Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership (SCSRP) commenced in May 2008. A new structure and full governance arrangements have been put in place. The Partnership sits as a thematic group of the separate Chorley and South Ribble Local Strategic Partnerships. The pilot merged Partnership has been working towards the delivery of the original success criteria (please see section 4) agreed by the Partnership. The pilot Partnership continues to benefit from a joint strategic assessment/Plan.

In September 2009 a partnership 'away day' was conducted and a business improvement plan was subsequently developed and is currently being delivered.

At the time of writing it is believed that the Safer Lancashire Board (which has overall responsibility for Community Safety in the County) is considering proposing a reduction in the number of Community Safety Partnerships in Lancashire. However, a specific proposal has not yet been tabled. If and when a proposal is made all existing Partnerships will be consulted, as will key partners.

Merging CSP to form larger strategic partnerships is supported in principle by the Home Office. There are 6 stages (outlined below) which must be completed before any formal merger can be officially agreed by the Home Office. Chorley and South Ribble are currently at stage 2 of the process.

Stage 1 – Proposal to merge must be agreed by all responsible authorities across the areas

Stage 2 – CSP pilot working together as a merged partnership – there is no designated timescale for this however it should be evidenced that a merger will be successful and would impact upon crime and disorder

Stage 3 – Application to merge to the Home Office Regional Director

Stage 4 – Home Office Regional Director considers application

Stage 5 – If approved – recommended to the Secretary of State that an order is made

Stage 6 – Home Office Legal advisors arrange for an Order

4. OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

Good progress is being made overall on reducing crime and disorder in Chorley and South Ribble. From the 1 April, 2009 to 28 Feb., 2010 overall crime across the two boroughs reduced by 5.1%. It should be noted that crime levels are currently the lowest they have been for many years and that sustaining this with decreasing resources will; be a significant challenge.

A detailed presentation will be made at the meeting on performance.

5. MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE PILOT MERGER

The criteria which the Partnership agreed to measure the success of the pilot merger is outlined below. For each of the criteria several pros and cons have been outlined.

1. Pooling of expertise, knowledge, skills and resources to more effectively tackle crime and disorder

Since implementation of the pilot merged CSP crime across Chorley and South Ribble has continued to fall and the Partnership remains on track to deliver against all Local Area Agreements (LAA) targets. The Place Survey results indicate that Chorley and South Ribble's communities are confident police and partners are working well together to reduce crime. In addition the Partnership has reduced further residents' perceptions of crime and disorder. The Partnership has a shared Community Safety Manager, Domestic Violence coordinator, a Policy and Projects Officer and Multi Agency Problem Solving team (MAPS) team police Sergeant. The Partnership has a Joint Strategic Assessment and a joint Partnership Plan, which allow partners to align resources to meet joint strategic community safety priorities.

Best practice has also been shared across the Partnership with examples including, but not limited to, the introduction of projects to tackle violent crime, serious acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour across both boroughs. Projects of note include Mini MATACs which are integral to the delivery of community safety within neighbourhood working, days of action events, alcohol consequences campaign and auto number plate recognition (ANPR) days. Operationally information is communicated better and the CSP has a greater presence and influence at a grass roots level. Both boroughs also benefit from the recommendations of two overview and scrutiny functions and share the hosting and administration of the Partnership.

Whilst in-roads have been made into the of pooling of expertise, knowledge, skills and resources further benefit could be gained by developing a joint multi agency problem solving team structure. A robust information sharing document has been introduced, but some difficulties still arise when data needs to be shared across partners. Whilst this is cause for some concern as intelligence led business processes can sometime be hindered, problems with data sharing existed in Chorley and South Ribble's stand alone CSP and data sharing is a challenge for many partnerships nationally.

Whilst the merging of targets can be achieved locally, Chorley and South Ribble are unable to officially merge targets, unless a formal merger is in place. Due to this and to avoid disadvantaging Chorley and South Ribble's communities, the pilot Partnership continues to financially apportion core area based grant and basic command unit resources on the geographic area for which the funds were intended. However several joint initiatives have been commissioned using pooled resourcing.

2. Co-ordinated approach to funding bids / commissioned work

The pilot has enabled a more joined up, transparent and coordinated approach to funding bids. Several bids have been supported and delivered over both areas, including but not limited to, Fire Break, Smart Response and the purchase of a vehicle crime sting car. Whilst some minor benefits have been realised relating to savings as a result of economies of scale, the main advantages in the merger have been the success in joint bids such as the £60k gained to support the alcohol consequences campaign, and the £20k provided by both Chorley and South Ribble's respective LSPs for the delivery of the smart response program. A further £50k has also been granted by each of Chorley and South Ribble's Children's Trusts to support the continued delivery of the Families' First vulnerable households' project.

Additionally, pending bids include £10k Chorley Children's Trust monies which would match the already granted £10k South Ribble Children's Trust monies to support the independent domestic violence program (IDVA) programme.

Whilst we can demonstrate success in this area there is room for improvement and moving forward the Partnership intends to focus on more long term solutions to funding and its commissioning processes, including consideration to mainstream initiatives and the development of exit strategies.

3. Reduction in the number of meetings attended by partners and statutory agencies

The reduction of meetings has been realised at a strategic level. The pilot merged CSP now has a single Strategic Board and one Officer Steering Group.

The Partnership also has a number of other joint meetings, including the Central Alcohol Group, which operates on a divisional level, the Families First, Domestic Violence and the Positive Activity Groups, which operate over both Chorley and South Ribble, and the Joint Commissioning Group (JCG) which operates on a Central Lancashire Primary Care Trust

(PCT) footprint. There is further discussion which needs to be had to consider whether such groups as the alcohol strategy group need to be operated over a PCT footprint or potentially merged with the JCG.

Whilst to date the reduction in Partnership meetings has largely been realised at a strategic level, most operational meetings continue to operate separately. The main reasons for this is the localised nature of many of the issues faced and because many of the individuals involved in these meetings work to either a Chorley or South Ribble geographic area. Separate meetings include the Multi-agency tasking and coordinating (MATAC) and Mini MATAC meetings, Multi agency licensing team (MALT), prevent and deter groups and Prolific Priority Offender groups.

There was a concern when the pilot commenced that reducing the number of meetings and moving to a strategic board model may impact negatively on community engagement, in particular the involvement of community/voluntary groups in Chorley. In practice it is felt that these concerns have been addressed through the opportunities for local people to engage in their neighbourhoods/local projects. Specifically local people are heavily involved in community safety through PACT meetings and area committees etc.

4. More efficient working practices

In addition to the reduction of meetings, continued reduction in crime and disorder and the other efficiencies outlined above, between them the two Councils are now saving approximately £50K in direct community safety management staffing costs by having a jointly funded single Community Safety Manager post. In addition, the Police are saving around £55k in staffing costs.

Members are also advised that additional savings have also been realised in the shared administration and operational posts such as the Domestic Violence Coordinator role. However these are not easy to accurately cost but suffice to say that such costs would have to be borne by each Authority in total if the merged arrangements were to cease.

6. CONSIDERATION OF OPTIONS

The options currently available for moving forwards are:-

Option 1 – Revert back to two separate partnerships

Option 2 – Seek approval from the Home Office for an official merger of the two Partnerships

Option 3 – Continue the Collaborative approach for the two Partnerships for an indefinite period

In view of the likely Lancashire wide review of the number of Community Safety Partnerships, consideration may need to be given in the future to involving West Lancashire in any merged Partnership. However, the latter is not appropriate at this stage.

The SCSR Partnership considered the above options at its Steering Group meeting on 17 March 2010. Given the good progress being made, particularly on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, and the efficiencies being achieved, the SCSR Partnership believes that returning to two separate Partnerships is not a viable option.

It should be recognised that a full merger would inevitably lead to a merging of overall funding decisions and political direction. The collaborative approach allows for effective and efficient partnership working but allows all partner authorities to retain funding and political decisions at a local level where that is appropriate. It is felt that Option 3 would retain maximum flexibility moving forwards.

Additionally, the SCSR Partnership believes that the current and future benefits of a merger can be achieved without a formal merger.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

In view of the above, it is recommended Members support the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership's view that a collaboration model, as outlined in the report, is the way forward, pending the outcome of the expected review of Lancashire structure of Community Safety Partnerships.

The key steps moving forward are:-

1. 31 March 2010:- Specially convened joint Chorley and South Ribble Overview and Scrutiny meeting to make recommendations in relation to the future of the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership
2. 3 June 2010:- A report recommending the adoption of a Collaborative Model be submitted to Chorley Borough Council's Executive
3. 14 July 2010:- A report recommending the adoption of the Collaborative Model be submitted to South Ribble Borough Council's Cabinet
4. 22 June 2010:- A report recommending the adoption of a Collaborative Model be submitted to Chorley Local Strategic Partnership
5. 15 July 2010:- A report recommending the adoption of a Collaborative Model be submitted to South Ribble Local Strategic Partnership.
6. September 2010:- Details of the proposed collaborative model be finalised
7. October 2010:- Implement a Collaboration Model across Chorley and South Ribble.

In addition, other partners may wish to seek formal approval to the proposed way forward from their Boards etc.