

Report of	Meeting	Date
Chief Executive	Area Forum Working Group Executive Cabinet Overview & Scrutiny Committee	16/11/06 07/12/06 04/12/06

AREA FORUM PILOT SCHEME

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To provide an overview of the Area Forum Pilot Scheme following three rounds of meetings in the three pilot areas of Clayton-le-Woods North Ward, Coppull Parish and Lostock Ward during the period February to October 2006.
- To set out recommendations for the future delivery of community forums in Chorley.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- The operation of the Area Forum Pilot Scheme and the decision to be made by the Council on the future approach to neighbourhood working will help to address the Council's corporate priority of "Involving people in their communities".

RISK ISSUES

- The issue raised and recommendations made in this report involve risk considerations in the following categories:

Strategy	✓	Information	✓
Reputation	✓	Regulatory/Legal	
Financial	✓	Operational	✓
People	✓	Other	

OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT SCHEME:

- The average attendance at the meetings was 29 people. A wide range of issues were raised by members of the public during the meetings. They included the following:
 - Anti-social behaviour
 - Bogus officials operating in the area
 - Dog fouling
 - Funding required for local groups
 - Juvenile nuisance
 - Lack of activities for teenagers
 - More information required on the new concessionary fare scheme
 - Motorcyclists using open land
 - Opening times for Astley Hall
 - Problems with people fly-tipping and dumping rubbish
 - Problems with the recycling containers
 - Street cleanliness following recycling collections

- Insufficient information on the performance of schools
 - Lack of local secondary schools
 - Poor public transport in some areas
 - Reduced bus services recently
 - Lack of a police presence in some areas
 - Traffic speeding and potential traffic calming schemes and more speed cameras
 - Under age drinking causing disturbance
 - Health services in local areas
 - Ambulance response times in rural areas
6. Feedback from the public was sought at the end of each area forum on the usefulness of the session and was positive in all cases. The lessons learned from the feedback are:
- Continue the “Listening and Responding” approach we have adopted.
 - Ensure people who ask questions are provided with full answers either on the evening or later in writing.
 - Work with partner agencies – eg Police, PCT, Lancashire County Council to ensure more collective, integrated solutions to problems the public face in local areas.
 - Select venues as central to the whole area as possible. (This resulted in the change of venue for the third meeting of the Clayton-le-Woods North Area Forum)
 - Avoid a few individuals dominating the meeting.
 - Ensure the new neighbourhood newsletters target the areas where meetings will take place to publicise them.
7. Partners were represented at the pilot meetings from the Police and County Council, the PCT, Parish Councils and a wide range of community and voluntary organisations.
8. A meeting of all partners was held in September to obtain feedback on the pilot scheme to date. Partners strongly supported the principle of area working and local forums and put forward a wide range of suggested improvements to enhance the scheme should it be rolled out.
9. Details of the action taken on issues raised at the Area Forum meetings or on the question cards completed by members of the public at the end of each meeting were reported to the subsequent meeting under the heading of “You said – we did”.
10. Publicity leaflets were hand-delivered to each household in the three pilot areas for the first round of meetings held in February/March 2006. For the second round of meetings neighbourhood newsletters were produced and delivered to every household. This was a total number of 8300 households.
11. The newsletters included feedback on the first round of Pilot meetings and highlighted the details of the forthcoming meeting. It also included details of activities for youngsters and an update on improvements to the recycling scheme. The ‘You said, we did’ feature gave direct feedback to issues raised at the previous meetings and contact lists to help local people contact the right people at the Council as well as in the community.
12. Posters publicising each meeting were distributed to Parish Councils and local libraries, surgeries and community groups etc for display.
13. Details of the Area Forum Pilot Scheme have been provided on the Council’s website and the Communications Section arranged for publicity to be provided in the local media / radio stations prior to each meeting.
14. 149 questionnaires were sent to members of the public who had attended the meetings and the results are set out below.

	Question	Excellent	Good		Weak	Poor	No Response
1	How do you rate the venues for the meetings?	44%	56%		0%	0%	0%
2	How would you rate the publicity of the meetings? (newsletters/media/website)	10%	58%		24%	8%	0%
3	How would you rate the responses to the public questions?	12.5%	52%		20%	0.5%	15%
		Yes	No				
4	Do you think services have/will be improved as a result of the Area Forum meetings?	83%	12%				5%
5	Do you think the Area Forum meetings should continue to be held?	98%	0%				2%
6	How often do you think the Area Forum meetings should be held?	Once a year 7%	Twice a year 51%	Three times a year 7%	Four times a year 27%	Six times a year 6%	2%

THE WAY FORWARD

15. The objectives of the pilot scheme were as follows:
 - To consult and engage with the local community on strategies, policies and service issues within the areas during the period of the pilot within the context of a non-political ethos.
 - To enable residents, businesses and local community groups to raise questions on service related issues on an open forum basis to influence the decision-making of the Council and other partner organisations.
 - To evaluate the effectiveness of and lessons learnt – setting out recommendations for community engagement across the borough.
16. There is strong evidence from the public and other stakeholders that the original objectives of the pilot have been achieved and the pilot has been a success.
17. There is now strong support from the public and partner organisations for the extension of the pilot scheme borough-wide.

OBJECTIVES:

18. The objectives of borough-wide community forums would be to :
- Ensure local people are able to voice issues of concern directly to the Council and partner organisations.
 - Keep in touch with 'live' current issues within communities.
 - Develop an area-based approach to problem-solving across agencies.
 - Develop a local action plan for each area linked to the Community Strategy and building on existing parish plans.
 - Provide a feedback loop back into the Council and partners – ensuring the 'you said – we did' approach is embedded at all levels.
 - Link in with the excellent local work of PACT meetings.
 - Provide an opportunity for areas with no organised feedback mechanism to actively engage with the Council and its partners.
 - Enable parish councils and other local groups to work together across a larger area to pursue areas of common interest.
 - Provide a basis for the further development of the Council (and the LSPs) approach to neighbourhood service delivery and the future recommendations of the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel on neighbourhood working.

PROPOSED FOOTPRINT

19. The area forum pilot boundaries were focussed on existing parish council boundaries.
20. Replicating the pilot borough-wide could both duplicate the role of parish councils and present capacity problems for the Council and its partners.
21. A proposed footprint for the forums is attached. There would be 4 areas – central, west, east and south.

MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

22. All meetings will be chaired by one nominated Borough Councillor. The Vice-Chair of each Community Forum will be appointed from the Ward Councillors for each area. Sessions will be organised three times a year with interim feedback provided to communities between meetings as issues of local concern are addressed. The proposed procedure rules for the meetings are attached.
23. Alternating venues will be selected – ensuring full disabled access and induction loop facilities are in place.
24. Publicity will be in the form of neighbourhood newsletters, posters and advertising in the local press.

FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

25. It is important that the Council is able to analyse the issues across all three areas on a regular basis. Quarterly reports will be presented to the Executive Cabinet setting out progress in each of the areas.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

26. There are no HR implications.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

27. An extension of the Scheme will mean an increase in resourcing is required for items such as room hire, officer support etc. However it is anticipated that the increase will be marginal and the impact will be considered during the budget cycle for 2007/08. Any financial impact in 2006/07 will be contained within contract cash budgets.

RECOMMENDATION

28. That the Executive Cabinet submit a recommendation to the Council meeting on 19th December 2006 that area forums are rolled out borough-wide as community forums from February 2007 on the attached footprint and procedure rules.

DONNA HALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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