

Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry: Neighbourhood working

Briefing for witnesses

About the Inquiry

Under the auspices of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel is conducting an Inquiry into Neighbourhood Working.

Partners in Change has been commissioned to provide consultancy support to the Inquiry.

The Inquiry will

- Consider the extent to which Council and other public services are now provided on a 'neighbourhood' basis in some form
- Examine the costs and benefits of neighbourhood management generally and of alternative models as they might apply in Chorley
- Recommend an appropriate model for neighbourhood working for Chorley
- Produce a final report including a practical action plan for implementing the proposed model

The Inquiry will conduct four hearings with witnesses who will give evidence to the Panel. It will also conduct site visits and hold a community conference involving Parish councils, local groups and stakeholders.

The Inquiry is due to report in April 2007.

About Chorley

Chorley is a District council serving a population of just over 100,000. It serves a traditional market town a few miles south of Preston. The district is relatively

prosperous with attractive residential areas within commuting distance by road and rail of the Manchester conurbation. However there are some neighbourhoods identified as among the 20% most deprived nationally and evidence of some health problems and relatively poor outcomes for elderly people in these neighbourhoods.

The Council's sustainable community strategy aims to raise satisfaction with the quality of life generally and in particular to promote more equal life chances across the District, address relatively high death rates attributable to heart and lung disease, promote more affordable housing, improve the quality of the town centre, attract more tourism and improve public transport.

The council is a partner in a Local Area Agreement led by the Lancashire Partnership and the County Council.

The council has 47 members representing 20 wards. It is currently Conservative controlled.

About neighbourhood working in Chorley

The District already has a number of examples of neighbourhood and area working:

- 23 Parish Councils serve most of the District except the central area. Some provide a range of local services including street scene and leisure
- Three community-led partnerships serve relatively deprived areas promoting multi-agency responses to local priorities in neighbourhoods of up to 5500 households
- Neighbourhood policing is delivered by 18 community beat managers who work with partners and communities to support a 'joined up' service in neighbourhoods. The Crime and Disorder Reduction partnership, serviced by the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment directorate, is regarded as one of the most successful such partnerships in the region. The council has a record of appointing neighbourhood wardens and is supporting the deployment of additional Police Community Support Officers
- The two main social housing providers are the council's housing department, which is transferring stock to Chorley Community Housing, and Places for People Group. Both providers have a strong commitment to neighbourhood working with caretaking/warden support and active engagement with local communities.
- The leisure services directorate provides community development support to the three partnerships identified above, is transferring some assets to local

community groups and supports local multi-agency initiatives with small discretionary budgets.

- The council has recently experimented with public service accountability to Area Forums and is about to roll out this model of participation and reporting across the Borough, splitting it into four areas for this purpose.

Defining neighbourhood working

The scoping study prepared for the Inquiry defines neighbourhood working as follows.

Neighbourhood working is an approach to public service management that seeks to bring together the services that bear upon the quality of life in a specific geographical area, and to meet locally defined priorities in response to expressed community concerns.

A neighbourhood working approach would normally include:

- Close partnership working between public services from a number of different agencies;
- Engagement and involvement of the local community in setting priorities, reviewing progress and perhaps in controlling and managing resources
- Clearly defined and accountable local leadership and management

Successful neighbourhood working should be expected to have two kinds of benefit:

- **First**, it is expected to produce **innovative solutions** to any given problem or set of problems, by crossing the boundaries set by the remits given to different agencies.
- **Second**, there is expected to be a benefit in terms of promoting **active citizenship** – as residents become engaged in practical challenges to improve their neighbourhood, they will build knowledge about the working of public services and confidence in participating in decisions, and this experience translates into greater readiness to become active in public life.

Based on national experience to date, the study suggests three broad ‘models’ of neighbourhood working:

Neighbourhood management on the pathfinder model: typically serving a population in the range of 5000-15000, this model includes a locally located team with a neighbourhood manager, community development and warden support, a

local budget and a partnership board with community participation providing oversight

Area management: usually serving a larger area with a population of 15000-40000, this model has a multi-agency team covering a range of public services overseen by a co-ordinator. An area committee of the council provides political management, often with community representatives as co-optees or observers.

Community anchor: An organisation such as a housing association, development trust, community centre or faith group uses its capacity to provide, support or influence a range of services.

Plan for the Inquiry hearings

There are four Inquiry hearings planned as follows:

1. Would neighbourhood working add value?

This hearing will consider what neighbourhood working is, what benefits it might be expected to achieve, and how resources could be deployed and accounted for in terms of costs and benefits. The invited witnesses include two national experts delivering aspects of government strategy and programmes on neighbourhood work, and three senior officers of the council.

2. What approaches to neighbourhood working should we consider? (service providers' perspective)

This hearing will look at practical examples of neighbourhood working. It will try to find out what the key success factors are in terms of structure, partnerships, management, resources and political oversight. It will seek the views of some key players in delivering neighbourhood working in Chorley on how it might be developed. Invited witnesses include some key providers and supporters of neighbourhood working in Chorley and elsewhere.

3. What approaches to neighbourhood working should we consider? (resident and community perspective)

This session will hear from resident and community organisations locally and from examples of 'grassroots' neighbourhood engagement from elsewhere. It will consider what scale is appropriate from this perspective, what results people want to achieve if they become practically involved, how local communities can best become effectively engaged and hear how some active communities in Chorley would like to see neighbourhood working develop.

4. What is the answer for Chorley?

This final session will help the Inquiry build its conclusions with the help of senior officers from the District and County councils and community or voluntary sector

representatives. It will consider whether neighbourhood working should be developed, and if so how. It will examine the scale on which any neighbourhood model for the District should be established, whether it should cover all of Chorley or be targeted on parts, which partners and resources can and should be involved, what the political and operational management should be and how the strategic context (including the Local Area Agreement framework) should be recognised.

Your role as a witness

Thank you for considering the Inquiry's invitation to participate in one of these hearings.

Attached is a list of the questions that the Panel is thinking of putting to you. There may not be time for all these questions to be considered, and the Panel may like to put additional questions to you as it considers what you have to say.

Please consider the rest of this briefing note and the issues the Panel is dealing with, and be prepared to add your own comments and thoughts. The Panel will give you an opportunity to do this.

Further information and support

For this Inquiry, the lead officer in the council is John Lechmere, Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment (01257 515720; email john.lechmere@chorley.gov.uk). The council has commissioned Partners in Change to advise the Inquiry including giving support to witnesses – you are welcome to contact their consultant Paul Lusk (01902 810042; email paul.lusk@partners-in-change.co.uk).