

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

MEETING DATE Thursday, 18 December 2014

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

OFFICERS: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services) and Simon Clark (Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mike Handley

OTHER: Councillor Jean Cronshaw, Craig Lee, (Buckshaw Village Community Association - BVCA), Brian Jones (Chorley Street Pastors) and Jackie Heywood (Clayton Brook Community House)

14.NW15 Minutes

Decision: That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Neighbourhood Working meeting held on 13 November 2014 be confirmed as correct record for signing by the Chair.

14.NW16 Declarations of Any Interests

In accordance with the Council's Members Code of Conduct, Councillor Mark Jarnell declared an interest in respect of item 3. Community groups and organisations, as he was a member of the Buckshaw Village Community Association.

14.NW17 Community Groups and Organisations

The Chair welcomed Craig Lee, (Buckshaw Village Community Association - BVCA), Brian Jones (Chorley Street Pastors) and Jackie Heywood (Clayton Brook Community House).

The Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance and explained that the Task Group were interested in how they engaged with members of the public and the Council, if there were any barriers faced and, if there were barriers if the Council could do anything to assist.

Craig Lee (Chair of the BVCA) outlined the background to the residents association. It had started in 2008 and had a maximum of 20 people on the committee, which was

open to all residents of the village. Their main aim was to create a sense of community, to this end meetings and free community events were held. The recent Christmas event had been very well attended. Assistance was also given at other events in the Village, such as Iron man.

Craig advised that Buckshaw Village was a unique area, as there were several Parish Councils, two District Councils, Lancashire County Council, the management company and eleven different builders who had responsibilities within the village. This could mean resolution of issues was complex.

The main engagement method was through the community events, the seven noticeboards and quarterly newsletters. The newsletters helped to fund the free events. There was a pool of volunteers who delivered the newsletters by zone, each zone consisting of 100 to 150 properties, although assistance was received from the private sector in terms of volunteers and funding. The newsletters had been found to be the most effective method of communication.

The other key communication methods were through social media; including Twitter, Facebook and a web forum. The web forum was free to join and policed by committee members. There were common “moans” on the Forum, but Twitter and Facebook tended to be more positive - the most popular post had been in relation to a lost cat!

Jackie Heywood (Centre Manager at Clayton Brook Community House) explained that the organisation had started as a food co-operative. It was predominantly a resource and drop in centre.

The organisation had outgrown the previous house and was now located in the old Places for People property. The majority of people using the facility were looking for information on housing and welfare rights. There were peaks in requests for service, e.g. when the bedroom tax was introduced. People also presented themselves as homeless.

The Community House organised events, including Halloween and a Christmas lights switch on. The Community House was run by a small number of volunteers, supported by local Councillors.

Jackie explained that, for the first time, Chorley Council had provided a Christmas tree. A lot of work had gone into the Christmas lights switch on, with volunteers having sourced wood and a trailer and built a sleigh. The organisation made the most of the resources available, in terms of people skills and materials people had, as they did not have a budget. Some supermarkets had donated prizes and ASDA had a community champion.

The Community House struggled with leaflet delivery, due to the small number of volunteers. They were able to raise some money through room hire. There was an annual report, which would be made available electronically. The organisation did have Facebook and Twitter.

In the New Year the House would be launching a volunteer academy and currently engaged with around 30 organisations. There were also links with education bodies, such as Preston College and Runshaw College. A number of volunteers were training to be trainers.

Brian Jones (Chorley Street Pastors Co-ordinator) advised that the Street Pastors could not function without the financial contributions received from Chorley Council. The organisation had been running for five years and now had 35 street pastors who were active every Friday, and alternate Saturday nights within Chorley. There was a need for additional street pastors.

The aim of the organisation was “to listen, to help and to offer practical care to folk when and where it is needed”, by working with the Council, Police and churches to pool resources and work together.

The organisation had received help and support from across the Council and the Police. Support was also received from shop keepers and pub landlords, in fact Pubwatch involved the Street Pastors in discussions about where there were issues. It was difficult to quantify the monetary impact of the organisation, but it was widely accepted that Street Pastors brought a calming influence and people liked to have them around.

The Street Pastors operated in Coppull, Euxton, Buttermere recreation ground, Devonshire Road recreation ground, Clayton Brook and in the Asda area, with 12 pastors on duty at any one time.

Brian offered to provide an update on the work of the Street Pastors on a monthly basis.

Simon Clark queried what added value Chorley Council could bring to the organisations. Craig advised that the BVCA had received assistance when it was first started. The Council currently engages with the BVCA and the Leader had attended meetings. Relationships were being formed with the Neighbourhood Officers and the local Police. The Association itself was self-funding and had no assets to maintain, such as buildings.

Members discussed the relationship with Parish Councils. It had been a disappointment not to be successful in an application for a grant, although sponsorship had been received from the private sector for events. There had also been involvement with local schools.

The BVCA would be interested in networking opportunities and sharing information, in particular to be made aware if skip days were planned in the village. Residents just wanted their issues to be resolved and were not necessarily aware (or interested) whether it was a Chorley Council service or a management company service.

Jackie advised that the Community House received no financial assistance from the Council, but would also appreciate networking opportunities and with promoting events. The Community House worked with the Council on skip days and a recent event when the pub had been pulled down. They had recently won an award at the “In bloom” competition in Southport.

Members noted that organisations could approach their local Councillors to put forward ideas for projects under Neighbourhood Working. Craig advised there were many ideas for projects which could be put forward. A survey had been undertaken of residents, requesting ideas. Recently a project had been undertaken to create a community garden outside the community centre, which had been funded through S106 monies, a private company and a housing provider.

Simon Clark queried whether it would be useful to bring community groups together and all three agreed it would. Craig advised the BVCA were members of the VCFS and that more events through that network would be useful as networking was invaluable. Meetings outside office hours were preferable.

It was noted that not all community groups were members of the VCFS. Councillor Cronshaw advised that the Chorley Older Peoples Forum produced a book containing information about community groups. Councillor Lynch suggested an annual event could be held for community groups to engage and network as South Ribble Council did. Craig advised that South Ribble provided a single point of contact which proved invaluable.

The Chair suggested use of Parish Council newsletters to communicate with residents.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance and contribution to the inquiry.

14.NW18 Next Steps

The Chair noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, 8 January at 6pm and that the draft final report would be considered at that meeting.

Members considered whether the Neighbourhood Areas were geographically correct and agreed that eight areas were working well. There was potential for a liaison mechanism between the eight Chairs of the meetings, through an informal meeting, perhaps prior to a Chorley 3 Tier Liaison meeting as any issues (of a strategic nature and involving all three tiers of Local Government) could be raised at that meeting.

Councillor Rogerson advised he had been to a meeting with Members from Lambeth who had engaged in a very positive way with Parish Councils. Most Parish Councils were good and engaged with their residents, but Members considered how they could effect a change with those who were not as proactive. Networking opportunities to enable best practice to be shared across the Parishes, sharing information with and from Parishes (through intheboro and Parish newsletters) were agreed as a way forward.

Members considered an annual event to facilitate networking for community groups and Parish Councils, which would empower residents to help themselves. This was something which the VCFS co-ordinator could assist with. Partners, such as LCC, Registered Social Landlords and the Police would be invited. Part of the event could enable groups from each of the areas to come together to share ideas and discuss issues in their area. Although there were representatives from the VCFS network on the Council's Public Services Reform Board it was not possible to have representatives from all community groups in the Borough.

The single point of contact from the Council was discussed as an excellent idea. There was a need to embed Neighbourhood Working, in particular for improved communication from officers about the outcomes of priorities, to Councillors, community groups and the public. Updates on progress could be delivered through intheknow, intheboro, Facebook and Twitter.

The definition of Neighbourhood Working was considered and reaffirmed as “working with our partners to improve the quality of life, health and wellbeing of all our citizens and to improve the environment of the neighbourhoods in which they live”. It was suggested that Neighbourhood Priorities be renamed as Neighbourhood Projects, in recognition that, over time, issues and aspirations changed.

There was a role for Councillors in engaging and connecting people in their own areas. A training course to give Councillors effect tools to do this would be helpful, as they had many roles, as a representative of the Council and of residents. Councillor Berry noted that the Health Advocacy course would be a good option for this. Members discussed the difficulties when political issues impeded the work of community groups and ward Councillors.

Members considered Community Action Plans and noted that these would be produced for Chorley East, Clayton Brook and Astley Village. The aim of the plans was to identify community needs and to look at how the Council, VCFS and Partners could assist in the resolution of these needs. This was another strand of Neighbourhood Working and it was important to understand where the different strands complemented each other. There was an element wait and see with this as the Community Action Plans were still in development.

It was AGREED that a draft final report be presented to the next meeting for consideration.

Chair

Date