

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Neighbourhood Working

January 2015



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PREFACE

The Scrutiny inquiry into Neighbourhood Working was chosen by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the new arrangements had been in place since a review of the neighbourhood working model in 2012. Up until this time, neighbourhood working had been seen as a stand-alone service or at best an extension of community development. It was essential that in line with the agreed definition “*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*”, neighbourhood working had started to transcend all Council delivery and integrate with Council and partners services and Members were tasked to provide the evidence that this was starting to take place.

The Council had recently developed a Civic Pride Campaign over the past 12 months and were currently reviewing how to promote this work effectively. Members felt that Civic Pride should be integrated fully into Neighbourhood Working and Members be engaged in all aspects of Civic Pride so we took this opportunity to explore how this could be improved upon.

The success of Neighbourhood Working is not totally reliant on the Council so it was important that we consulted with existing stakeholders to understand their strength of engagement and to explore better ways of working together in partnership.

I would like to thank the Task Group Members for their deliberations, the officers and external representatives of parish councils and community groups of Chorley who made a contribution to this report. The representations that we received have proved extremely invaluable and enabled us to produce a set of recommendations that we feel will improve the current arrangements to better serve the residents in their experience of living in their communities.



Councillor June Molyneaux (Chair)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group undertook a scrutiny inquiry to review Neighbourhood Working arrangements in Chorley.

Objective

The development of a neighbourhood working footprint that will encourage sustainable engagement with neighbourhoods across Chorley.

Desired Outcomes

1. To encourage residents to have a confidence to engage with and deliver projects in their neighbourhoods.
2. To create a sense of pride for residents across Chorley.
3. To strengthen existing partnerships and to establish new ones.
4. To implement Neighbourhood Action Plans across the borough.
5. To develop the role of the Ward Councillor in neighbourhood working.

Task Group Membership

Councillor June Molyneaux (Chair)

Councillor Kim Snape (Vice Chair)

Councillor Julia Berry

Councillor Charlie Bromilow

Councillor Mike Handley

Councillor Mark Jarnell

Councillor Paul Leadbetter

Councillor Matthew Lynch

Councillor Dave Rogerson

Officer Support:

Lead Officers

Lesley-Ann Fenton Director Customer and Advice Service

Simon Clark Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods

Louise Elo Neighbourhoods Team Manager

Democratic Services

Dianne Scambler Democratic and Member Services Officer

Ruth Rimmington Democratic and Member Services Officer

Meetings

The meeting papers of the Group can be found on the Council's website:

www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny.

Contribution of Evidence

The Task Group would like to thank all those who have provided evidence and contributed to the Inquiry.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Cabinet is asked to consider the following recommendations:

- 1. To develop a liaison mechanism between the eight Chairs of the Neighbourhood Area Meetings through an informal meeting that could take place 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.**
- 2. Provide training to Councillors on effective tools to engage and connect people in their own area.**
- 3. The Neighbourhood Priorities to be renamed as Preferred or Key Projects to reflect that, over time issues and aspirations change.**
- 4. To have a single point of contact at the Council for community groups and Parishes to raise matters relating to neighbourhood working. Reporting of day to day environmental issues to use existing channels, such as My Account**
- 5. To improve communication between officers, councillors and stakeholders about the outcomes of priorities to community groups and the public. Updates on progress could be delivered through intheknow, intheboro, Facebook and Twitter.**
- 6. The Council to explore with the VCFS sector how the use of current resources provided by the Council to the VCFS can be used by the VCFS to improve networking across the VCFS sector in Chorley. Including the facilitation of an themed Annual Forum on a dedicated topic, for example health initiatives, to help shape future key projects and encourage greater involvement at all levels.**
- 7. Civic Pride should be integrated fully into Neighbourhood Working and Members engaged in all aspects of Civic Pride delivery.**
- 8. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel are supportive of the Corporate Strategy project to introduce Community Action Plans in parts of the Borough and recommend consideration is given to a wider roll out depending on the implementation and outcomes achieved from the initial plans.**

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Following the review in 2012, approval had been granted to redraw the boundaries of the neighbourhood areas, increasing their number from seven to eight. It was also agreed to increase the level of representation at the twice yearly round of neighbourhood area meetings, to include County Council and Parish Council representation. In addition, officers from other agencies were included and individually tailored to each of the neighbourhood meetings.

Each neighbourhood area is allowed to identify three priorities for deliver in a financial year, which are costed and subject to Executive Cabinet approval as part of the annual budget setting process. A set of rules for the conduct of the meetings which included the selection of a Chair and that decisions would be made by consensus as opposed to a more formal voting system was agreed.

The Chair of the neighbourhood area meetings have a number of responsibilities that include, the chairing of the twice yearly neighbourhood area meetings (currently January and June each year) and liaison with lead officers on behalf of the group to scope predetermined neighbourhood priorities. The Chairs can also convene additional meetings of the group to reach consensus on the actions necessary to deliver priorities and to liaise with lead officers, acting as a single point of contact for officers and group members alike.

The review also provided guidance on the areas of work that the neighbourhood priorities would cover, including additional works and schemes to improve areas of open public space over and above business as usual. Work and projects that supported the formation of new community groups or sustain existing ones, leading and supporting community events that met the principles and definition of neighbourhood working and activities and work that promoted community cohesion, such as initiatives that integrate demographic groups into the life of the community were actively encouraged.

A restructure of the Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods (HEN) Team, in 2014 established a core service to start the process of embedding a neighbourhood working culture across all service areas. It was therefore vital that neighbourhood working was not seen only in the context of delivery of a set of specific project type priorities or as a community development programme but as a means of establishing local need and, where practicable, putting solutions in place at a local level that meets those needs. To that end, a number of work streams were being progressed with a view to providing a fully neighbourhood focussed service that included Time Credits, the establishment of the HEN restructure and development of Neighbourhood Action Plans.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Evidence

The Group were provided with a report of the Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods on the current Neighbourhood Working arrangements and evidence of projects delivered by other organisations.

Witnesses

The group consulted with a number of parish councils, partner organisations and community groups that included:

- Mike Murphy (Chorley Community Housing)
- Andrew Daniels (Communications Manager (Chorley Council))
- Sarah James (Head of Policy (Public Service Reform) Chorley Council))
- Katrina Reed (Chair of Euxton Parish Council)
- John Bamber (Vice Chair of Euxton Parish Council)
- Laura Lennox (Chair of Astley Village Parish Council)
- Mick Muncaster (Chair of Clayton-le-Woods Parish Council)
- Craig Lee (Buckshaw Village Community Association – BVCA)
- Brian Jones (Chorley Street Pastors)
- Jackie Heywood (Clayton Brook Community House)

Additional responses were also received from Adlington Town Council and Anderton, Bretherton, Charnock Richard and Whittle-le-Woods Parish Councils

South Ribble Council

Rebecca Heaps (Neighbourhood Coordinator (South Ribble Council)) attended a meeting to explain how they have implemented Neighbourhood Working.

Terms of reference

To understand the current arrangements for Neighbourhood Working in Chorley

To consult with existing stakeholders including Parish Councils, County Councillors and representatives from Housing Associations to understand the strength of engagement

To converse with established community groups on the delivery of successful projects in their neighbourhoods and how to get residents involved

To understand how the Council's Civic Pride campaign and programme of campaigns links into Neighbourhood Working

To investigate areas of best practice amongst our neighbouring authorities to ascertain if there is anything that we can do better.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the Task Group and the specific recommendations resulting from them are set out in this section of the report and are mainly around better communications, encouraging greater participation and facilitating improved networking arrangements.

The Task Group recognises that for the recommendations to be successful it will be dependent on the participation of everybody that is involved in neighbourhood working, including the Council, our stakeholders, community groups, Councillors and residents of Chorley.

ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the review, Members recognised the role they played in the Council's neighbourhood working policies by working alongside neighbourhood officers and community groups. This work can often be challenging when balancing competing demands, such as the different needs of deprived or more affluent areas, or dealing with different ethnic, faith and cultural backgrounds. Neighbourhood working needs to take place in the actual communities and not just through meetings.

Residents can also contribute in making their neighbourhoods a better place to live in and must be encouraged to get involved, whether formally in activities, such as neighbourhood/community groups meetings, or less formally, with 'clean up' days, or community days and events. A wide range of techniques are needed to encourage and give residents the confidence to get involved.

The Group agreed that strengthening partnership working was key to the successful implementation of a neighbourhood working regime which was embedded throughout all communities across the borough. Partnership structures brought together agencies, such as the police, council, housing associations and others to tackle problems that no single agency could solve alone. Problems could be solved by using local knowledge gained through experience, talking to local people and front-line workers, as well as being 'out and about' in the neighbourhoods.

Recommendations:

To develop a liaison mechanism between the eight Chairs of the Neighbourhood Area Meetings through an informal meeting that could take place 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.

Provide training to Councillors on effective tools to engage and connect people in their own area.

To have a single point of contact at the Council for community groups and Parishes to raise matters relating to neighbourhood working. Reporting of day to day environmental issues to use existing channels, for example My Account

The Neighbourhood Priorities to be renamed as Preferred or Key Projects to reflect that, over time issues and aspirations change.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLEMENT

The Group consulted with existing stakeholders that included Parish Councils, County Councillors and representatives from Housing Associations to understand their strength of engagement and to explore ways of working better together in the future.

Members were interested to understand what they expected from the Neighbourhood Working process and if there was anything extra that they could bring to the process, including financial contributions. This included exploring ideas on how the Borough Council, Parish Councils and other organisations could work together more effectively on projects in their areas or if there were any barriers that prevented this from being achieved. The overall objective was to identify how relationships within the existing stakeholder's structures could be strengthened so that communities could engage more effectively within the different neighbourhood areas.

Overall, they were happy with the way in which Neighbourhood Working was being implemented by the Council and the projects had given them the opportunity to work together to achieve something more than business as usual that met local priorities that were important to local residents. There was an acceptance that they were in a position to contribute financially and could influence other local organisations and groups to get involved.

Many of the parish councils were very established in their ways, preferring to sit back and let residents come to them if they had a problem or suggestion to make. Members felt that they could be more proactive in their approach, particularly when looking for projects to propose as a neighbourhood priority. Also, as many residents didn't understand the hierarchy of Local Government tiers, there was a view that better consultation and greater communications would help to alleviate some of the disputes that often arise over ownership of assets in the area and help to encourage residents to engage.

Recommendation:

To improve communication between officers, councillors and stakeholders about the outcomes of priorities to community groups and the public. Updates on progress could be delivered through intheknow, intheboro, Facebook and Twitter.

COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

We consulted with representatives from a number of established community groups and organisations on the delivery of successful projects in their neighbourhoods and how they get residents involved.

Each of the groups had originally been established to meet a particular need within the local community and had grown in strength as years had gone by. All of the groups had established relationships with the Council in differing ways, either through receiving

financial support, working with and receiving contact and support from Council officers or participating in networking opportunities provided through more formalised council structures.

Key communication methods were through social media; including Twitter, Facebook and web forums, although other methods included the erection or use of noticeboards and the production and distribution of newsletters or posters around the area. However, all of the representatives agreed that it would be useful to bring community groups together and were in favour of a networking event that would be open to all.

A networking event would enable groups from each of the areas to come together to share ideas and discuss issues in their area. Partners, such as LCC, Registered Social Landlords and the Police would be invited as part of the event to encourage better partnership working to address a common goal, for example health and wellbeing initiatives.

Recommendation

The Council to explore with the VCFS sector how the use of current resources provided by the Council to the VCFS can be used by the VCFS to improve networking across the VCFS sector in Chorley. Including the facilitation of an themed Annual Forum on a dedicated topic, for example health initiatives, to help shape future key projects and encourage greater involvement at all levels.

CIVIC PRIDE

The Council has implemented a Civic Pride Campaign over the last 12 months that has consisted of a number of publicised events aimed at getting the residents of Chorley to take pride in their neighbourhood area. The Neighbourhoods team are currently delivering the 'Don't Mess with Chorley' campaign encouraging residents to keep our borough clean through targeting issues such as fly tipping, rubbish and dog fouling, whilst the Economic Development team are actively working on the Choose Chorley Investment scheme by getting people to invest in Chorley.

A number of different starter kits would be made available 'off the shelf' to help residents in a range of activities that would help to enhance their neighbourhoods, for example, litter picking packs that would provide them with the necessary equipment to get a project started and the Council would encourage members of the community to become a point of contact, to organise residents effectively signposting and advertising the use of the 'My Account' system to residents.

Whilst it was accepted that there was a lot of really good work being undertaken by the authority, there was criticism that this was not being communicated effectively to ward Councillors and the Group felt that this was definitely one area that needed to be improved upon. Members wanted to be included throughout the process and not just at the end when a project had been delivered.

The Council had also been leading the way in encouraging people to get involved in volunteering with the launch of the SPICE Time Credit's project. This scheme rewarded people for volunteering by offering an hour of their time for an hour's time credit that could be spent on a wide range of activities. It encouraged residents to take pride in where they lived, by encouraging them to get involved in volunteering and take a more active role in their communities.

The Group felt that this needed to be embedded into the neighbourhood working agenda, as the time credit scheme also enabled residents to get involved in the design and delivery of public and community services. It would also help to create a strong and diverse network of volunteers and volunteer organisations in their neighbourhoods.

Recommendation:

Civic Pride should be integrated fully into Neighbourhood Working and Members engaged in all aspects of Civic Pride delivery.

COMMUNITY ACTION PLANS

The implementation of Neighbourhood/Community Action Plans was seen as a fundamental aspect of encouraging the residents to take ownership of the actions and practices agreed to be undertaken within the community. Members agreed that a holistic approach that encompassed everyone across the borough was needed.

The Council was exploring the possibility of implementing Community Action Plans for parts of its borough as a key project in its Corporate Strategy and the Group considered the possibility of such a plan being developed for each of the eight Neighbourhood Area meetings.

Recommendation

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel are supportive of the Corporate Strategy project to introduce Community Action Plans in parts of the Borough and recommend consideration is given to a wider roll out depending on the implementation and outcomes achieved from the initial plans.

SOUTH RIBBLE COUNCIL – NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING

The 'My Neighbourhood' approach was launched in 2012 as South Ribble Council's way of working with communities. The five Neighbourhood Forums of Central, Eastern, Leyland, Penwortham and Western Parishes replaced the previous Area Committee's and informal meetings are now held in each of the areas across the borough on a quarterly basis. Each of the meetings are only one hour in length and a Ballot Box is used to pick up any business as usual enquiries so that the meetings can concentrate on bigger issues or more important items of business.

Initially the forums were aimed at identifying and agreeing local priorities, interactive workshops were held, using maps to add context and support discussion and were extremely well attended by the communities. Other partner agencies such as the local neighbourhood policing teams were also invited. Residents had direct access to

Councillors, there are no appointments or questions submitted in advance and local councillors are involved with all aspects of the meeting giving cross party ownership.

Ten priority projects for each area made up the body of each of the My Neighbourhood Plans. All the plans are created in consultation with residents, public services and community groups, to find out what local projects people wanted. A big part of bringing the projects together was the input and involvement of the local community. The priorities contained within each of the plans were highlighted by local residents who wanted to make the areas in which they live better.

Members recognised the different approach that our neighbouring authority had taken and thought that this gave additional support to the recommendation by the Group with regards to working with the VCFS on improved networking and considered the potential of Chorley Council facilitating a themed annual event for greater interaction by all partners on a dedicated topic, for example health initiatives, this would help to shape future key projects across the borough and encourage greater involvement at all levels.

CONCLUSION

The feedback from parish councils, community groups and organisations involved in Neighbourhood Working was generally positive with regards to the current approach being taken to implement and develop neighbourhood working.

There was a recognition that communication on the delivery of projects and activities in the neighbourhood areas to all interested parties could be improved upon.

Relationships between the Council and Parish Councils and Community groups were in the main working well. However, there was a view that networking and the sharing of best practices between VCFS groups across the borough could also be improved.

Engagement with residents by Parish Councils, community groups and members varied across the neighbourhood areas and a view was taken that these stakeholders, especially Parish Councils and District Council members could be more pro-active in their approach particularly when nominating projects to be considered at the neighbourhood area meetings.