

Scrutiny Committee

27 January 2015

My Neighbourhoods Update 2014



Lead Member: Cllr Phil Smith

Lead Officer: Denise Johnson

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's 'My Neighbourhood' approach to community involvement is now well established, with 3 years operational activity.
- 1.2 The shift taken towards empowering communities, working to bring external funding in and galvanise community groups has been successful, as shown by demonstrable outcomes.
- 1.3 My Neighbourhood Plans, created to manage delivery of projects, are refreshed each year. Plans are 'live', meaning that they evolve continually. When a project is completed, it is replaced with another. The annual refresh challenges the list of projects, their sponsorship, timescales and progress to date.
- 1.4 On a daily basis, the community involvement team works with members, parish councils, other public services and community groups. The type of work is as varied as the projects generated by the community – some aspects are short term or event based, others are long term improvement schemes.

2. Progress

Overall Position

- 2.1 Work has continued on project delivery through 2014, working with partners wherever possible to maximise capacity. Each forum has responded to residents and community groups to inform and direct projects, and services across the council have worked together to enable improvements. An example of this is Cockshott Wood in Walton le Dale, where complaints of anti-social behaviour led to re-routing a footpath away from residential properties, and creating a more scenic route for dogs and their walkers.
- 2.2 Forums have been held quarterly in each of the My Neighbourhood areas. The forums are an opportunity to update people on the ongoing work in their area, and feedback from both individual attendees and community groups continues to be positive.
- 2.3 Refreshed My Neighbourhood Plans for 2015/16 will be presented to Cabinet on 18 March and Council on 25 March. Work is underway to review existing projects, challenge timescales and revisit projects in waiting on reserve lists.

Areas of significant progress / achievement

- 2.4 Highlights from 2014 are attached at appendix A. As ever, each My Neighbourhood area has different projects and priorities, with varying levels of support and input from the council. Some projects, for example, require help with external funding bids and/or funding from us. Others do not require any financial assistance, but advice and support which helps them to achieve their objectives.

- 2.5 We have been approached as a best practice example throughout the year by organisations which are keen to find out more about our approach. A presentation was made to the Scrutiny Committee at Wyre Borough Council in December, with a follow up visit here scheduled this month. Wyre members are especially interested in community empowerment and the flexibility of 'My Neighbourhoods' in the types of projects we deliver

Areas for further action

- 2.5 Over the last 12 months, engagement with parish councils and community groups has further improved. More and more ideas for joint working and improvement schemes are being generated as completed schemes are seen elsewhere. With this in mind, there is a challenge to manage expectations in line with our capacity, and to stick to a robust work programme.
- 2.6 Events organised by neighbourhood forums have been very popular, from Leyland's Big Lunch with over 1000 people enjoying a picnic on Worden Park, to the Halloween Hunt with local businesses in Lostock Hall. Forums are working to encourage community groups to take on leadership of established events with our support; building their confidence and promoting a strong sense of local ownership.

3. Emerging key issues

Frequency of forums

- 3.1 We continue to look at the most efficient and effective ways of working for our forums; we are in no way complacent. In Autumn 2014, a pilot project was trialled to produce a Forum Newsletter for the Western Parishes. This was delivered to every home and gave a progress update on projects in that area.
- 3.2 Feedback from this newsletter was very positive and generated interest in community projects – phone calls, e-mails and posts to the facebook page were received. Alongside this, we are aware of the challenges in holding winter forums, particularly December and January. As a result, consideration is now being given to reducing the annual number of forums from 4 to 3, and rolling out the forum newsletter to all areas on a more regular basis.

Social Media

- 3.3 The community involvement team manages facebook pages for each of the neighbourhood forums, as well as community pages for events such as Longton Live and Penwortham Open Gardens.
- 3.4 Following the pilot period where public interest has been gauged, there is a clear potential to use these pages to promote the work of the council. Best received posts include those with neighbourhoods' staff, such as the cleansing team or the tree gang, with good news stories or photos of work being carried out.

- 3.5 With this in mind, dialogue is being opened up between staff to ensure that key messages go out via social media and that the council's reputation benefits from such publicity.

4. Background papers

- 4.1 Existing plans are available at www.southribble.gov.uk/myneighbourhoods
- 4.2 Facebook pages for the My Neighbourhood areas can be found at:
www.facebook.com/mycentralforum
www.facebook.com/easternforum
www.facebook.com/leylandforum
www.facebook.com/penworthamforum
www.facebook.com/westernparishesforum