

GETTING INVOLVED IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

A CONSULTATION PAPER ON ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

November 2006



Introduction

This consultation paper sets out the County Councils proposals for getting people at a local level involved in what we do and how we do it, and ultimately taking responsibility for owning and managing local services and facilities themselves. The people who know best about local issues, concerns and priorities are the people living in those localities and Lancashire County Council (LCC) is committed to drawing on local knowledge and experience to influence and shape future decision making and service planning.

In 2002 LCC introduced its Locality Focus Programme (LFP). It set out a programme of activities designed to bring LCC “closer to the community”. As a result a number of successful initiatives have been introduced at a district level including:

- Having a District Partnership Officer and assistant located in each of the twelve Lancashire Districts.
- Establishing the Lancashire Local, a joint decision making meeting of an equal number of County and District Councillors, across all twelve districts of Lancashire.
- Locality Focus meetings which bring together county councillors and County Council managers based locally to encourage a more joined up response locally
- Regular one-to-one meetings between the Leader of the County Council and of each District Council to build better relationships
- A lead County Director for each district, who has a strategic overview of issues and provides a high profile point of contact for the districts.

We now need to focus our attention below district level, and find ways to listen and respond at a neighbourhood level.

A recent refresh of the LFP has identified four key strands for future development:-

- To support members as community advocates
- To engage effectively at the local level
- To open ourselves up to the public
- To engage effectively with partners and stakeholders

We think that effective engagement at a neighbourhood level, with transparent mechanisms and structures in place for responding promptly and appropriately to neighbourhood concerns, is fundamental to delivering all four strands of the LFP.

LCC is also keen to promote the concept of “Place Shaping” introduced by the Lyons review. Place Shaping requires Local Government to take responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there, promoting their interests and their future. This concept is further endorsed in the recently published Local Government White Paper. Sir Michael Lyons invites Local

Government to 'tackle the challenge of promoting effective local choice and energetic Place Shaping.' LCC recognises its responsibility as Place Shaper and how fundamental, effective engagement with neighbourhoods will be to this.

A dedicated Policy Officer has been employed to develop a corporate Framework for Neighbourhood Engagement on behalf of the County Council but it is clear that effective engagement with people at a neighbourhood level will require the co-operation of a wide range of partner stakeholders. We now want these partners to help shape and influence our proposals.

What do we want to achieve?

We are developing a Corporate Framework for Neighbourhood Engagement to ensure that all citizens of Lancashire have the opportunity to influence LCC decision making, service planning and delivery, and that the engagement of citizens is consistent across the organisation and across the county.

Through the Corporate Framework we want to ensure:-

- a corporate understanding of and commitment to neighbourhood engagement
- a co-ordinated and consistent approach to neighbourhood engagement across LCC
- that elected members are placed at the heart of any activity
- that neighbourhood engagement is meaningful and effective and of a good standard
- a consistent response to neighbourhood issues
- that neighbourhood engagement is used to plan and shape LCC services
- that neighbourhood engagement is accessible, inclusive and involves those people or groups who are sometimes excluded.
- that neighbourhood engagement is evidenced and shared and related policies and procedures are regularly monitored and reviewed
- that we work closely with partners, particularly District Councils, to engage with neighbourhoods together.

What do we mean by engagement?

Engagement can happen across a broad spectrum from providing quality information to empowering people to make decisions and manage budgets (see diagram below).



Inform	Research	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Providing quality information to support public understanding of LCC services and activities	Obtaining the views of the public on a range of open issues	Obtaining public feedback on proposals to inform decision-making	Working with the public to ensure issues and concerns are addressed	Working in partnership with the public in decision-making	Public decision making and/or devolved budgets leading to service commissioning
How	How	How	How	How	How
e.g. Brochures and newsletters	e.g. surveys and focus groups	e.g. surveys and focus groups	e.g. user panels	e.g. neighbourhood needs analysis	e.g. Referenda, User management of services

LCC have systems in place to engage at the lower levels of this spectrum. This consultation document therefore will consider how we involve people better and encourage participation in County Council activity.

Through good Neighbourhood Engagement at the upper levels of the spectrum we believe we can:-

- Improve our understanding of local issues and priorities
- Better represent constituents
- Improve understanding of what we do
- Improve service delivery and enhance efficiency
- Increase and improve partnership working
- Improve customer satisfaction through improved services
- Involve better those people with whom we often fail to engage
- Make a difference

What is a Neighbourhood?

There is no simple answer to this question. Neighbourhoods can be defined by geographical or structural boundaries or by issues of common interest. We have to keep an open mind in defining a 'neighbourhood.' However, whilst

size may not be a barrier to shaping and influencing decision making etc, it needs to be considered in terms of practicality and efficiency when considering devolved budgets and service commissioning.

What are Neighbourhood Arrangements?

We define neighbourhood arrangements as structures/groups/committees etc. based locally, that have gained the trust and respect of local people and can facilitate and co-ordinate effective engagement and communication in their neighbourhood.

LCC believes that Neighbourhood Engagement at the upper end of the spectrum will require the involvement of such an arrangement if it is to be effective and inclusive.

If a Neighbourhood Arrangement wants to take on this role on behalf of their neighbourhood, LCC will expect them to prove their legitimacy i.e. that they have either political authority or a clear mandate to represent their neighbourhood.

Any Neighbourhood Arrangement that can demonstrate legitimacy will be recognised by LCC.

If, however a Neighbourhood arrangement wants to own and manage local services and facilities LCC will expect these arrangements to demonstrate four key dynamics:-

- Legitimacy – political authority or a clear mandate to represent a neighbourhood
- Identification – there must be a clear sense of belonging and commonality within the neighbourhood concerned
- Effectiveness – there must be mechanisms and structures and procedures in place
- Partnership – a variety of authorities, organisations and individuals must be working together to make a difference

A test, similar to that for quality Parishes, will be developed against these four dynamics. This test will not be exclusive of any existing test of quality and will be developed in partnership with District Councils and other public service providers

Examples of Neighbourhood Arrangements/structures include:-

- Parish and Town Councils
- Neighbourhood Management
- District Area Committees/Councils
- Market Town Partnerships
- VCFS

Wherever possible we will look to existing arrangements and structures in neighbourhoods, but where none exist or where those that do, do not have the capacity to fulfil this role, we will work with Neighbourhoods to build this capacity.

Listening and responding.

As community advocates all elected members have a pivotal role and will be the thread right through the listening and responding process.

The local councillor will be the first point of contact for any individual or neighbourhood group who want to be more involved in local governance.

If elected members are to be responsive to neighbourhood issues and concerns, and effective in their role as community advocates there will need to be systems in place for bringing these issues to the attention of decision makers.

The Lancashire Local will play a key role in this process. We will develop a structure and mechanisms for all recognised Neighbourhood Arrangements in a district, including Parish and Town Councils, to come together to discuss and prioritise neighbourhood issues and concerns and to get appropriate issues onto Lancashire Local agendas. This of course will not preclude individuals or community representatives from attending Lancashire Local meetings to talk to agenda items in the time allowed for public participation.

We will nominate a Neighbourhood Engagement Lead for each district from the Lancashire Local. This lead member will be the link between the district Neighbourhood Arrangements and the Lancashire Local, and then between the Lancashire Local and the Cabinet member for Community Planning and Partnerships who will be our county wide member champion for Neighbourhood Engagement. The cabinet member will continue to be supported by a Parish champion to provide member leadership on Parish and Town Council issues.

By engaging in this way through structures that become familiar with everyone we can begin to identify opportunities for even greater empowerment to neighbourhoods through devolved budgets and services and the management of community facilities.

Working better together

Neighbourhood engagement and empowerment is a key priority across a number of central government departments. There will, therefore, be a

requirement for all public service providers to improve the way they listen and respond to their service users and the general public at a local level. Doing this in a fragmented and disjointed fashion will result in:-

- Duplication of effort
- Wasted resources
- Consultation fatigue
- Missed opportunities

It is therefore our intention to work with our partners towards developing a multi-agency co-ordinated engagement strategy. Our first priority will be a co-ordinated and consistent approach across the County Council. We will then invite the twelve district councils across Lancashire to work with us to bring together our strategies, structures and mechanisms, giving the people of Lancashire easy access and opportunity to shape all Local Authority activity across the county. Then working through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) we will develop a way of working together systematically on Neighbourhood Engagement.

Triggering Neighbourhood Action.

As the government has developed its neighbourhood agenda, a number of practical tools/ actions have emerged. Some of these tools can be used proactively to ensure that an agreed level of service is maintained and neighbourhood aspirations are expressed and considered i.e.

- Neighbourhood Agreements
- Neighbourhood Charters
- Parish/Neighbourhood Plans

Communities can exercise other actions to resolve persistent neighbourhood problems i.e.

- Community Call for Action
- Neighbourhood Inquiries
- Neighbourhood Petitions

As these tools are more commonly exercised they will encourage and support more effective two-way neighbourhood engagement.

LCC will develop systems to respond to these community tools and actions in a co-ordinated and consistent manner across the organisation. However, this kind of community action should be a last resort. Ideally persistent issues will be resolved quickly and locally and we will look at ways to empower county councillors to do this.

What happens now?

The process and timetable for consultation are set out below:-

Milestones	Date
Formal consultation paper issued	22 January 2007
Presentation to range of partnership meetings	January/February/March
Presentation to Lancashire Locals	February/March 2007
Consultation period ends	21 st April 2007
Locality Focus Member Steering group considers the consultation responses and a proposed implementation plan	May 2007
Cabinet considers the responses to the consultation and the proposed implementation plan	7 th June 2007
Full council approves the amended framework	26 th July 2007
Public Launch of Neighbourhood Engagement Framework	September 2007

Consultees

All County Councillors
LCCs Communities and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny committee
The Lancashire Locals
District Council Lead Officers
All District Councillors of all 12 District Councils
Lancashire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Society of Local Council Parish Clerks
Parish and Town Councils
Members of the Public
Local Strategic Partnership Lead Officers
Lancashire Partnership Chair
Primary Care Trusts
Lancashire Care Trust
Hospital Trusts
Strategic Health Authority
Lancashire Constabulary
Lancashire Police Authority
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
Fire and Rescue Service
VCFS Consortium

Learning and Skills Council
Business Link
Job Centre Plus
Chambers of Commerce
LAA Partner Leads
Environment Agency
Community Futures
Councils for Voluntary Service
Community Empowerment Networks
Neighbourhood Managers
Market Town Partnerships

How can I make my views known?

You can write to: Adrienne Banks, Neighbourhood Engagement Policy Officer, Lancashire County Council, Policy Unit, Christchurch Precinct, Preston, Lancashire, PR1 8XJ. Alternatively you can email your views to adrienne.banks@css.lancscc.gov.uk . **Please note the closing date for comments is 21st April 2007.**