



# COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

## *Panel Report*

### Public

**Date of Meeting:** 10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2010

**Title:** COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PILOTS UPDATE

**Report of:** ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Report reference:** CD06/10

**Summary:** To update members on the progress of the Community Empowerment pilot projects in Longtown and Harraby

**Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:** Members should note the contents of the IDeA report on the Harraby pilot and the notes on the Longtown pilot and discuss the implications for the wider development of the empowerment pilot principle into other areas of the City.

### **Recommendations:**

Members are recommended to note the key points arising from the two projects and, recognising the key lessons identified to date, consider arranging a working group of the key partners to consider the next steps, such a meeting to be informed by a more formal monitoring and evaluation report.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

## 1.0 **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 1.1 The Harraby and Longtown Empowerment pilots have been evolving since April 2009.
- 1.2 The pilots were set up with a view to experimenting with a range of approaches to community engagement within different environments.
- 1.3 The purpose of the pilots was to assess the feasibility of a rolling programme of partnership based working in local communities which was focussed around listening and responding to community concerns and empowering groups and individuals in order that they had the interest, knowledge and skills to be able to genuinely influence the delivery of services in their area.
- 1.4 The main aim was to test whether a locality based approach could address community issues more effectively, promote local ways of joining up service delivery and be seen to respond to and be influenced by the public in a more creative and effective manner than the direct, centrally driven approach that is usual .
- 1.5 Work is currently being undertaken to evaluate the progress made against those objectives after the first 12 months of activity.
- 1.6 Formal evaluations will be carried carried out by the partner agencies, who include the City and County Council's the Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Community Association, Housing Associations, PCT and Sure Start and Parish Councils and in Harraby, representatives from the local 'Stakeholders Group' which is made up of residents who have taken an active interest in the process, will produce their own evaluation which will provide an untainted view of how they feel the pilot has made a difference 'on the ground'.
- 1.7 These full evaluations will not be available until September, but the IDeA recently commissioned a report on community engagement in Cumbria, which highlighted, the 'Harraby – Together We Can' pilot and the relevant extracts from that report are appended for Member's interest and discussion (Appendix 1).

## 2.0 **LONGTOWN PILOT**

- 2.1 The progress of the Longtown pilot is noted as follows;

- 2.2 There are three elements to this process stemming from the Rural Pilot Empowerment Project in Longtown and looking more widely at how the current structure and community initiatives in rural areas can be focussed to support the process.
- 2.3 The production of Community Led Plans is the cornerstone to the empowerment agenda in the **Longtown/Rural Empowerment Pilot Project**. The progress of the community planning in Arthuret and Kirkandrews on Esk is progressing with completed plans are due to be produced by the second half of 2010. The key issue for the City Council is to ensure that all relevant Members and officers are aware and involved in the Community Planning process and priorities identified by communities are able to influence decision making.
- 2.4 As a response to the empowerment process and the movement within Cumbria to develop '**Locality Working**', the Carlisle Parish Councils Association (CPCA) arranged two meetings in June & October 2009 for chairmen of the Carlisle District Parish Councils to explore the subject.
- 2.5 There was enthusiasm for the concept of issue based clustering, as opposed to fixed geographical clusters with a permanent infrastructure. They felt that this type of approach, where two or more parishes would work together for the duration of a project, would add strength to the scheme.
- 2.6 The CPCA has produced a report entitled 'CPCA Proposals for Locality Working' (Appendix 2). This has been used to apply for funding from the Cumbria Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (CIEP). A programme of meeting is planned to identify key issues that will form a basis for on-going plan of action. Councillors and officers from the County and City Councils are supporting the CPCA in this development project.
- 2.7 Carlisle City Council and the Carlisle Partnership are in the process of working with partners countywide to develop a **Single Community Strategy for Cumbria**. This document will replace existing community strategies and provide a single strategic vision for Cumbria as well as expressing locality priorities at a district level. Rural considerations and implications will clearly be a central part of this development work.
- 2.8 As part of a programme of work to outline Carlisle's input to the Single Community Strategy the Carlisle Partnership has approached the Rural Support Group to identify rural issues and priorities that they would like to see expressed within and

addressed by the strategy. A special meeting of the Rural Support Group has been convened where a workshop approach to identifying these issues will be taken.

- 2.9 Ahead of this meeting a report outlining thematic issues and actions already identified and contained within community plans at a parish level has already been developed and will be used to inform the Rural Support Group's workshop. This will also provide an opportunity for the issues identified by parishes as part of the 'Locality Working' to inform the process.
- 2.10 Rural Communities are being given a direct the opportunity to influence strategy development and Local Area Agreement expenditure at a district and county level.

### 3.0 **THE WAY FORWARD**

- 3.1 The potential for a future 'roll out' of the principle of this approach to a wider community, is clearly an important issue for discussion and it is obvious that there are a number of lessons to be learned and heeded from both pilot schemes.
- 3.2 Although some of those lessons were evident from very early on in the process, it would be wrong to consider them outside the context of a full evaluation, which would help create an informed debate between all partners

### 4.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 Members are recommended to note the key points arising from the two pilots and, recognising the key lessons identified so far, consider arranging a working group of the key partners to consider the next steps, such a meeting to be informed by a more formal monitoring and evaluation report.

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RB/VH  
28<sup>th</sup> May 2010

## **Appendix A**

### **Extracts from - Riding high: a partnership approach to community engagement in Cumbria**

**'Together We Can' is a programme of community engagement work across Cumbria. One project in Harraby shows the positive impact the programme has had on the police, district and county council's work in communities. Such has been the success of the project that Gordon Brown visited in 2009 to find out just what was going on.**

**This work provides an excellent example of working with communities and neighbourhoods – a pillar of the IDeA's Framework for an Ideal Empowering Authority.**

An area of wasteland on the outskirts of Carlisle has been pivotal in changing attitudes towards young people. The police regularly received complaints about problem teenagers from residents living on a housing estate in Harraby until a BMX track was built on the site. "We used to get lots of calls from people about some of the kids in the area causing a nuisance," says Inspector Barry Bell, "But that has massively been reduced since the track was opened. The children maintain and look after it - there is a real sense of ownership and pride in it."

Harraby is an area of mainly social housing that was built over 40 years ago. Bored teenagers put forward the idea of the track to local councillors as part of the community engagement initiative 'Together We Can' – a partnership involving the county and city councils and a range of agencies including the police, primary care trust and the Riverside Housing Association. At its heart is the active involvement of local people which Inspector Bell believes is the reason for its success.

"I am a Harraby lad – I grew up here. The area has always had its share of problems but I can't emphasise enough how little Harraby is a problem now. Just in the last year anti-social behaviour is down by a third," he says and adds, "There is a real sense of pride in the community. It's amazing the changes that have taken place over the last couple of years and it's all down to community empowerment. I want to use what we have learnt from here and apply it to the other areas I police in the city."

#### **Collaboration at local level**

Cyril Webber is the local ward councillor for both the city and the county council and has been involved in the project from its inception in 2008. "The project is based around a real collaboration.

The BMX track is just one example. The county council provided the land, the city council found the money and the residents cleared the site.”

One reason for the success of the project is the appointment of a community involvement worker who is jointly funded by the police and the county council with in-kind support from the city council. The involvement officer is based in the community centre a couple of days a week in order to liaise with residents about service issues ranging from grass cutting to social activities.

The Together We Can project is driven by a monthly stakeholders group which is run by the residents in collaboration with the partner organisations. “This is a seamless project,” says Councillor Webber. “You don’t get arguments about who takes the lead on particular projects - everyone pulls together as one team working in harmony.”

Inspector Bell agrees: “We talk about working in partnership but often what we all mean is that we have a problem and we each have a little bit of it. Here it feels very different. We come together with a common purpose of improving Harraby. We are not just chipping in our bit but have a shared set of values and vision which is based on doing the very best we can for the community.”

The project not only crosses professional boundaries but also geographic ones as it covers two city council wards. Steve Dunn is a community engagement officer for the city council who works in the area.

“We knew from the outset that Harraby was a natural community but that it also covers a number of different electoral boundaries. Instead of wards we based the project on how the community defined its own area, for example what shops or parks people use rather than the streets they live in. It hasn’t always been easy working like this but it has definitely been worth it as the project area makes sense for the community.”

The relationship between the city and the county council has also been positive. Both organisations saw the initiative as a way of trying out a new way of working with communities and delivering services.

“The project is an opportunity to work with partners to develop a model for engaging and empowering people,” says Rob Burns who is the community support manager for the city council. “On the community engagement’s ladder of participation we have been good at the first few steps - informing, consulting and involving people. For example, we have set up with the county council a joint neighbourhood forum. However, we are not so experienced at the top end of the ladder and

releasing power to communities. Part of this work is to explore how we genuinely empower communities and we have cross party support for this.”

Burns believes that Harraby is now also well on the way to delivering on the other steps of the participation ladder. “Over the last couple of years we have trained dozens of people around the issues of decision making, budget processes and how public bodies work. These people are now actively involved in shaping services locally and ensuring they meet the needs of local residents. Whether its discussing what should happen to the local secondary school that is due to close or deciding on the contractors to design and build new play facilities. The challenge for us is to maintain this activity and interest once the pilot phase is over.”

### **Key lessons**

Some of the lessons already drawn from the Together We Can pilots.....:

- 1 The outreach approach to delivering services can present challenges to some professions. There is a real difference in languages and styles with some groups of people much less comfortable working in a community setting compared with others. However, already there is evidence that organisations are working more effectively in communities as a result of the pilots, although significant cultural change will take time.
  
- 2 Within a complex partnership not everyone has experience of working with councillors – even within a council. Councillors are absolutely critical to working creatively at a local level and have extensive networks which are often invaluable. It is important to understand what they have to offer and how best to work with them.
  
- 3 The outreach approach to local delivery can sometimes be seen as extra add-on to the day job. This was one of the criticisms from staff from the first pilot. Yet local partnership activity often helps reduce the day job because it is about preventing problems arising – such as the reduction in anti social behaviour in Harraby.

# Carlisle Parish Councils Association

## CPCA Proposals for Locality Working

### **INTRODUCTION**

Having become increasingly aware of the movement within Cumbria to develop 'Locality Working' the Carlisle Parish Councils Association (CPCA) decided to bring together the chairmen of the Carlisle District Parish Councils to explore the issue.

At the first meeting, held on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009 in Dalston, chairmen expressed enthusiasm for the concept of issue based clustering as opposed to fixed geographical clusters with a permanent infrastructure. They felt that this type of approach, with two or more parishes working together for the duration of a project, would add strength to the scheme.

The second meeting, held on 28 October 2009 in Rockcliffe, was in the format of a workshop to further develop the concept of issue based clustering. Attendees studied the success of locality working elsewhere in Cumbria<sup>1</sup> and in the UK<sup>2</sup> and developed the detail of how locality working might be used to the benefit of participating Parish Councils.

The two meetings demonstrated the willingness of the Carlisle District Parish Councils to embrace the principle of locality working and to engage with the other two tiers of local government to develop and implement the concept of issue based clustering within the District.

### **BENEFITS OF LOCALITY WORKING DEFINED BY PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMEN**

1. Issue based locality working as identified by Parish Council representatives would lead to stronger communities better able to support and sustain themselves, and would increase the number of people who feel that they can influence decisions locally.
2. By fostering locality working, local authorities will be able to get closer to the needs of their communities.
3. The encouragement of locality working might, in time, allow exploration of potential areas for participatory budgeting, a stated aim of Carlisle City Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper by Libby Bateman, Project Officer for the Upper Eden Community Plan, which focuses on Economy, Environment, Transport & Access and Social & Community as well as separate information about the Grange and Cartmell Community Board – South Lakeland and the Derwent Seven – Allerdale

<sup>2</sup> Oxfordshire, Braintree District – Essex.

4. Locality working may bring community planning closer to reality and would provide a means of involving communities. This would address one of the major concerns of Parish Council chairmen at the October workshop.
5. Issue based locality working may foster an atmosphere for encouraging a movement towards Quality Parish status for those participating Parishes.
6. The issue based rather than the geographic approach to locality working may help to spread capacity, particularly among the smaller Parishes Councils.

## PARISH COUNCIL PROPOSALS

The following were identified at the workshop as the main areas on which Parish Councils would initially wish to focus in their desire for an issue based approach to locality working:-

1. Wind Farm Developments in the north east of the district. These are Stonechest in Nicholforest Parish, Black Knors in Bewcastle Parish and Mossgrove, which is situated between Hethersgill, Walton, Solport and Stapleton Parishes. Several Parish Councils have concerns about these proposals and it may prove to be of mutual benefit for them to work together across parish boundaries, for example in undertaking parishioner surveys. This might produce a model for helping parishes deal with future wind farm proposals.
2. Parish Council Responses to Planning Applications. There are often gaps in the knowledge of councillors and clerks, as statutory consultees, on the correct way in which to respond to planning applications. The CPCA, by working closely with Carlisle City Council, might be able to assist councillors in clusters of parishes through targeted training.
3. Road maintenance activity within 30mph areas. The CPCA should work with Carlisle City Council and Cumbria County Council Highway departments to achieve a seamless service, where appropriate. Already the Highway Steward scheme is making a major contribution. It is hoped that by close co-operation some of the perceived difficulties will be easily addressed.
4. Small, remote and less populated Parishes could consider closer co-operation along the lines of the Upper Eden Community Plan cluster to lessen their sense of isolation, thus providing the framework for issue based joint projects as and when they became necessary.
5. Clustered Representation on the CPCA could be shared by some of the smaller Parish Councils to ensure that their views were better and more forcibly presented at CPCA group meetings and to Carlisle City Council and Cumbria County Council.

6. External support. The workshop identified the need for more community initiatives but which would require additional external support in order to facilitate development. An example of this might be an investigation on the feasibility of affordable housing in parishes where there was a clear need. This could take the form of locally run, or housing association supported, housing need surveys and consultations.
7. Neighbourhood Forums Parish Councils recognize and value the role that Neighbourhood Forums play in locality working and would welcome the benefits of joint working that should result from further agreed and fully consulted development of this format.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Parish Councils in the Carlisle District have demonstrated their willingness to engage in locality working and are now looking to both Carlisle City Council and Cumbria County Council for help in developing and facilitating this issue-based method of joint working which, it is hoped, should ultimately lead to a greater degree of community empowerment.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1. Presentation of the report on CPCA Proposals for Locality Working to Carlisle City Council for discussion at the joint meeting on 30 November 2009.
2. Presentation of the report on CPCA Proposals for Locality Working to Cumbria County Council and request inclusion on the agenda for the Carlisle Local Committee on 16 December 2009. Include this item on the agenda for further discussion at the joint meeting on 23 March 2010.
3. Identify how the CPCA can work with Carlisle City Council and Cumbria County Council in the fully resourced development of these proposals, remembering the voluntary nature of parish councillors.
4. Consider how the Upper Eden Community Plan model might be developed for smaller Parishes. Propose organizing a workshop for a group of these Parishes to explore the idea, providing that resources could be found. The UECP has the benefit of a fully resourced Project Officer. To achieve the full benefit for some of the parishes in Carlisle District it may be necessary to consider similar resourcing.
5. Agree a timetable for initial and on-going activities.
6. Agree a reporting process and mechanism.

Ronnie Auld  
Chairman – CPCA November 2009