

**Subject:** Neighbourhood Plans and  
Neighbourhood Forums:  
One year on

**Status:** For Publication

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> November 2010

**Report of:** Director of Customers and Communities

**Portfolio**

**Holder:** Leader of the Council

**Key Decision:** Yes

Forward Plan  General Exception  Special Urgency

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet the four Neighbourhood Plans for the areas of Haslingden, Helmshore and Edenfield; Rawtenstall; Bacup; and Whitworth and to seek their approval for them to be presented to Council.
- 1.2 The report also fulfils the Council's recommendation in June 2009 that there is a 12 month review of the Neighbourhood Forums following the refresh in 2009 and present recommendations for their future development.

**2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-
- Delivering quality Services to our customers
  - Delivering regeneration across the Borough
  - Encouraging healthy and respectful communities
  - Keeping our Borough clean, green and safe
  - Promoting the Borough
  - Providing value for money services

**3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS**

All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- 3.1 Not to adopt the Neighbourhood Plans could affect the Council and its partners ability to deliver better services within a framework that focuses on

strengthening the role of elected members as community champions. But most importantly it is about empowering local people so they can influence how and by whom services are delivered in their interest.

- 3.2 The risk of not implementing the proposal may impact on the Council's ability to attract new and emerging funding as the Coalition Government's focus on Localism and Big Society is about allocating resources to authorities that demonstrate a drive and commitment to give more power to local people and their communities.
- 3.3 Not implementing the neighbourhood plans could detrimentally affect the reputation of the council with the members of the forum and the wider community who have been involved in the process of development of the plans and forums. This could further impact on future successful working between the council and the community, which would go against the government's vision of a 'Big Society'.
- 3.4 The successful delivery of the Neighbourhood Plans is reliant on all partners to work together.

#### **4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS**

##### **Neighbourhood Plans**

- 4.1 Agreement for the refresh of the four Neighbourhood Forums was approved by Council in June 2009, with the first meetings of the refreshed Forums taking place in September.
- 4.2 The main changes to the Forums consisted of an expansion in membership to make the Forums more inclusive, and a different format for the meetings to enable meaningful discussion and consultation to take place.
- 4.3 The aim of the Forums is to improve the quality of life for all Rossendale communities through ensuring that the services delivered are appropriate to the needs of local people, businesses and visitors. The Forums support elected members in their role as place shapers and civic leaders.
- 4.4 The Forums have a three way membership comprised of elected members, representatives from the local community and local service providers such as the Police, Primary Care Trust, Lancashire County Council and Greenvale Homes. Currently there are approximately 35 community members across all four Forums.
- 4.5 The membership of the Neighbourhood Forums meet four times a year, with the initial focus being on the development of the Neighbourhood Plan for their area - the local delivery plan for the Borough wide Sustainable Community Strategy. They also hold at least two consultation meetings a year which we encourage members of the public, local community groups etc. to attend.
- 4.6 Each Neighbourhood Forum is Chaired by an elected member and managed and supported by an Area Manager from the Communities Team. A senior

manager from Rossendale Borough Council is also included on the membership of each Forum to support the delivery of the plans.

- 4.7 As the Neighbourhood Forums are part of the Local Strategic Partnership structure the Neighbourhood Plans link the key local issues to be addressed and actions to the Community Strategy outcomes and performance indicators.
- 4.8 Draft Neighbourhood Plans for Rawtenstall, Haslingden, Helmshore and Edenfield, Bacup and Whitworth are attached as **Appendices 1 - 4**. The plans are three year plans, but the initial focus will be on the 12 month delivery plan, which is included as a separate summary document.
- 4.9 The process of developing the Plans has been key in ensuring that the Forums 'own' the Plans. Each Neighbourhood Forum has held at least three planning meetings and two public consultation meetings, primarily focussed on developing the Neighbourhood Plans. This community led, or 'bottom up' process has been necessary to get buy in from partners and the community and ensure the Plans reflect the priorities of local people.
- 4.10 The Plans are not just about Council services – but should reflect the issues of concern in each area. The process began with the Forums identifying the key challenges and issues in each area, and then identifying actions to address these key issues. Meetings have utilised small group work in order to ensure all members have been able to input into the plans.
- 4.11 The two consultation meetings gained wider views and comments on the priorities and actions in the Plans. The meetings were run as informal drop in sessions, with various interactive consultation mechanisms used to enable people to give their views. The consultation meetings have been well attended and the comments and views expressed have been incorporated into the draft Neighbourhood Plans as appropriate.
- 4.12 The findings from the consultation are also supported by evidence from other recent surveys such as the Place Survey and the consultation done by Forward Planning around the Core Strategy, as many of the same issues have come up. For example the top issues raised in the consultation around the Core Strategy were:
- Valley Centre in Rawtenstall
  - More local shops with greater variety-address vacancies
  - Support and enhance Tourism
  - Develop a commuter rail link to Manchester
  - Improving car parking
  - Activities and training for young people
  - Protect countryside/landscape
  - Enhance bus services
  - Decline of Bacup-needs regeneration
  - Traffic congestion

- 4.13 These are the same issues that have been raised in relation to the Neighbourhood Plans. This clearly identifies that we have a good body of evidence in putting the plan together.
- 4.14 The draft Neighbourhood Plans were discussed in detail at the July round of Neighbourhood Forums, and were issued for wider consultation via the website etc. and with key partners.
- 4.15 Responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of the Plans will be through the Neighbourhood Forums. Just as the community has been involved in all stages of the process of putting the Plans together, a key focus of the Forums is for the implementation of the Plans to be community driven.
- 4.16 The involvement of community members and community groups in the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plans is particularly important as it enables the Forums to harness the resources of the community in addressing local issues. This links well with current thinking and policy around the Big Society.
- 4.17 It is intended that the Neighbourhood Plans are fluid documents that will be updated regularly and can be added to as the Forums develop and new challenges and policy emerge. The Action Plans will be inserts in a covering document / folder for ease of updating. As well as allowing flexibility this also keeps the costs of producing the documents down
- 4.18 Implementation of the Plans is closely linked to the development of the Forums. It is crucial that the Forums do not work in isolation and that communities feel they are being listened to and work is being delivered in their neighbourhoods. As The Forums become more embedded in their communities they will become a focus for co-ordinating activity in each area and ensuring that services and initiatives are 'joined up'.
- 4.19 Ongoing community engagement activity and the work that will be done through the developing Customer Insight Strategy will further increase the Forums understanding of the area it covers.
- 4.20 The Plans cover a three year period from October 2010 – October 2013, however, in view of the current economic climate and the uncertainty over future budgets, it is proposed that the Forums focus on actions that can be delivered over the next 12 months and then review what progress has been made and what can be delivered in the medium and long term.

### **Review of the Neighbourhood Forums and future development**

- 4.21 The Neighbourhood Forums have developed since they were refreshed in June 2009 and need to continue to do so. Feedback so far has been very positive particularly from community members who have welcomed the opportunity to get more involved in determining and shaping services and more generally to find out more about what is going on in their local area. Feedback from the Forum meetings in July 2010 expressed a view that the current format of the

forum meetings is more productive and are certainly preferred when gauging them against the previous format.

4.22 Benefits, particularly in terms of information sharing, are being seen through the Forums and joint actions are being taken such as the production of the What's On Guide in Bacup. In addition links are being made through the Forums that result in joint projects and action outside of the meetings. As the action plans are implemented, the benefits of the Forums will become more apparent.

4.23 Not every community group or community focused individual would wish to be a member of a Forum. However, their thoughts and ideas need to be captured and harnessed. It is therefore imperative that the Council and its partners engage with all sections of the community. The Neighbourhood Forums should be seen as part of a developing network of community engagement but community members have a key role to play in being the link between the Forums and the groups they represent. In addition to the role of the Neighbourhood Forums in tackling priorities in the local area the Forums have a key role in engaging with local communities and this is done in a number of ways.

- Each Neighbourhood Forum has a number of community members who represent local community and residents groups. A particular benefit of the Forums, highlighted by the Chairs, has been the flow of information to and from community members.
- Work is taking place throughout the Council to engage with various specific groups including the BME community, young people and people from rural communities.
- Consultation meetings of the Forums are held at least twice a year and members of the public are encouraged to attend these meetings. The format of the public meetings is chosen to enable real engagement and information sharing and different formats for the public meetings are being explored.
- Officers from the Communities Team regularly attend a variety of community group meetings and events, estate walkabouts etc. to engage with and build longer term relationships with communities across Rossendale.
- The Neighbourhood Forums are emerging as a route for engaging with local people and communities in a meaningful way and providing a mechanism for identifying and addressing community aspirations and priorities. As key partners such as the Police, Primary Care Trust, LCC and Greenvale Homes as well as the Council are represented on the Forums, they are able to take a joint, partnership approach to addressing issues across all partner agencies.

## Future development of the Forums

4.24 In terms of the future development of the Forums, discussion took place at the July Forum meetings and a number of key themes emerged:

- **Improving local democracy and community engagement** – The Forums have made a good start in engaging with local people and groups, but there is scope for many more people to be involved in the Forums, via community membership and community members, sub-groups, public meetings, linked networks etc.
- **Giving shape and meaning to the Big Society in Rossendale** - working with local groups and people on the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plans and encouraging people to take more responsibility for addressing issues in their local area.
- **Communication** – The Neighbourhood Forums have a key role to play in co-ordinating information and activity in an area and keeping people informed about services and activities, including elected members. Suggestions for ways of improving communication include greater use of the website, Facebook and Twitter, newsletters, e-mail networks etc. as well as using the Forum meetings to share information and showcase local groups and projects.

4.25 The Forums will need continued commitment from the Council and its partners to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plans are jointly implemented and that the Forums continue to engage with local communities.

4.26 As reported in the Neighbourhood Forums - *Putting Communities First* report in June 2009 partners asked that consideration be given to reducing the number of Forums as they felt that it would be increasingly difficult to resource four separate Forum. Partners have indicated that this is still a challenge, particularly with the drive for efficiencies within the public sector.

4.27 The pressure on resources, particularly in terms of staff time is acknowledged but as the four Neighbourhood Plans need to be implemented, it is felt that the four separate Forums should continue for the present time. In order to reduce the officer time involved, consideration will be given to reducing the number of meetings scheduled and holding merged and themed meetings where there are items of common interest.

4.28 The draft Neighbourhood Plans have been presented to the LSP and to LCC. The LSP endorsed the Plans on 7 October and LCC Cabinet approved the County Council actions in the Neighbourhood Plans without amendment on 7 October.

## **COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:**

### **5. SECTION 151 OFFICER**

- 5.1 Within the Communities Team, Regenerate East Lancashire resources finance an Area Manager and two Area Officers as part of the infrastructure that supports the Neighbourhood Forums. The future of this funding stream will only become clearer once the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review has been published.
- 5.2 The Communities Team along with other Council departments will be tasked to deliver against some of the actions identified within the Neighbourhood Plans with other actions being supported by other agencies and partners. The Council should therefore continue to ensure that it manages expectations in line with its available resources, both financial or otherwise.

### **6. MONITORING OFFICER**

- 6.1 Any legal implications are addressed within the body of the report.

### **7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)**

- 7.1 Any human resource implications are addressed within the body of the report.

### **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 As clarity emerges around the Coalition Government's Big Society and what that practically means to people who live, work and visit Rossendale, the Neighbourhood Forums are well positioned to influence and shape local service provision and engage with local communities to jointly address local issues and ultimately commission services.
- 8.2 The Neighbourhood Plans will begin to influence the way resources and services are delivered at the neighbourhood level. They are embedding themselves as a mechanism for improved community engagement and partnership working. Only by the ongoing commitment by all partners to the Forums will the Plans be implemented successfully.
- 8.3 Mindful of the economic climate, the aim has been to reflect the aspirations of the community whilst being careful not to raise expectations or include unrealistic actions. That is why the plans have a vision for the next three years but will initially focus on delivering against a twelve month plan.

### **9. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 9.1 That Cabinet notes the development of the Neighbourhood Plans.
- 9.2 That Cabinet approves the Neighbourhood Plans and that they are presented to Council for approval and are submitted to our partners for example the

Police, PCT, Greenvale Homes, Fire Service and Community sector for their approval.

9.3 That Cabinet notes the feedback from the 12 month review highlighted in 4.21 to 4.27 and recommends the continuation of the Neighbourhood Forums as outlined in the Operational Framework.

9.4 That future minor amendments to the Neighbourhood Forum Operational Framework and the Neighbourhood Plans be delegated to the Director of Customers and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

## 10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 As outlined above, the following consultation has been carried out:

- Consultation with Neighbourhood Forum Members
- Consultation with the council's database of interested residents
- Consultation with the wider community through public drop-in sessions
- Consultation with the wider community through the 'Have Your Say' section of the website.

## 11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Community Impact Assessment required Yes

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached Yes

## 12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached No

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of inspection
Appendix 1: Rawtenstall	Attached to the report
Appendix 2: Haslingden, Helmshore and Edenfield	Attached to the report
Appendix 3: Bacup	Attached to the report
Appendix 4: Whitworth	Attached to the report



Community Impact Assessment Neighbourhood Forum Operational Framework	Attached to the report Council Constitution <a href="http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=302">http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=302</a>
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