

AGENDA ITEM NO 9

TITLE: Neighbourhood Panels

Committee: Community and Environment Committee

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[M212]

1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To review the performance of the Neighbourhood Panels.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members are recommended to:

- (i) Note the issues raised in this report and the comments identified at the Scrutiny Committee (held on the 27th November 2012)
- (ii) Instruct Officers to instigate a Service Review of Neighbourhood Panels with a draft Terms of Reference presented to the next Committee meeting.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2005 the Home Office launched the Neighbourhood Policing Model, which was a national project, which had to be rolled out across the Country by 2008. The Neighbourhood Policing Model included setting up Neighbourhood Consultation Panels to ensure that citizens were consulted on police priorities in their local community.
- 3.2 In East Cambridgeshire, recognising a significant opportunity, the Council and Constabulary worked together to develop a model of Neighbourhood Panel that would include wider involvement from service providers and transparent involvement for the general public, together with an open and accountable decision making process.
- 3.3 East Cambridgeshire District Council agreed to work with the Constabulary to set up a 6-month Neighbourhood Panel pilot for Soham and the surrounding villages. This was very successful and was extended by a further 6 months and then made permanent across the District in 2008.
- 3.4 East Cambridgeshire is divided into five Panel areas that hold meetings quarterly and take action on the issues raised at those meetings, reporting back the results at the next meeting. The Panels are also used as a consultation forum and as a place to share information amongst Parish Councils and between the Parish, District and County Councils. Partners also

aspire to tackle strategic issues affecting our communities using a multi-agency approach.

3.5 Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Sanctuary Housing are the main partners in the Panel process. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service also contribute as necessary. Parish Councils have majority representation on each Panel to ensure that the Panels have a local focus.

4.0 PERFORMANCE SINCE JUNE/JULY 11

4.1 A breakdown of attendance at Neighbourhood Panels has been recorded since the June/July 2011 round of Panels and is attached at Appendix A. A summary of members of the public attendance figures for Neighbourhood Panels Jun/Jul 11 – Oct 12 is provided in the table below.

Panel Area	Jun/Jul 11	Oct 11	Jan 12	Mar / Apr 12	Jun/ July 12	Oct 12	Total for 6 Panels
South	8	15	4	12	5	9	53
Soham and East	14	15	13	12	7	5	66
West	7	14	8	10	6	7	52
Ely	30	25	25	31	27	25	163
Littleport	20	19	21	20	10	12	102

Note: This analysis does not account for repeat attendance (which the vast majority of attendees are), thus the figures are actually significantly lower than detailed above.

4.2 Since the June/July 2011 round of Panels there have been 78 priorities identified. A total of 16 priorities (or 20%) were the responsibility of ECDC to address. Every Panel area with the exception of Ely has raised at least two ECDC issues during this period (a total of 6 meetings).

4.3 Appendix B summarises the priorities agreed at the Neighbourhood Panels since Jan 2011. A response was given on every issue raised through the Neighbourhood Panel process, not just those prioritised in Appendix B.

4.4 Appendix B shows clear patterns of concern for the Panel meetings that have remained consistent since they began in 2008. In addition to area specific themes for each panel, the following remain district-wide concerns:

- Anti-Social Behaviour (particularly linked to alcohol and drugs)
- Fly-tipping and Litter
- Driving and parking related issues

4.5 The Neighbourhood Panel Newsletters detail some of the successes that the Panels have achieved. A selection of the issues tackled are summarised below:

Panel Area	Issue and Action Taken	Issue and Action Taken
South	<p><u>Fly-tipping and litter on verges.</u> Action: Additional resource was added to the cleansing side of the waste contract, and litter picking has been undertaken along the A14 and verges in the South of the district.</p>	<p><u>Anti-social Behaviour in Burwell</u> Action: A multi-agency ASB Project Group was set up to tackle ASB and as a result ASB fell and remains low.</p>
Soham and East	<p><u>Reducing Inconsiderate and Obstructive Parking throughout Panel area</u> Action: 110 non-endorsable penalty tickets issued for various offences, obstruction, parking on double yellow lines, parking without disabled permit overstaying in limited waiting bays.</p>	<p><u>ASB at Barleyfields & Cloverfields Estate, Soham</u> Action: Continued high visibility patrols by Police officers and PCSOs alongside engagement with local groups especially teenagers.</p>
West	<p><u>Drugs Activity in Haddenham</u> Action: Patrols in plain clothes and in marked vehicles have continued in the area to gather intelligence and there has been a significant reduction in such offences. Four individuals have been prosecuted for possession of Cannabis, two of these suspected of supplying young people with the drug.</p>	<p><u>How to secure road safety improvements to minor roads.</u> Action: The County Council has revised its speed limit policy and where the county council is unable to respond to a request for a change in speed limit in a settlement, because it does not meet the criteria, local communities will be able to decide on the setting of speed limits in their settlements, provided that they are willing to cover the costs involved.</p>
Littleport	<p><u>Underpass at Station road filling with water at Station Road</u> Action: The underpass is now clear of water and Network Rail has put this ditch on a programme for regular maintenance.</p>	<p><u>To work with partners to try and tackle issues of speeding and parking in Littleport</u> Action: Additional Patrols have resulted in 15 Fixed Penalty Notices. Work continues with the District Council to run a pilot project to try and tackle parking problems in the area of primary schools. Support offered to Speed watch following problems experienced with a speeding driver.</p>
Ely	<p><u>Acquisitive Crime across the panel area</u> Action: As part of efforts to tackle metal theft, officers visited local scrap dealers on a daily basis, recording who is weighing in. This information is used to target known criminals and is passed to other agencies. A priority offender's vehicle used to transport suspected stolen scrap metal was seized and the owner prosecuted.</p>	<p><u>Tackle ASB in Ely City Centre</u> Action: 7 persons given PNDs or charged with Public Order offences. Numerous stop searches and patrols carried out by PCs and PCSOs and alcohol confiscated on a number of occasions and persons moved on (DPPO). S27 directions to leave notices have also been issued on a number of occasions. Two Designed Public Place Orders (DPPO) are in place and a number of successful interventions have occurred as a result.</p>

5.0 PANEL CONSULTATION

- 5.1 As a key partner in the Panel process, surveys were sent to the Parish Councils to ascertain what value they place on the NP's. From a total of 35 City/Town and Parish Councils, a total of 15 responses were received. By Panel area: 1 response was received in Ely; 1 response was received in Littleport; 3 responses from Soham and East; 3 from parishes in the West and 7 in the South Panel area.
- 5.2 The consultation exercise asked a number of questions regarding the purpose and usefulness of the Panels. With regard to how valuable the neighbourhood panel meetings are to Parish Councils (1 being the most valuable and 5 being the least valuable) the average score across the panels was 2.4, with the panel which feels they are of most value is Ely and least valuable is Littleport and South.
- 5.3 The response to the value of the panel meetings to members of your community suggests they are perceived to be less valuable with the exception of Ely, with 3 areas averaging the least valuable score.
- 5.4 Responses were divided over the purpose of Panels and adherence to the Terms of Reference of the Panel Meetings. The South Parish Councils appear divided over their purpose, Littleport concluded that in parts the Terms of Reference had been adhered to, whilst Ely was a certain yes.
- 5.5 Appendix C summarises the findings from the questionnaire sent to all Parish/Town and City Councils. Data from panel areas with multi-parishes have been collated.
- 5.6 Overall across the panels there is mixed feeling about the value, effectiveness and future of Neighbourhood Panels. It shows that the current model does not reflect the needs of all 5 panel areas.
- 5.7 A clear message of concern has been received from Littleport Parish Council with the view that Panel Meetings are of limited value, with the exception of information sharing, presentation and consultation, and are not a good use of resources.
- 5.8 Conversely, the current model is valued by the City of Ely Council who feel they are of high value to community members, a good use of ECDC officers' time and have resolved community issues. The City of Ely Council suggest panels should be advertised more in the local press or on market stalls.
- 5.9 In the South, a number of Parish Councils believed the meetings had no value to them or the local community and 3 Parish Councils have formally agreed not to provide a representative at the Panel meetings. Nevertheless a strong view was expressed that the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Panels should not be judged by the number of residents attending the meeting but a forum for Parish Council to get together. The general

consensus was that meetings should focus on more strategic issues rather than more operational issues, such as dog fouling and fly tipping.

5.10 Responses from Soham and East and the West Villages were few and this makes it difficult to draw any conclusions. General feedback is that the meetings are more beneficial for Parish Councils than community members which can be evidenced by the declining public attendance. Suggested improvements include focusing more on community issues and advertising more or changing the current format to 'drop in sessions'.

6.0 KEY ISSUES/CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Appraising the performance of the Neighbourhood Panels over the past two years, a number of observations can be made:

- (i) Attendance by the Parish Councils and members of the general public is decreasing
- (ii) Less key priorities and new issues are being raised at Panel Meetings
- (iii) Increased staffing resource has been invested by ECDC in the delivery of the Panels
- (iv) Recognition across most panel areas that the value of the meetings are to resolve issues that require cross agency working

6.2 In the past year, Cambridgeshire County Council in partnership with strategic bodies, including East Cambridgeshire District Council, have launched 'ShapeYourPlace'. This web-based community engagement tool provides local people with the opportunity to improve their neighbourhood, raise issues and learn about things in the local community.

6.3 Launched on the 5th of April 2012, the 'ShapeYourPlace' site has 5 East Cambridgeshire WebPages that mirror our Neighbourhood Panel areas; Ely, Littleport, West Villages, Soham and East Villages and South Villages. The common District Council issues that are raised across the site are; waste and recycling, road improvements and general information regarding funding bids and consultations. ECDC officers have been pro-active in posting information, consultations and changes to services. Since May there has been in excess of 5,000 unique visitors and 14,500 total visits across the 5 East Cambs sites.

6.4 Neighbourhood Panels are not a statutory requirement for any public body other than the Police Service. The District Council has taken on the administration and financial costs arising from these meetings on the basis that they are a valuable method of community engagement, partnership working and consultation. As new technologies become available, social

media has clearly become a more accessible tool for community engagement as demonstrated by Shape Your Place. It is five years since the Panels were implemented across this district and Members are therefore asked to re-evaluate the purpose and delivery of Neighbourhood Panels in the context of recent performance, comments from the Parish Councils and use of new social media.

- 6.5 The Scrutiny Committee on 27th November 2012 considered the findings of this paper and were broadly in agreement with the conclusions raised in this report. It was suggested that Ely was a panel meeting that had maintained its initial purpose whilst others needed to be reviewed, particularly in the rural areas. The role of the Parish Councils was discussed, encouraging operational issues to be dealt with outside the panel meeting and for Parish Councils to meet more regularly with fellow Parish Councils. Recognition was given to the needs of the residents and the ability to provide a choice of both meeting and web based engagement. The Committee resolved to recommend that these issues be considered by way of a Service Review.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The District Council provides administrative support to the Panels. A total of 9 officers support the 5 panels, with a further 5 Heads of Service providing support to the Panel Chairman and other Panel Members as required. The Facilities Team also provide support at the meetings. Other resources provided by the Council are printing, room hire and refreshments. Partner agencies also provide officer support at Panels and in between meetings. This estimated cost to the Council of providing this function is £13,000 per annum.

- 7.2 No INRA is required.

8.0 APPENDICES

- 8.1 Appendix A – Neighbourhood Panel Attendance Figures
8.2 Appendix B – Priorities Identified by Neighbourhood Panel Area
8.3 Appendix C – Results of Parish Council Consultation

Background

Documents

Neighbourhood Panel
Terms of Reference

Location

Rm FF107
The Grange
Ely

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