

SOUTH

This cluster has particular challenges in that it is a mix of urban and rural, parished and non-parished areas with some well established forums which are already operating in accordance with the CPCP objectives. This has the potential to create a diverse range of priorities across the area covered, and to require different ways of working.

The initial approach has been to plug into as many organisations and their associated meetings as possible across the cluster, to better understand the issues and potential demands, and to convince people that the council is serious in its aims. The variety and number of these organisations has meant that this process is lengthy and is ongoing.

The first meeting specific to CPCP was held in Wroughton with local organisations from across the cluster, and was attended – as all meetings have been – by all the ward councillors from within the cluster, who are involved and supportive. Priorities and other concerns were discussed and ranked in order of importance and has since informed members thinking.

The second meeting held in Old Town and Lawn was aimed at residents, who had the opportunity to feed their views into a number of local issues in discussion with service providers. Also attending were residents from the Wichelstowe development, who were keen to do more for themselves within their emerging new community. CPCP has provided the council with a timely opportunity to engage with them and a meeting between council officers, ward members and partners was held in Wichelstowe at the request of the residents in early December. This proved to be extremely useful in developing a way forward, and in helping those residents feel that the council and its partners are interested in supporting their desire to develop their community.

A further meeting was held in Wanborough Primary School aimed at residents in that part of the Cluster. Although not particularly well attended, it provided those living in that area and council officers with the opportunity to meet and discuss local concerns, and crucially in discussion with planning and bus operators, some outstanding issues were resolved there and then.

The Old Town and Lawn Area Panel have scheduled meetings with residents and their representatives. The Police will use these meetings as their consultation platform.

The principal benefit cited by both chair and lead are the fact that the programme has provided a point of contact with the council for people and organisations across the cluster, and links across council services to develop a more joined-up approach. The reaction from those who have attended events has been largely very positive to what the council is trying to do. It has also helped foster a better atmosphere between the council and those communities within the cluster which are not part of the main Swindon urban conurbation and which have traditionally not identified strongly with the town or the Borough, and reconciling some of those disparate views.

There is a genuine feeling that something positive is now beginning to emerge, and that if the Council continues to endeavour to meet the communities' needs, we will be able to realise the true potential of CPCP.

NORTH CENTRAL

CPCP events have been held during Autumn 2009 and a calendar of future events has been produced. For example, a Cluster-wide Forum for the public on “Health in the Community” was held in Gorse Hill Baptist Church with stalls staffed by the Council and other agencies, including the Fire Brigade and Primary Care Trust. A number of the planned CPCP events for 2010 will be organised jointly with other Council Directorates, external partners and the community.

The CPCP programme has been handed an opportunity off the back of what was initially a source of disappointment to many in this area, the delays to the building of the Pinetrees Community Centre in Pinehurst. These delays now mean that there is an opportunity to use CPCP to give the community more say in the services provided by the centre, and involve them in running it. This project will form an important part of the Cluster’s future work, and its success will be a key measure of how effective the programme could be. An initial consultation event was held in February at the Academy, which included preliminary building design plans for the Community Centre. There will be a further consultation event on the building designs and ongoing engagement with key community groups and representatives on the development and running of the Centre. The project will also involve wider community development activities that will create support for what happens in the centre and in the community.

Ward councillors are already very familiar with many of the issues affecting their individual wards and the concerns of local residents. However, meetings have been held with council officers from key service areas, such as community engagement, StreetSmart and transport, and with partner organisations, such as the police and PCT. This has allowed a better understanding of the issues from their perspective, and identified potential ways to move forward.

The cluster lead has been to a variety of community meetings such as the Penhill Forum, Pinehurst Initiative Forum, and with Gorse Hill Residents’ Association, and organises meetings with all ward councillors every six weeks to review progress. CPCP has also been promoted at existing and established events such as the Pinehurst Fun Day. Potential links between the Clivey youth facility in Pinehurst, the Academy and other organisations are being explored. In addition, CPCP-related events with the Western Ward Councillors have been held at Even Swindon Community Centre, including a public meeting on parking issues in the local area.

Plans for a tennis pavilion at the newly refurbished St Marks Recreation Ground have been identified as a priority for ward councillors. A potential source of funding from the Lawn Tennis Association has been identified, but requires match funding from the council. Officers from Leisure and the Cluster Lead made a presentation to Gavin’s Den to bid for this match funding and are hopeful of a positive outcome.

The overall approach in this cluster has been one of steadily building a comprehensive, joined-up picture across the entire area to identify priorities for the Cluster Plan, which is being developed.

WEST SWINDON

In West Swindon, many of the aims of CPCP have already been seen in action, and momentum is gathering. A clear example came from the unexpected closure of the Freshbrook Community Centre following the removal of the charitable status of its managing trust by the Charity Commission.

Local groups were left without a place to meet and residents were concerned at the impact of the closure, and were pressing local members to solve the problem.

The cluster lead was able to cut through council procedures to rapidly re-open the centre to hold a meeting with residents to discuss the way forward. More than one hundred people turned up to the meeting. The community pulled together and formed a steering group to get the centre reopened. They have identified what they want in future from the Centre and have produced a business plan, set up a new committee and are in the process of gaining charitable status. They have been supported by Ward Members and officers, but they have driven the changes and response themselves.

The meeting also allowed members and officers to explain the position quickly to the community, turning a negative situation into something positive and preventing misplaced dissatisfaction with the council – which was not responsible for the situation – from taking hold.

As part of CPCP there have been regular meetings in West Swindon, advertised mainly through flyers delivered door-to-door by members. The attendance at all has been very encouraging, with many new faces, varying with the issues under discussion. There have been some notable achievements where residents have sorted out the issues for themselves (such as parking, clearing brambles, school patrols). They have also created their own very effective web forum, to support the meetings.

The clear success of the forums in West Swindon encouraged the police to amalgamate their tasking meeting with the forum for the first time in January, when a lively and constructive discussion with residents led the police to change their policing priorities in direct response to local residents' concerns. Police engagement in the process brings obvious benefits.

It is fair to say that West Swindon has had a head start in some respects compared to other cluster areas. The long-running West Swindon Community Forums run by local members were a well-understood concept so 'bolting' CPCP to this did not need a huge leap in understanding. West Swindon is also a clear geographic area and community in its own right, which is mirrored by the CPCP cluster boundary.

Nevertheless, the CPCP initiative has re-energised the local process and brought a clearer focus. Residents feel more informed and involved, and CPCP has proved that local people are willing to help sort out local issues themselves if they are encouraged and supported. Even when progress on an issue is slower than they would like, such as removing the speed humps on Freshbrook Way, they are now far more likely to appreciate and understand why this is the case.

TOWN CENTRE

In this cluster there is no shortage of residents and community groups who are keen to improve the area and are strong advocates for this, and equally the ward councillors have a thorough understanding of the issues.

What CPCP has done is create a mechanism which gives those groups and residents more confidence and trust that the council as a whole is serious about reaching out to them, and is genuine in its desire to work with them. As a result, the level and quality of debate and engagement has improved to everyone's mutual benefit. It has already triggered a number of modest but nonetheless potentially significant developments. For instance, the police have been linked to the council team responsible for licensing houses in multiple occupancy, which has allowed them to be more effective in dealing with landlords with properties in Broad Green where rooms have been used for prostitution.

On a larger scale, environmental action days being planned by groups in both Broad Green and Eastcott, which will be largely scoped and planned by them with support from the council. Schools are also being invited to take part, helping to bring young people into the programme and helping them understand the wider issues. Local ward members have agreed to go into Drove Junior School to talk about local democracy and accountability.

CPCP has also allowed discussions about the running of the Central Community Centre to be placed back on the table after a period when residents believed the council was being obstructive over their desire to be more involved. The way forward is now being discussed, and in a hugely improved atmosphere.

The cluster has also taken on the challenge of finding out the views of people via social networking, the Cluster Chair is using networking sites and engaging with residents via Facebook. The cluster lead is writing a regular blog and other Members being encouraged through training to use these new tools to get to the heart of what matters to everyone in the community, not just those groups or individuals who are already engaged.

The cluster lead has regular meetings with all ward councillors and with community groups, with the focus now on reaching the faith groups to draw them into the process – for instance, meeting with the leader of the Mosque to try to resolve the long-standing issue of car parking in the area.

EAST

Work in this cluster was interrupted during the year due to change in the Cluster Lead when the previous incumbent left the Council.

The cluster is extremely diverse in both the political make-up of the ward members, and demographically. Following discussions with the cluster chair and meetings with partners and ward councillors, the continuing approach will be to focus on the individual communities which make up the cluster, rather than to try a one size fits all approach to the whole area.

There have been extensive discussions with partners. Work has been done with the police and fire services to understand their priorities and activities within the cluster, which have been useful and revealing. Both services gave examples of where the Council had been difficult to deal with, not necessarily because staff were or are being obstructive, but because our working practices are not efficient or capable of responding quickly.

A meeting with all Ward Members and the Cluster Chair was held in February, to set the groundwork for moving the Cluster forward.

NORTH

An early meeting in this cluster showed a great deal of promise, with more than 300 people turning up to a meeting at the Tawny Owl pub, on the theme of free time and leisure. The event was attended by all Ward Councillors from the cluster, with input from relevant council departments such as libraries, arts and leisure, parish councils from within the cluster, and partners such as the police. Many of the visitors to the event were interested in having a say over the future plans for Mouldon Hill Country Park, and the proposed scheme has been modified following the input from residents directly gained from the event. There was a general view expressed that holding the event in a pub was a good idea. It's clear it reached people who wouldn't otherwise have attended a more formal event held in a community building, because some of the visitors were there to visit the pub and took part in the event when they saw it was happening.

Off the back of this another event was held at North Swindon library on the theme of Independence and Wellbeing, but perhaps because of the type of people this event would appeal to, the turnout was less high, at around 80, and it is a possibility that some were there simply because the library building was open on a day when it was normally closed. As a result of the lessons learned with the second event, events themed on Senior Wellbeing, which are now being planned will be taken to venues such as residential homes for the elderly instead.

It is clear that the police presence at all events has proved to be popular with visitors, and a cluster event themed around the police is being planned to happen before May at the Orbital Retail Park.

Some of the lessons learned within this cluster are that the involvement of neighbourhood engagement officers is important to the process; the level of enthusiasm from parish councils towards CPCP has varied widely, and the diverse demographic make-up of the cluster makes identifying common themes and priorities difficult. It's also been apparent that the presence of different council departments at events has improved communication between them.

NORTH EAST

This cluster is geographically split, and comprises four wards and four Town/Parish Councils. Among them is Highworth, which is a distinct town and community its own right with an active Town Council. For this reason, attention was focused here first. Following a meeting between the Town Council members and the cluster lead, where previous perceived problems in working with the Borough were aired, the Council elected a member to liaise directly with the cluster lead and a positive atmosphere has been achieved with issues for further co-operation identified.

The first cluster event was held at the Messenger pub in Covingham in October, between 2 and 7pm on a weekday. The turnout was disappointing, although many people who were just visiting the pub saw what was happening and did give useful feedback. Council officers who attended were able to talk about issues such as flooding, highways and the Eastern Development Area, libraries and Children's Services, but it was the police presence that appeared to be the most popular.

Meetings with the three Parish Councils within the cluster have yielded results, with each coming back with an issue it wishes to work with the Borough Council to improve. The cluster lead has also acted to cut through some of the council's procedures to get things done on some issues brought to the cluster by residents, which have been resolved more quickly than would probably have been achieved otherwise. As in other clusters, the council's own bureaucracy, and poor communication between departments, has been brought into focus as a reason as to why progress on resolving seemingly simple and straightforward matters can be slow.

The Cluster Chair has commented that a huge amount of work has been involved in setting up meetings and getting responses from groups and organisations in order to move things on, simply because of the large number of wards, parish councils and community groups that are within the cluster.

Work is now continuing to with existing community groups and the Parish Councils to set priorities.