

## Statement to Cabinet on Connecting Communities Engagement Framework on 8.5.13

I wish to make it clear I am speaking on my own behalf with experience of Partnerships within B&NES council of some 10 years which includes being Chairman of the Chew Valley Partnership since it was formed 5 years ago and Chair of the Stronger Communities Delivery Partnership.

It has for sometime been necessary to form some structure for communities of geography and interest to have some way of interacting with other partnerships and now the Public Services Board. The Stronger Communities Delivery Partnership struggled with lack of finance – it is difficult to deliver without any money, nevertheless it bought interested parties together. Another difficulty is that part of the area is NES has parish councils while Bath does not.

I therefore welcome this initiative but I do have some reservations which I am sure can be overcome.

The first is that at the moment this is a top down exercise. In my view for this to succeed it needs to change to a bottom up exercise with the communities taking the lead albeit with a lot of help and direction from the Policy & Partnership team.

The second is the term 'cluster groups'. We already have cluster groups where clusters of Parish Councils meet with B&NES where the Parishes provide written questions and written answers are provided. Some Parish Councils have viewed these as a waste of time for example Keynsham Town Council have not attended a cluster meeting for more than six years and do not feel they have missed out on anything. My concern is that the term cluster group being used again may put off some parishes and could cause unnecessary confusion.

I am also concerned about Keynsham and Chew Valley having 2 separate cluster groups while we have one Partnership currently. My concern is heightened by the fact that Keynsham is being chosen as a pilot cluster while the Chew Valley is not and they may therefore feel left behind. I notice that the Somer Valley Partnership remains intact.

I hope my concerns can be looked at seriously in an attempt to overcome them. I can advise you that parish Councils In North Somerset and South Glos are envious of the Partnership arrangements we have here in Bath & North East Somerset. One of their problems is that stronger and safety partnerships are one partnership which results in stronger issues being pushed to one side for safety issues.

Tony Crouch

8 May 2013