Parishes Liaison Meeting, 19ᵗʰ June: Connecting Communities

Aim of this briefing
This note (and short presentation to the meeting) aims to brief Parishes on the "Connecting Communities" initiative. This is a new programme, jointly adopted by public services in Bath and North East Somerset (including the Council, Police, Fire and Rescue, Curo and Health services) to simplify and improve the way we engage with local groups and residents.

Background
Bath and North East Somerset has over the years developed a number of ways through which the Council, other public services, parish councils and local residents work together to tackle local issues. These include:
- Parishes Liaison meetings
- The Partners and Communities Together (PACT) process
- The Parish Cluster Groups
- Local area partnerships- including the Environs of Bath Committee, Chew Valley Area Partnership, Valley Parishes Alliance and Somer Valley Partnership

There are also effective working relationships between individual parishes and public services, backed up by the Parish Charter. Parish and Town plans too have helped to clarify local priorities and engage public services and communities in projects to address local concerns.

These systems are generally "good" – but it is sometimes unclear about what issues should be raised at which body, which can lead to duplication of effort. There are also frustrations about how issues, once raised, are addressed, particularly in the light of funding challenges and changing public expectations.

"Connecting Communities" is therefore about addressing these challenges, and has an ambition for public services to become "excellent" at local engagement by:
- Listening- responding quickly and positively to new ideas
- Prioritising- being flexible to local circumstances
- Joining Up- public services co-ordinating how they engage locally and not "re-inventing the wheel"
- Working with you- helping communities find solutions to local problems
- Sharing ideas - encourages joint working and sharing "what works"

In doing this, local public services are particularly keen to help parishes and community groups to test new ideas and to grow successful ones. A "toolkit" has been created which gives examples of the various ways community needs can be met, and giving practical examples of what has happened locally. These range from the use of the new "community rights (as at South Stoke, where the Parish council has successfully nominated an asset for the new Assets of Community Value Register) to Snow Wardens, Community Libraries and Village Agents.

New initiatives are coming forward all the time, including the "crowdsourcing" of data about flooding and new ways of delivering community broadband

Connecting Communities: Next Steps
Connecting Communities will be built initially around the geography of Parish Cluster groups. This will enable:

- The building of local "Cluster Group Profiles" which will identify key assets and needs
- Work to take place within each Parish Cluster Group to streamline and simplify consultation and engagement processes
- Lead officers to be identified to act as a "single point of contact" for new ideas
- New initiatives and good ideas to be shared

The intention is to pilot this approach in two Cluster Group areas in the parished area and one within Bath City.

Since the Connecting Communities Programme aims to encourage change and innovation it is therefore open to suggestions for new and enhanced ways of working, particularly where this involves collaboration across parishes.

Further Information about Connecting Communities

Cabinet report- Connecting Communities

http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s25447/Connecting%20Communities.pdf

View the Webcast of the discussion on this item (item 14)

http://www.bathnes.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/103908

Connecting Communities Framework

http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s25448/App%201%20CC%20Framework.pdf

Connecting Communities Toolkit

http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s25449/App%202%20CC%20Toolkit.pdf

Connecting Communities Action Plan

http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s25450/App%203%20CC%20Action%20Plan.pdf

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