

Parish Liaison Meeting, 19th February 2014 – Connecting Communities

1. Aim of this briefing

This briefing note updates on the progress of Connecting Communities over the previous 4 months (Parishes Liaison having received updates on 19th June and 16th October 2013), including identifying the emerging framework and next steps.

2. Update

Work has continued on implementing Connecting Communities in the Keynsham/Chew Valley and the Somer Valley Cluster Areas. This has focused on how new arrangements can strengthen collaboration between public services, parishes and local communities. The following Connecting Communities Framework has emerged from these discussions:

- Cluster Forums to comprise local elected members, public services, Parish Councils; and also voluntary and community groups, residents and businesses, as appropriate to local circumstances. These Forums will adopt a common “core agenda” to ensure key issues identified locally are addressed, including
 - Channelling concerns to those best placed to deal with them
 - Receiving reports from local projects and updates from public services to see the “big picture” of what’s going on locally
 - Progressing initiatives based on local needs

Cluster Forums will not generally deal directly with complaints and issues about individual services and there is a presumption also that individual schemes will be discussed and any issues resolved separately wherever possible and only raised if there are impacts across the Cluster area. Neither will Forums have any locus for:

- Development Control and regulatory matters
- Delegated decision-making including budgets and funding

It is expected that Clusters will come together in networks for wider community engagement, either through an event (as with the Bath City Conference), use of social media or other ways of getting as many people involved as possible.

This framework will provide a clear structure for closer joint working. As part of this offer, a Council Director-level sponsor will be appointed for each Cluster and a locality team of officers established to help get things done. In Bath, the South East Bath pilot is being progressed and is being linked with local regeneration initiatives such as Foxhill and the Enterprise Area.

3. Next Steps

One of the aims of Connecting Communities is to have fewer, better meetings. As a result, it is expected that the current Parish Cluster Group meetings will be absorbed into the Connecting Communities Forums. Work will therefore take place through the Bathavon South and Bathavon North Parish Cluster Group meetings to establish them as Connecting Communities Forums as above. Given that these arrangements, as with Parishes Liaison itself, are included in the Parish Charter it is proposed that work now be undertaken to amend and update the Charter to reflect the Connecting Communities approach.