

## **Community Engagement Scrutiny Review**

### **Notes from meeting of members of the Community Engagement Task Group with Parish Council Liaison Group (PCLG) on 13 March 2013**

PCLG Representatives present: Peter Powell (Chairman), Gerry Cheetham, Peter Jesse, Brian Mellors. Plus Andrew Towleron (YLCA Officer), Mora Scaife - CYC

#### Key Points –

- The difference between central wards within the inner city boundary and parished ward was noted. The Council has a regular dialogue with the Housing Associations within the city; but these have selective views from the ones outside the inner city. There is therefore a different relationship emphasis between the inner and outer city housing areas.
- Parished wards operate in different ways dependant in many cases on the attitudes of the elected Member towards Parish Councils. Where there is strong liaison, there appears to be more activity and a willingness to work together.
- Many local councillors engage with their local PCs (many Ward Cllrs are also Parish Cllrs) Many attend PC monthly meetings, but some don't – the PCLG felt this should be consistently the case.
- PCs preferred method of communication was face to face – Support from the NMU was a great help and so were ward councillors who were in touch.
- In some areas of the CYC administration, communication with PCs was unfortunately not always satisfactory or meeting the specifications of the agreed local charter.
- Reduced staffing levels at the Council, were to the disadvantage of PCs and had lead to CYC failing to reply to correspondence within the time scales set out in the Local Councils Charter.
- Many PC Clerks and residents found the new CYC website difficult to trawl. They queried whether Area forums could be provided via CYC's

website where links to all the relevant types of info provided by CYC could be found.

- PCs would like to have a better understanding of the budget decision-making process.
- People will often respond if there is an amount of money to be spent in their area, even if the amount is small. PCs could help to inform the decisions around use of available ward committee funding as well as for their own funds.
- Parishes had completed their budgets for 2013/14 before the end of January and the precepts had been set without knowledge of likely costs of the new planning process to those parishes. CYC were attempting to keep down their own costs but unfortunately, adding to the costs of parishes.
- Members of the Liaison Group queried what had happened regarding the proposed training courses for the introduction of updated planning procedures which were scheduled to take place in March, as halfway through March no information had been sent out to Parish Councils.
- It was stressed that many of the planning documents, particularly, for proposals within industrial estates, were far too large to be displayed on computers or, in many cases on screens in our meeting rooms - As some types of development were covering larger areas of floor space, it was important that every detail was able to be examined, so that nothing would be missed, particularly in retail outlets where the safety of customers is paramount.
- Earlier consultation is needed (where consultation is appropriate) – using the Neighbourhood Management Unit (NMU) to enable PCs to submit responses in time. Sufficient time should be given as consultation needs to go to a meeting for discussion, not just to individuals.
- There is often a lack of consultation on changes to CYC services e.g. Christmas recycling arrangements. A basic criteria on what should be consulted on could be agreed.

- The reduction in the number of litter bins and salt bins, without notice was an area of concern in many parish areas. They felt they could have helped suggest which litter bins were least used and which most.
- PCLG were pleased that Information on the PCLG and PCs was being provided online via the council website, to encourage more individuals to get involved.
- PCs were pleased that the council included the dates of PC meetings in the council corporate diary, but suggested that formal and informal Ward Committee meeting dates should be included too.
- Clashes of dates are not helpful to the attendance of ward councillors at PC meetings and parish Cllrs at ward committee meetings and ward team meetings - ward committee meeting dates need fixing early to avoid this which would enable better attendance by Parish Cllrs.
- Ward Team meetings were variable.
- PCs notice boards & newsletters etc could be used to publicise events and consultations e.g. NMU could advertise resident surveys on PC notice boards etc to encourage more residents to participate and improve response levels
- Regular meetings with local councillors are needed, especially (but not only) with new councillors. The importance of the relationship with PCs should be included in new councillor induction programmes.

In conclusion emphasis was placed on the fact that Parish Councillors are volunteers, giving up of their own time with only a part time clerk.

Community engagement was improving but there is still more to do. PCs are a good channel for communication both ways. PC minutes could go to local ward councillors (electronically). Timings and dates of meetings should be made known well in advance to enable greater attendance and responding to communications to meet CYC's timescale is sometimes difficult.