

NOTES FROM THE PARISH NETWORK 16/04/09

Derek Liddle Chair of South Yorkshire Local Councils Association

Derek described the changes that the Yorkshire Local Councils Association is currently going through in order to meet the modernisation agenda.

For example the YLCA has a website containing both generic information on its role and a members section.

In addition the national body NALC is similarly going through a number of changes at the present time. The national association has changed it's constitution and is now revamping information to be made available around such issues as community consultation and engagement.

Derek emphasised that NALC is a strong advocate for parish and town councils and firmly supports their stance as an independent elected body that can act for the common good.

John Healey MP

JH explained he had four main reasons for accepting the invitation to join the Parish Network for the evening:-

- 1) to make a link between local and national government
- 2) to emphasis the Governments commitment to Parish and Town councils
- 3) to hear first hand from Parish Councils in order that he can understand the pressures they are under at the present time.
- 4) To thank Parish and Town Councils for their hard work and commitment.

JH said that the Government had, over the last few years, put a framework in place to strengthen and support the role of Parish and Town Councils as the first tier of local government to ensure that they have the power to act when needed.

He cited a great example from within his constituency of the Brampton Bierlow parish council listening to the views of local

residents and taking action to install a BMX facility within the parish.

So what have the government done?

- Made it easier to set up parish councils
- Made it easier to set up parish councils in urban areas
- Extended the duty to involve parish and town councils
- Introduced quality status
- Extended the well being power to parish councils
- Introduced a duty to promote democracy – an integral part of the role of parish councils including a great capacity to promote the value of politics

Of all these changes JH felt that the Power of Well Being will make the greatest impact in the long term because it allows parish councils to take action to address local issues without restraint.

There is a big opportunity for Parish Councils over the next few years as a more community minded approach is now more firmly rooted in society.

Finally Parish Councils are in a position to help guide people through the recession and promote tolerance to diffuse associated tensions. If parishes use the powers available to them to the full then they can play responsive role for local people.

JH concluded that the first tier of government is a special position to be in on the basis of knowledge and experience.

QUESTIONS

1. Question from Monica Carrol (Woodsetts Parish Council)

What was the expectation for Quality Status and why shouldn't the Well Being power be automatically given to those who have achieved Quality Status?

A: The reason for the criteria being used for the power of well being was that it was less complicated than the Quality Status criteria. However I would be interested to know if you find that the

criteria set out is actually becoming a barrier to using the well being power.

2. Question from Alan Hodkin Aston cum Aughton Parish Council

Q) Given that the Government has opened up the power of well being to local councils. Is there an expectation that it will be widely used and if so would it be the intention to limit the possible increase in precept that the power may lead to?

A: It is still very early days for the well being power however it is the intention that it will be used widely. Government has no plans to get involved in the levels of precept as this would be extremely complicated.

Q) What is the government doing to encourage principal councils to allow devolvement of some services to Quality councils, along with the appropriate funding as was intended when the scheme was first published.

A) The Government has not changed its position and the commitment is the same as made at the launch of the Quality Scheme in the 2003.

3. Eric Shaw Whiston Parish Council

Q) Can parish councils benefit from the rate support grant?

There are a number of different streams available to parish and town councils including grant funding however it is not feasible to devolve central budgets such as the rate support grant.

4. Peter Hubbard – Ulley Parish Council

Q) Many parish councils are too small to take on service delivery. How can they influence the quality of services more?

RMBC are now under a duty to consult so parish councils should be able to have influence on local issues and services. The duty is on the principle authority to capture and act on the views of local residents and organisations.

5. Jane Austen - Aston Cum Aughton Parish Council?

Should parish councils be represented by right on LSP boards?

Cannot see that it would be feasible for all 29 to be represented .
However there is a duty on the LSP to consult with parish and town councils on relevant issues.