



handed in
@ Birmingham
4/3/05 by
No reply
needed

STAFFORDSHIRE PARISH COUNCILS' ASSOCIATION
15 Martin Street
Stafford ST16 2LE

300/05
A.M

CHIEF EXECUTIVE:
Mrs Mary BL Booth, BA (Hons), M Sc, Cert (HE) LCA

Telephone: 01785 277499
E-mail: spca.parish@staffordshire.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spca>

Independent Inquiry into Local Government Funding by Sir Michael Lyons Birmingham Friday 4. March 2005

Comments on ODPM/Home Office discussion document 'Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter?' (pub. January 2005) Chapter 4: Resources and capacity for neighbourhood engagement

The following brief comments have been prepared by Mary Booth, Chief Executive of the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association (SPCA), who is a Board Member of the West Midlands Regional Assembly. They refer to paragraphs 93 to 127 of the above document, which refers specifically to the Lyons Inquiry. Further information is available on the examples given from the SPCA office, whose contact details are above.

Two central aspects – resources available - capacity of people to engage

Control over budgets

- parish councils at neighbourhood level including in urban areas have the authority to raise money through their precepts
- town and parish councils (TPCs) are democratically accountable and subject to Audit Commission controls

Access to other funds

- TPCs can apply for some grants eg Awards for All, Staffordshire Environmental Fund (LTCS), Staffordshire County Council Local Members' Initiative (LMI), in the past the Countryside Agency Vital Villages Initiative eg cluster of five parishes in Newcastle under Lyme accessed £50,000 from Parish Transport Grant to purchase community minibus for improved access in rural areas (Rural Runabout)
- Quality Parishes have recently been able to apply to Quality Parishes' Investment Fund eg three Quality councils in Staffordshire together received approx £20,000 for projects, including £10,000 for street lighting in Colwich
- TPCs can identify projects and get legitimacy for spending through public support achieved via parish meetings, eg Berkswich PC funding for village hall improvements

Delegated budgets

- Ward budgets are already available in Staffordshire, eg Staffordshire County Council LMI; East Staffs BC Ward Action Service Plans (WASPs).
- In two tier areas partnerships through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are adding value
- Delegation to TPCs, especially Quality councils eg delegation of running markets (Stone Town Council); 44 TPCs with village lengthsmen/grasscutting agreements with SCC

NIDS – why give powers to NIDs when there are existing powers for TPCs which could be used if local councils were set up in these areas?

Neighbourhoods without own resources:

- where the public want them, set up new TPCs by petition under Local Government and Rating Act 1997 eg 11 new parish and town (local) councils in Staffordshire since 1997 Act. Burton upon Trent now fully parished – seven new local councils in urban area, established in 2003.
- NALC new website dedicated to creating new parish councils <http://createacouncil.org.uk/>
- County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) – part of NALC – have for years helped set up new councils, at their own expense, ie funded by **current** membership of association. Funds should be provided to CALCs for this work.

Community ownership and management of assets eg village halls, community centres

- TPCs take on buildings and develop them eg Stone Railway Station redundant buildings transformed into community centre
- TPCs can borrow money with ODPM loan sanction for capital projects
- South Staffs DC handed over play areas to TPCs when Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of housing stock took place. TPCs now look after them.

Capacity of people to engage

- TPCs and SPCA regularly liaise with County Council and District Councils eg annual liaison meeting in each district between SCC and SPCA Area Committee
- Training provided through County Training Partnership/National Training Strategy with bespoke qualification for clerks (Certificate in Local Council Administration)
- Networking via CALC/NALC of good practice
- Vibrant, strong community leaders eg recent Chairmanship training research project when SPCA worked with IDeA
- Specialist advice available for PTCs through CALC/NALC

Young people

- youth parish councils: new toolkit available on website www.nalc.gov.uk/createayouthcouncil/index.html
- involve young people in decision making eg Lichfield City Council

Resources needed

- for County Associations of Local Councils which are currently over-stretched
- no central government funding provided to CALCs other than for specific projects
- for town and parish councils
- especially to roll out E-Government to first tier of local government eg to deal with new Planning and Compulsory Act 2004 and online planning consultations

Recognition needed by Government of vast amount of **volunteer** activity at town and parish level

+ vast potential of this sector for the future, if properly resourced.