

Working Together in Oldham

Ask the Panel Questions and Answers

During the event, we asked delegates to send in questions for the panel via e-mail or to tweet @OldhamLeaders with #ThrivingCommunities.

We received a number of questions that we didn't have time to answer on the day, so we have answered them below.

The panel consisted of (left to right): Cllr Barbara Brownridge, Cormac Russell, Dr Carolyn Wilkins OBE, Liz Windsor-Welsh, Dr Ian Wilkinson



Question for Cormac Russell from Rev Andrew J Robinson

Given that we require a 'revolution of the heart', would you agree that we require a 'decommissioning of mind sets' at both community level and institutional level; and:

How will we achieve this?

How do we get 'front line' service staff to embrace such a vision?

A: Yes, but we need to go at the speed of trust. Commissioning is problematic as it is around what people need and not what people have, so not an asset based approach (Cormac Russell).

We need to make the 'odd days' like this the reality and not go back into our organisations and forget what we have learnt because the day job gets in the way – it is the day job (Dr Carolyn Wilkins)

Working Together in Oldham



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Question from D Cartwright

How is the Partnership going to get the information to our communities? Maybe local councillors could be used to deliver locality information?

A: We are committed to better understanding and engaging with communities. The Partnership intends to use a variety ways to gain meaningful and relevant information and open up effective channels of communication. This includes community conversations, community connector roles, the Your Voice survey, and of course working through and utilising the local knowledge of elected members.

Anon question

I noticed that when the representatives of the Voluntary Groups were asked to raise their hands only about 20% raised them. That means that 80% have been paid to come to this event. It would be a good idea to actually encourage more to come if a small sum of money was given to any group that sent representation. This would be a good way of rebalancing the professionals and voluntary and help the smaller groups.

A: Conference organisers would like to thank everyone for giving up their valuable time to come to the conference and feedback/ideas on how to encourage and enable good representation from all communities and sectors are always welcome.

For this event, more than 200 people came to the conference with over 40% of delegates being from the community, voluntary and faith sector in Oldham. Around 30% of delegates were from a wide range of partners, including police, fire, leisure, health, private sector and some Greater Manchester colleagues. The remaining delegates were from across the Council including elected members.

Question from Josh Howe, via Twitter

<https://twitter.com/joshhowe0987/status/915153965209329664>

Will East Oldham be involved with the plans?

A: The ambitions for Thriving Communities apply across the borough and communities will continue to have opportunities to get involved, shape plans and help design services wherever they live. In respect of some of the early adopter place based initiatives there isn't a one size fits all approach; some have started in one area – for example, Oldham West Health and Social Care early adopter – but the learning will be rolled out across the borough.

Working Together in Oldham



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Question from Mike Wright via e-mail

What can be done to improve the employment rate amongst people with disabilities in Oldham, which is significantly below the national average?

A: We recognise this is an issue and there is support available in Oldham which includes careers guidance and support for young people of school / college age who are living with a disability.

Get Oldham Working there to help individuals and connect with employers to identify opportunities and raise awareness of the issues. There are many other circumstances and barriers individuals living with a disability face in respect of accessing employment and the Partnership is committed to working together to address those wherever possible..

Question from the Holts and Lees Workshop

Can we commit to working together to address issues that barriers around sharing information brings?

A: Very simply – yes. This is something that the Partnership wishes to address and will be picked up at the Oldham Leadership Board.

Question from Mark Drury, via e-mail

How does Oldham's public sector break out of the cycle of looking for deficits in our communities, finding them and then developing resolutions or mitigations?

A: There is a growing recognition and understanding of the benefits an asset based approach makes to the outcomes the public sector can support or deliver. This is reflected in the new Oldham Plan and very much so in the Thriving Communities strand of that. To deliver this change of approach presents many challenges and will take time, a shift in culture and processes.

Working Together in Oldham



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Question from Mark Drury, via e-mail

Are Oldham's public sector willing to trust communities to identify their own issues and solutions – and be willing for them to identify the 'wrong' issues and/or solutions?

A: There is real commitment to build relationships of trust and collaboration between communities and the public sector. The aim of Thriving Communities is to develop those relationships in ways which mean that identifying issues and solutions is done collaboratively by all with a stake in the outcome. It won't be the sole responsibility of the public sector to deliver everything and that leaves scope and opportunity for the community themselves to do things they are committed to. Where it is the public sector taking the action, the required checks and balances would be in place.

Anon Question

I've heard really positive things from Holts and Lees and from Ghazali. Both focus on having a physical presence, i.e. a building from which there is a central focus. Will the council free up buildings in each estate to further accelerate this sort of community based activity?

Similar question from Jo Griffin via Twitter

<https://twitter.com/J0Griffin/status/915170304678404096>

How do we release buildings to create space to work within communities?

A: This is a good question for the Partnership to consider as many different organisations have assets across the Borough. It is important that this consideration is also informed by results and feedback from the different place-based initiatives and to what extent a physical presence impacts on outcomes.

The Council has a commitment to asset-transfers and continues to review its processes to improve how this happens and other partners have identified and released buildings in their ownership (e.g. First Choice Homes, Regenda, etc). There needs to be a better understanding of how more of this could happen and this will be developed as part of the Thriving Communities approach.

Working Together in Oldham



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Question from Focussed Care workshop

This is a great initiative but not known about by partners. How can we change that on this and improve communication on Thriving Communities generally?

A: Good communication is always a challenge and particularly when there is so much going on. One of the things which will improve this is asset-mapping work now underway and which eventually will result in a good picture of groups, activities, and facilities at a local level.

In respect of Thriving Communities, we will host information from the workshops on the Oldham Partnership website (www.oldhampartnership.org.uk); use social media to promote and invite interested people to visit place based sites to see how this is working on the ground.

Anon Question

If this is so important, why are there so few councillors here?

A: There were 10 elected members attending the conference for some or all of the day. This included the Leader of the Council and 3 Cabinet members. Elected members were present in each workshop and formed part of the key note address and panel session.

Anon Question

1. How long will the Holts and Lees run for?
2. Will it be rolled out?
3. How can we respond as services in the way that they have done so in Holts and Lees?

A: The Holts and Lees Place Based site is not a pilot but an early adopter. We have no timescales for it and no process / plan for withdrawal. We are currently reviewing the learning from the early adopters to see which models work best for the future. We hope that we can all learn from this across the Partnership.

Working Together in Oldham



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Anon question

The Clusters and the districts are not the same – is that strength or a weakness?

A: Neither – it's a challenge! The Clinical Commissioning Group sets cluster areas based on populations of around 30,000. They are also modelled around GP practices rather than ward boundaries for practical reasons and economies of scale. It does help to sometimes have matching boundaries, but we need to be able to work around this to find the right services to be delivered at the right levels within our localities.

Question

How do we make sure that as council officers and teams, we treat residents and community groups as our customers and our employers, rather than interruptions to business and a distraction from the day job?

It seems too often that the answer we give them is “we’ll get back to you” and then we don’t, there seems to be little concern or urgency, and little placing of the resident at the centre of our operations. No performance tracking of community enquiries and requests, and not enough keeping those communities up to date on progress within the council.

And sometimes community groups and volunteers seem to be treated with distrust and as adversaries rather than welcomed and looked after, barriers put in their way rather than removed.

This means that community initiatives sometimes happen despite the council rather than because of us or with our help.

How do we change the organisational culture in a real way, so that the co-operative rhetoric is reflected in reality?

A: Cultural change is never an easy thing to do, nor is it a quick process. There is no doubt that residents are being put at the heart of everything we do – this is evident in the Council’s values and behaviours and the challenge to all services to ensure they operate in a way that supports that. A lot has been achieved over the last six years, but realise that we still have some way to go on our co-operative agenda.

Working Together in Oldham



Ask the Panel Questions and Answers

Question from Tina, via e-mail

When the work on the rebuild/ re structure of the town centre QEH and living accommodation, will it be possible that the companies who win the tenders are able to employ in apprenticeships local people, that way the colleges in Oldham are not struggling to place people wishing to gain recognised qualifications and skills. People are having to leave college because they cannot get employment in order to fulfil their college placement requirement

A: Yes, we aim to ensure the maximum social value is generated out of any contract awarded. This means ensuring local employment opportunities and apprenticeships wherever possible.

Question from Stuart Lockwood

Procurement and commissioning processes are still heavily weighted towards “cheapest wins” which is largely at odds with the stated ambition for co-operation.

Is the Council prepared to revisit how it contracts and performance manages service providing partners to better value and recognise their contribution to wider outcomes?

A: Yes, we recognise that this does need to be looked at in more detail and we need to ensure maximum social value.

Question from Matt Kinsella via Twitter

<https://twitter.com/WTFisitnow/status/915194223862910976>

As ‘leaders’ or ‘professionals’ could we ‘facilitate to innovate’?

A: Please tell us more!

Anon Question

This is a novel way of putting questions to the panel (professionals) – maybe politicians in the future will not appear to ask questions just send their PR people to answer. The questions should be asked by Voluntary Sector.

A: The Panel included Action Together as well as an elected member. Questions were taken from the floor as well as from questions submitted throughout the day. All questions appear unedited in this document.

Working Together in Oldham



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Anon Question

School of Thriving Communities – What the Voluntary Sector does not need to listen to is theories or fancy names for a project. We need concrete solutions to help us go. Want to help in a practical way then don't charge for room hire – volunteers are giving their time, their expertise and then the council charges for renting a room at a community centre.

We don't need a school, we need the so-called professionals to stop throwing obstacles at us and throw some help our way.

A: The feedback from the session on the School of Thriving Communities will be fed back. There appeared to be consensus that the name doesn't work.

Anon Question

For this collaborative approach you will need a strong community sector. Many have cutbacks due to a lack of funding. Will money be available to community groups so they can survive, and to then enable the 'Working Together' initiative to work?

A: All sectors (public, community and voluntary) face the stark reality of cuts and budget pressures as a result of changing demands and national funding policy. Taking an asset based approach we need to work together to make the best use of the collective monies still within the Oldham system. Every effort is being made within the Thriving Communities programme to channel funding through to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in the form of grants, commissions and seeking additional external funding.

Anon Question

Where's the funding come from?

A: We are hoping to secure some funding from the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care fund to support activity, but we also acknowledge that we need to make best use of the few resources we have.

Working Together in Oldham



Ask the Panel Questions and Answers

Anon question

To Barbara, what is the role of elected members in building thriving communities?

A: Elected members have a vital role in Thriving Communities, but we do need to review how we work as members to ensure we can carry out this role effectively.