

LAF Review: District Council Meetings Summary

During May 2012 members of the LAF Task and Finish Group met in four separate meetings with representatives from the District Councils in the county. Senior officer and member attendance was requested to give an overview of the District Council's views and positions on the LAFs. It is accepted that the views expressed don't necessarily represent the views of all district councillors or even the official view of the respective councils. What the meetings have done is flag up common issues and matters that should be addressed as part of the continued development of the LAFs. It should also be noted that whilst some of the District Council representatives regularly attended LAFs, and in some case more than one LAF, some did not or only had direct experience of only one LAF.

Key Issues

<p>Variable LAF support by District Councils</p>	<p>Both in terms of officer attendance and member attendance (at least 3 of the 5 district members we spoke to were not regular attendees).</p> <p>SBDC sends the same lead officer to every LAF and historically there has been good officer support for LAF issues raised.</p> <p>AVDC also supportive providing lead area officers, and AVDC update papers at LAFs.</p> <p>CDC – Only recently have become more supportive of LAFs. Officer attendance depends on agenda, but do present papers, and have expressed willingness to support 4th LAF meeting if this was cut.</p> <p>WDC – Officer attendance depends on agenda, previous regular senior officer attendance stopped due to topics, and LAF issues coming up at other alternative forums.</p>
<p>Uncertainty over the role / purpose of LAFs</p>	<p>In some form this issue came up at every meeting.</p> <p>SBDC felt they needed a clear purpose and that current aims were confused. Felt the apparent aims did not match current method.</p> <p>AVDC did not feel all the originally intended LAF objectives were being achieved, and queried if chairs and attendees fully understood these. Matters discussed had to pitched at right (sub district) level, not too local or too high level, and should focus on topics than can be influenced.</p> <p>CDC – uncertainty over LAF purpose with some LAFs being very active and some delivering limited functions of grant giving and information dissemination. These limited functions could be delivered better using other methods. Need to get better outcomes from LAF activities.</p> <p>WDC – High Wycombe LAF seems to duplicate HW Town Committee. Unparished area issue means the two cant be merged, although are trying back to back meetings. LAF aspirations very broad and perhaps need more clarity.</p>

	<p>Not clear on role and hence the overall value of a sub district forum.</p> <p>Depending on what role is decided, this will have implications for who should attend, the size of meetings, the support required, officer attendance etc.</p> <p>A clearer and unique purpose would help reduce criticism over it being an unnecessary extra layer and duplicating other forums/meetings/methods.</p>
LAF processes, petition issues, presentations	<p>AVDC highlighted need for LAF processes (such as in how priorities set) to be consistent in their quality, and to be seen as fair and ensure wide buy in achieved.</p> <p>WDC – LAF role in petitions perhaps needs clarification as being heard twice now some are going to LAF and direct to council.</p>
Insufficient budget delegated	<p>SBDC felt funding broken down to only allow funding of very small initiatives, pooled at the district level could achieve more.</p> <p>WDC – More delegated budget needed to get greater buy in / involvement.</p>
Representativeness	<p>SBDC felt public and Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) not encouraged to participate.</p> <p>WDC sceptical on degree to which LAFs facilitate VCS links and public engagement, and that committee style attracts only certain types of people comfortable with this. Should explore other methods to engage community and youth groups.</p> <p>AVDC – sceptical if ever get great public involvement, and perhaps Parish Councils (PCs) or other methods need to be relied on for this input.</p>
Public attendance /profile issues	<p>SBDC concerned that community forums set up with BCC and Community Impact Bucks were not aware of LAF meetings and funding. LAFs need to spread by word of mouth to boost attendance.</p> <p>AVDC – agenda must be interesting to widen attendance.</p> <p>CDC could see benefit in more VCS and public attendance/input into LAFs.</p>
Meeting style	<p>LAF Meetings too ‘council like’ and formal (voting rights an example). Mentioned by all that this could be off putting to some groups, but AVDC suggested some PCs prefer this formality.</p>
LAF meeting language and atmosphere	<p>AVDC – important that meetings avoid jargon and officer speak, so as not to put off PCs and wider audience.</p> <p>CDC – Member attitude to each other, and using ‘partnership language’ important to foster more of partnership feel at LAFs.</p>
Agenda (content and DC involvement)	<p>SBDC officer not aware could be involved in agenda setting.</p> <p>AVDC suggested the degree to which they had input into agendas could be variable also. Certainly did so at the Greater Aylesbury LAF (GALAF) to good effect, but perhaps not at all. AVDC pointed to their update provided to each LAF as having succeeded in broadening the LAF topic agenda,</p>

	<p>and resulting in more involvement from their officers at meetings. Suggested a focus on single topics at LAFs would enable more in depth discussions and interest, and that didn't always need to feature a transportation slot. A Public forward plan informed by priorities would assist agenda setting and in generating interest.</p> <p>CDC felt a topic focussed meeting could also reduce officer attendance required.</p> <p>WDC – felt LAFs had a very BCC issue dominated agenda. Had opportunity to influence agenda but attendees more concerned with BCC work.</p>
<p>DC members involved / welcome</p> <p>More equal partnership forum and less BCC</p>	<p>SBDC view that LAFs were imposed and not an equal partnership. Whereas felt the SB Strategic Partnership was more equal. Felt LAF terms of reference gave impression they were BCC led.</p> <p>AVDC felt welcome and involved, certainly at the GALAF, where have regular meeting slots to provide updates. But this is not the case at all LAFs. Overall didn't feel LAFs were too BCC. Wondered if District Councillor views/buy in varied depending if they were twin hatters.</p> <p>CDC – Seems a 'BCC' LAF and should be branded better as a CDC and BCC LAF. Would then get better buy in from District Councillors. Also needs to be reflected in BCC Members language. LAF seen as BCC member surgery currently. Culture change needed, and LAF chairs need to discuss matter with District Members to get better buy in.</p> <p>WDC – LAFs are seen as a BCC thing, naturally as BCC pay for and support. For this reason seems right chair should be BCC member.</p>
<p>Chair skill / ability</p>	<p>Cited as an issue by all and linked to some other issues raised.</p> <p>AVDC – Need for skilled chairperson to tackle issues over meeting content, and dominance by certain groups/individuals.</p>
<p>Loud voices dominate</p>	<p>SBDC highlighted some LAFs being dominated by more confident and well organised groups.</p> <p>AVDC also highlighted at some LAFs that loud voices dominate,</p>
<p>Legacy issues of pathfinder, distrust</p> <p>PC involvement and buy in</p>	<p>CDC – some issues of LAFs having been imposed and PCs having been alienated. Also that they ignored existing community engagement infrastructure in place, and there are some issues with the LAF community boundaries.</p> <p>SBDC felt parish clerks were nervous of working with BCC and there were trust issues. Also that PCs felt they were losing their autonomy and didn't like how they'd been grouped into local communities.</p>

	<p>AVDC would like all PCs involved and that work is required to engage and encourage low/non attendees to have greater input.</p> <p>WDC – There are community boundary issues but any changes now would need to be informed by whatever role LAFs should perform. Some PCs have perceived LAFs as a BCC takeover, but are starting to see them as an opportunity.</p>
More support for LAFs needed	<p>SBDC pointed to greater efforts needed to join LAFs up with VCS network, which could be achieved with greater Locality Manager resourcing.</p> <p>AVDC concerned if BCC support for LAF wanes, other partners will quickly follow.</p> <p>CDC were very positive about the work of their BCC Locality Manager who has links with local community groups and is aided in this by the existing CDC support infrastructure in place (Revite groups and their communities team) and her co-location sat with the CDC communities team on some days. CDC felt strongly that there must be grassroots engagement initiatives such as community appraisals underpinning LAFs, which can help bring people to them. Co-location means the LAF activity is tied in with all the work, issues & data collected by the CDC community team.</p>
LAF positive examples	<p>All could point to good examples of LAF work and them making a difference.</p> <p>SBDC on Wexham Park Hospital parking issues.</p> <p>AVDC felt LAFs had an important role as a networking forum for the 3 tiers of council and partners, and were delivering on local focus for discussion providing discussions were pitched at appropriate level.</p> <p>CDC recognised their value in joining things up and getting projects moving, and legitimising grassroots issues gathered so they can influence BCC services.</p> <p>WDC see LAFs as secondary tool for consulting community, but considered primary value to be bringing the 3 tiers of local government together.</p> <p>And most acknowledged the LAFs were good in principle (except SB) but were there was room for improvement.</p>

Prospects for future increased LAF support from District Councils

SBDC: Before can support more, current issues with LAFs need resolving. SBDC size limits the extent to which they could provide significant additional staff or funding support. Don't currently delegate funding in the district and size of this probably would not be meaningful in any case.

AVDC: Positive on LAFs, and have been from outset. Their Corporate Plan Community Engagement Action Plan, and current officer discussions taking

place could mean greater support for LAFs could be forthcoming in the future. Feel LAFs do serve important functions.

Felt a role that LAFs could perform could be assessing future impact of various changes in public service delivery, identifying issues and resolving possible issues before service plans are implemented. Linked to original LAF objective to better coordinate partner service delivery, which was felt to be currently lacking.

CDC: Felt that some of good examples of LAF working where action had been achieved (e.g. community transport work) could open the door to greater partnership working and pooling of budgets, alongside collocation of officers and shared support. Sceptical of benefit in LAFs having delegated decision making powers from CDC as District and Parish layers in place for this, but see role in them informing service provision.

WDC: Didn't feel LAFs had developed how they should but supported principles, and could see logic in being more involved given current economic/policy climate. Would need to know more about how LAFs set to develop in future and their role/purpose before WDC could look at supporting more than they do.

South Bucks

A feeling that a district wide LAF would be better / merged with the Strategic Partnership persists in the District. Pointed to partners and VCS not having the capacity to engage in LAFs. Feelings remain that LAFs were imposed on them, and feedback from some PCs is that they are not comfortable with them. A feeling that SBucks is unique to the rest of the county in terms of its large parish sizes, and so no need for a sub district tier.

A written response received from both Denham and Gerrards Cross Parish Councils echos these points. Denham also added it is a burden on District Councillors with many covering more than one LAF. Whilst supporting good work relationships between county and parishes Denham PC does not feel a one size system fits all areas of the county.

BCC Cabinet Member Martin Phillips report on South Bucks LAF situation (Nov 2011) concluded that retaining the status quo to be way forward in the short term, given that although there was a fairly even split in the Parish Councils favouring the LAF system and those wanting a district LAF/Local Strategic Partnership merge, the Parish Councils in favour of LAFs represented a significantly larger proportion of the population.