

## **Empowering Locally?!**

It is a privilege to be asked to address the meeting on behalf of the ComReps.

Over the last nine months the ComReps, working as a team, have made considerable progress. We have met regularly, defined the ComRep role and responsibilities, set up ComRep/Officer meetings, set out the key challenges for WSCC in implementing neighbourhood working in support of Vision 20:20 and developed a possible way forward through working together. We now seek the meetings full support and involvement in order to continue. The next two steps are set out in the comRep report.

At one of our early meetings we agreed that our work is about today and tomorrow, not yesterday (water under the bridge), and we are going to be positive and proactive. We are not a complaints department. We believe that the Constituency Model for neighbourhood working is worthy of full implementation. We fully support the key outcomes and principles set out and approved by Cabinet in the report on Empowering Locally issued on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

But what does 'empowering locally' mean? The words are very strong and quickly raise expectations. What is local? Who and what is being empowered? Who will make the decisions?

The Cabinet report recognises the need for 'working with residents (to address issues and needs) at the most local level possible', but what does this mean? Who is going to do the working and what powers and support will they have? By what mechanism can ComReps gather neighbourhood views? What resources will they have in order to respond when the issues and needs are identified? It is not clear.

The ComReps' way forward is through the formation of the proposed local teams comprising Elected Members, Officers, ComReps and Resident Representatives, empowering at one and the same time WSCC and local residents to get things done.

But first, and of fundamental importance, is a resolution of what constitutes a neighbourhood. This is a choice for residents. The ward and constituency boundaries are satisfactory for local and national elections but may not be satisfactory for neighbourhood working.

There are important questions of workload and resources that need to be considered. Two ComReps are running family businesses and one is in full time employment and consequently their time is limited. This will be the same for Elected Members, and may be more so but by careful planning and delegation should be manageable.

The local teams once formed will bring matters forward for the attention of the T & F Group and then from there to WSCC for action.

There are many questions (hundreds of them) that need to be answered and the answers have to be found round this table. After all, that is why we are here isn't it. It can and should be done.

Chair, WSCC ComReps (on behalf of the ComReps Group).