

Urban LAFs Workshop

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Tyne and Wear Joint LAF.

Relating to Five Local Authorities all undergoing major change.

Background

Very little open access land in Tyne and Wear. Main access issues related to people getting out into surrounding countryside. LAF dealing with 5 very different LAs structured differently, experienced staff lost with cuts and changes affecting contacts.

1. Need for regular contact with LA officers. Different authorities were communicating on a strategic level but different LAFs were not. Ken Whetter of Rotherham LAF gave example of South Yorkshire where LAF chairs were meeting together outside of regular LAF meetings.
2. To overcome loss of experienced personnel it was suggested LAFs needed to identify LA officers and familiarise them with LAF role.
3. Often insufficient access to officers and therefore lack of input to ROWIPs and LTPs.
4. It was pointed out by LA officer from Sandwell that ROWIPs were funded from LTP Integrated Transport Block Funding from Dept. Transport which at the moment is reviewing the above arrangements and is undergoing a consultation the closing date being 6th March (See Dept. Transport website to comment).
5. Elected member representation on LAFs problematical. Important to have council members on LAF to have that voice and contact in the LA.

Relations with Natural England.

1. Defra and NE are presently working up a Memorandum of Understanding. i.e. what LAFs can expect from NE
2. Useful if NE provided some official wording for LAFs to use to invite membership to LAFs reaffirming its legal status. – It was pointed out this already exists in LAF guidance literature. NE could possibly write to all LAs restating their role and legal status.
3. Regional Co-ordinator position regarded as vital. Relationship with NE patchy, needs to improve.

4. Needs to be recognition for the special problems and identity of Urban LAFs. The legislation is built around rural legislation ie. Countryside Rights of Way Act which does not really apply to an urban situation.

Recruitment.

1. Hard to recruit in urban areas because of lack of identity/profile and recognition of role.
2. Need to form a "hit list" of organisations that can be targeted for "head hunting".
3. Urban LAFs to work together to build profiles.
4. Chairs to attend meetings of LAs etc. to build their profile and advertise their presence.
5. Who is a legitimate target for membership? It was pointed out that there are 22 groups identified in the LAF Guidance.
6. It was suggested young people be targeted as possible members by making contact with Universities and Youth Parliaments.
7. It was difficult to attract disabled representatives.
8. Access to waterways was important to people so groups involved with rivers and waterways could be potential candidates.

Future Issues.

1. Links to the Health Agenda in LAs important. Could be a source of future funding for access.
2. The recent damage by the flooding has created severe problems on the ROW network. Needs addressing urgently. Possibly need to look at this collectively and NE have a national voice on the issue.