

LEICESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC SENIOR OFFICERS' GROUP
14TH FEBRUARY 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER - NEXT STEPS

REPORT OF LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose of Report

1. To review the implications of the Local Government White Paper and agreed direction of travel and next steps for this partnership group, particularly in the context of the requirement to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy to inform the next LAA and to assist public and voluntary sector partners in their responses to the White Paper.

Previous Decisions

2. At previous meetings SSOG has agreed to consider further issues raised in or by the White Paper including the Sustainable Community Strategy, Comprehensive Engagement Strategy, Community Cohesion and arrangements for the expanded fourth theme of the Local Area Agreement (dealing with economic development, housing, environment, transport and spatial issues).

Background

The White Paper

3. An implementation plan for the White Paper has now been published (see 'Strong and Prosperous Communities; The Local Government White Paper; Making it happen: the Implementation Plan' at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1505697>).
4. The plan includes the following proposals:
 - (a) Workstream 1 - Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill;
 - Subject to parliamentary time this Bill is likely to gain Royal Assent in autumn 2007.
 - The key features (most relevant to this report) include,
 - a statutory basis for Local Area Agreements and formal framework for co-operation of local partners.
 - empowering councillors to raise issues with overview and scrutiny committees as part of the Community Calls for Action regarding all local government services.

- new powers for overview and scrutiny committees to review and scrutinise the actions of key local public service providers.
- introducing a new duty on best value authorities (except police) to involve people in local services and policies.

(b) Workstream 2 – Performance;

- 200 national indicators against which all relevant partners will report,
 - some to be available by summer 2007.
 - other to be developed for inclusion in LAAs in April 2008.
 - full set of indicators to be available from April 2009.
- Single performance framework for local government and its partners,
 - Audit Commission to operate as the single local services inspectorate from April 2008.
 - Comprehensive Area Assessment from April 2009. (Note: Partners will be involved in the forerunner of this Assessment later in 2007, the Leicestershire Joint Review of Children's Services, which will make judgements on the performance of all partners)
- Strengthen LAAs and LSPs,
 - LAAs to form the agreement between central government and local authorities/partners about priorities for improving performance against national priorities and local place shaping* ambitions.
 - LAA operational guidance summer 2007.
 - Place shaping* guidance for LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and statutory elements relating to LAAs - draft Autumn 2007 and final Autumn/Winter 2007/08. (This Guidance will clarify the format of and requirements for the revised LAAs from April 2008.)
 - each LAA to include about 35 improvement targets (+ statutory attainment and childcare targets) drawn from the set of 200 national indicators.
 - economic theme widened to include environment, housing, transport in addition to economic.
 - single pot LAA grant which will create more flexibility to allocate funding across themes (see separate item on the SSOG agenda).

[For partners who are not familiar with the term, 'place-shaping' is used in the first two (and doubtless subsequent) Lyons Reports on Local Government. In his May 2006 report Sir Michael Lyons wrote: Fundamentally, I see place-shaping as a way of describing my view that the ultimate purpose of local government should not be solely to manage a collection of public services that take place within an area, but rather to take responsibility for the well-being of an area

and the people who live there, and to promote their interests and their future. Place-shaping should both reflect the distinctive identity and aspirations of the people and area, and function as a means of safeguarding and promoting their well-being and prosperity.

The White Paper emphasises the importance of the leadership role of local government in making this happen, particularly through the LAA route and therefore obtaining partnership support and commitment.]

- Efficiency – areas or local ‘authorities’?
 - to provide affordable, right first time, seamless and accessible services.
 - break down barriers arising from organisational structures so that people can access seamless services (particularly in two tier areas).

(c) Workstream 3 - Governance and empowerment:

- restructuring,
 - There have been no bids for unitary status for Leicestershire.
 - County and District Council Leaders currently discussing how to move towards the requirement to operate as a virtual unitary authority.
- community empowerment,
 - package of reforms for community governance.
 - principal authorities to have powers to carry out community governance reviews by April 2008.
 - community calls for action extended to all local government services by April 2008.

(d) Workstream 4 - Cities and Regions:

- consultation on draft guidance on City Development Companies (until March 07).
- Government to work closely with local authorities who are developing Multi Area Agreements.
- Government to develop leadership models in the context of the sub national review of regional and sub regional structures (to be published with CSR 07).

(e) Workstream 5 - Community Cohesion:

- work with local government and partners to develop best practice and support efforts to address/increase cohesion

Growth and Places

5. The Three Cities 'City Region' (the 6Cs), led by the 6 principal local authorities, has attracted funding including to support spatial development and transport.
6. New Growth Points funding can be used to address improvements to infrastructure and services (for an area and/or location) not directly associated with development (e.g. not just roads but also improvements to street scene, health care or cultural facilities, waste treatment or the green environment) and a mechanism is needed to agree these.
7. Governance arrangements in respect of the new funding are being developed for the 6Cs level and are required for the sub region (Leicestershire and Leicester) and individual places which will benefit from such funding.

Next Steps

8. In summary the context for 'next steps' is therefore that:
 - judgement on the performance of individual agencies will increasingly (beginning with the Joint Area Review of Children's Services this year) take into account the effectiveness of wider cross agency focus on joint priorities and joined up action.
 - Government Guidance will be helpful in a number of areas but we do not have time to wait for it before making a start given the need to prepare a new LAA by April 2008.
 - instead we should make adjustments as Government/national thinking is clarified.
9. The following principles are therefore proposed:
 - (a) The new LAA from April 2008 should form the joint action plan which will identify how the priority outcomes should be achieved;
 - diagram 1 sets out the broad arrangements for preparing the new LAA.
 - how are other Government departments briefing agencies on this?
 - prioritising the use of pooled funding to meet the agreed priorities (see separate paper on the agenda and note that consideration is currently being given to how and when the supporting people budget will be pooled).
 - (b) A revised Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) should be the cornerstone of joint planning and prioritisation of service and efficiency improvements by identifying the outcomes we want to achieve;
 - the LAA needs to be based on the priorities agreed locally and then negotiated with Government.

- the SCS should be used for this purpose to avoid any duplication of effort.
 - preparing a single community strategy (compared to 8 currently) for Leicestershire would be the most resource efficient process for all partners. This proposal is currently being considered by County and District Council Leaders – the views of partners would be welcome.
 - diagram 1 sets out the proposed broad arrangements for the development of the SCS.
 - diagram 2 sets out the Governance structure within which the SCS would be prepared with lead roles for the seven theme partnerships
 - proposals for the new economic development and environment theme to be brought forward.
- (c) The starting point for the development of the SCS should be a robust evidence base prepared around the main and cross cutting themes.
- (d) A partnership performance framework based on the LAA should be developed to prepare for the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- (e) The new LAA with its focus of priorities has the potential also to serve as the key source for the scrutiny by local authorities of public service providers:
- a scrutiny protocol would be required to avoid double-handling of issues between the scrutiny processes of the county and district councils.
 - the emerging Community Forums will also assist in establishing efficient and effective scrutiny of public service providers.
- (f) Planning for places (place shaping) should be included in the SCS/LAA framework. This should allow joint priorities for places to be identified and funding to be aligned.
- (g) There should be a single partnership Community Engagement Strategy;
- practical not theory i.e. how to access the children and young people through the Children's and Young Peoples Council for Leicestershire rather than when/how to use focus groups.
 - theme based and led by theme partnerships as appropriate (e.g. CYCLe organised and access through CYP block).
 - provide for cross theme consultation.
 - use existing and planned arrangements (including community/area and neighbourhood forums).
 - provide the basis for involvement in the community strategy.

10. The County Council has had initial broad discussions with the City Council and other sub regional partners about the value of establishing a Public Service Board for the sub-region (i.e. Leicester and Leicestershire) in the context of the need to set priorities for the use of the funding being routed through the 6Cs. The relationship between such a Board and Leicestershire Together (and the equivalent Leicester Partnership) would need clarification.
11. These 'next steps' can be considered further at the development day but in the meantime it is recommended in view of the timetable that work on the evidence base for the new Leicestershire SCS begins immediately. Following the development day SSOG may wish to receive for approval project briefs on:
 - the preparation of the SCS.
 - the Community Engagement Framework.
 - governance arrangements for Growth Point funding at sub regional and place levels.

Recommendation

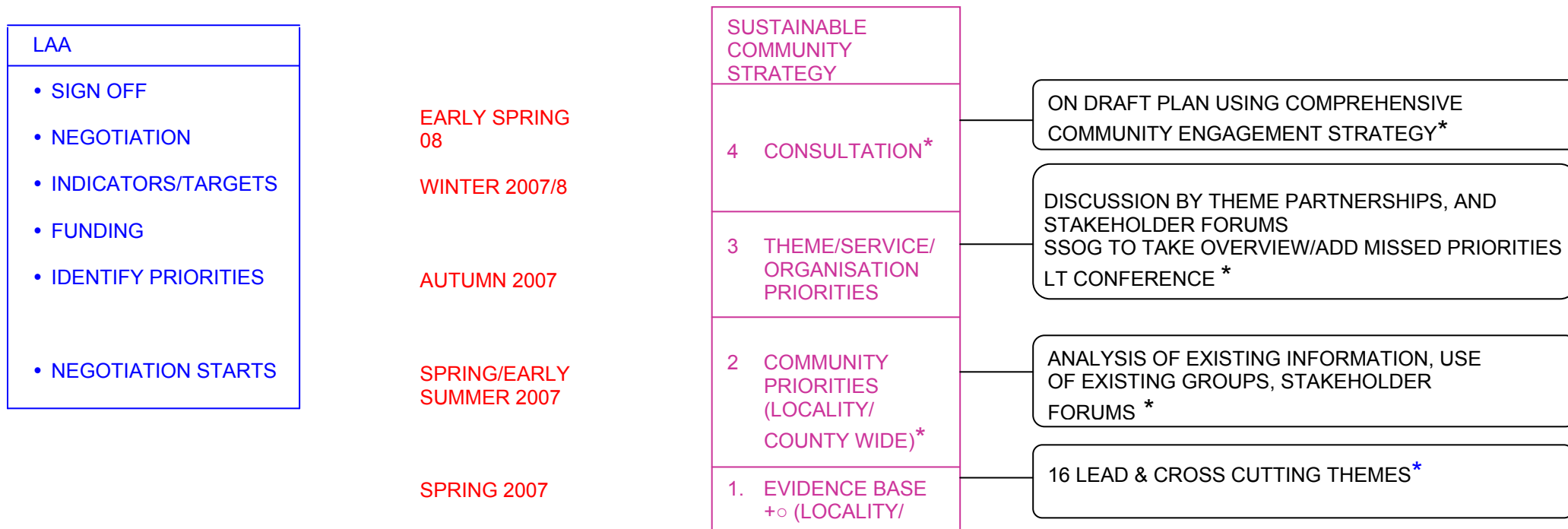
12. It is recommended that SSOG:
 - (a) gives initial consideration to the principles set in paragraphs 10 – 11;
 - (b) endorses the strategic governance framework set out in diagram 2;
 - (c) agrees that work should start immediately on the preparation of an evidence base for the SCS; and,
 - (d) agrees that further discussion of the issues raised in this report forms part of the SSOG development day.

Officer to Contact;

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DIAGRAM 1

REVIEW OF LEICESTERSHIRE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY



Key

*Work Packages

(Other work packages
• communications)

- oLocality includes;
- Priority Neighbourhoods
- Community Forum Areas
- Rural
- Towns

+ could include analysis of funding

THE LEICESTERSHIRE TOGETHER STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

