

Leicestershire Strategic Senior Officer Group

13th June 2006

Community consultation

Report of Leicestershire County Council

Purpose of report

1. To inform the Group about proposals to improve community consultation and the seek agreement for next steps.

Report

2. In recent years the Government has encouraged/required local agencies to pay greater attention to engaging and consulting communities within their areas. This has included neighbourhood policing, public and patient involvement in the NHS and neighbourhood management in priority areas. It is expected that the Local Government White paper will include further requirements in this area when it is published, probably later this year.

3. Consultation has already been identified by Leicestershire Together as an area where greater efficiency and effectiveness could be obtained by joint planning and implementation and sharing of outcomes/results. Some progress in this area was achieved through the development of a consultation toolkit.

4. Some of the consultation effort is targeted at communities and neighbourhoods. This includes the parish plans programme, the LAA stronger community's social capital work and elements of neighbourhood policing. However in the absence of an overall programme there is the potential for duplication of effort and public confusion. Duplication increases both cost (to the public purse) and consultation fatigue for the public. Innovation will be of most benefit if we can achieve some joining up of consultation needs and approaches.

5. The notes of a recent meeting to discuss consultation targeted at individual communities or neighbourhoods are appended. They identify some existing and potential future problems with the current approach to community consultation. The nature of community consultation is that no matter which agency leads the process and what technique is used the outcomes require attention by a range of service providers. The meeting therefore concluded that the LAA Stronger Communities Board should lead a review which addresses a number of issues including the development of a more co-ordinated approach to community consultation activity. (The membership of the Board and its terms of reference would need to be reviewed in this context).

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that the Strategic Senior Officer Group should agree that the Stronger Communities Board should lead a review of community consultation and bring forward proposals to minimise duplication and cost to the next meeting of the Group.

Officer to contact:

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Appendix - Note of meeting on the 16th May 2006 to discuss community consultation.

Present:

Julia McKechnie - Leicestershire Constabulary
Martin Gage and Jeremy Prescott - Voluntary sector
Gill Smitherman - LSEP
Andy Robinson, Tom Purnell, Harry Mistry – Leicestershire County Council

Main points:

1. What's included in community consultation?

- parish plans
- LAA social capital surveys/local development groups
- neighbourhood management
- neighbourhood policing networks, street surveys and beat meetings (see attached Strategy)
- town centre management/masterplans

2. Who leads/initiates?

- VCS
- local authorities
- District based LSPs
- Police

3. Who funds?

- local authorities
- LSEP
- Government grants
- Other grants
- Police

4. Benefits/disbenefits of particular approaches:

- Some are community led and owned by the community but not always by service providers
- Others are 'imposed' and are more likely to receive attention from service providers but will not be owned by the community.
- There is value in having a menu of options according to the need
- There is a certain amount of self selection - particularly better off communities in community led processes such as parish plans -which means that not all communities benefit
- *a common characteristic is that issues relating to services delivered by many agencies are identified whoever leads the work and no matter what the technique or area is.*

5. Concerns about current approach;

- No overall programme
- Some communities could be consulted twice - others not at all

- Lack of shared ownership of approaches could lead to some agencies not addressing outcomes
- Potential for duplication/opportunity for efficiency
- There are gaps - especially in urban areas and among less well off/articulate neighbourhoods
- Funding for some approaches is uncertain going forward

6. Issues that need addressing:

- Developing a shared and co-ordinated programme that engages all relevant agencies and allows for prioritisation
- Developing agreed/shared arrangements to achieve/support the achievement (by the community) of the outcomes arising from local consultation, including:
 - Feedback from agencies (yes we will/ no we can't)
 - Project Development support for communities
 - Funding for projects
 - Shared gathering and dissemination of intelligence
 - For specific consultations
 - Identifying overall trends and issues
 - Feeding in issues that agencies need answers to
 - Ensuring better ownership from and involvement of community representatives - especially councillors
- Security of funding

7. Process:

- Consider at SSOG
- Recommendation to LT
- LAA Stronger communities board to lead