
TITLE: The Future of the East Cambs Strategic Partnership

Committee: East Cambs Strategic Partnership Board

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1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To consider the future of the East Cambs Strategic Partnership (ECSP) in the context of a revised policy context and newly formed partnership structures.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That members of the East Cambs Strategic Partnership Board dissolve the ECSP with immediate effect.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At its last Board meeting being in June 2011, the ECSP Board formally agreed a new structure for the ECSP. The Board agreed to meet once a year to appraise the previous year's work and agree strategic direction, with a proviso of members being able to call extraordinary meetings when needed.

3.2 The intention was for the resource intensive element of the Partnership to be focused on the 'delivery end' of the structure via the thematic sub-groups, allowing greatest opportunity to implement projects and actions that would have a direct impact on the Strategy.

3.3 Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) reward funding was withdrawn by Ministers on 3rd September 2010. This left the ECSP with half of their original allocation. However, as a result of successful lobbying by all partners, the County Council received the second £4.5m instalment of the LPSA Reward Grant, and the ECSP was able to secure £120,000 to pay the arrears payments due to voluntary and community groups and some of the arrears payments due to projects run by statutory partners.

3.4 The Annual ECSP Board meeting scheduled for 21st March 2012, was cancelled due to a lack of agenda items and the uncertainty around the Government's intentions for LSPs. A Board meeting has now been arranged for 11th June 12 to consider the future of the ECSP.

3.5 This paper is informed by consultation with the thematic task group Chairs, task group members and ECSP Board members. Thematic Groups have not been asked to update their delivery plans for Q4 of 2011-12 or produce revised plans for 2012-13 until the future of the ECSP has been agreed on 11th June 2012.

4.0 THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT POSITION

4.1 The DCLG have confirmed that 'the Duty to Involve' is being repealed and that this will include a repeal of the requirement for Local Authorities to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy¹. The key policy driver for LSPs has therefore been scrapped. Ministers unfortunately haven't yet identified a suitable legislative opportunity so can't confirm exactly when the duties are likely to be repealed, but the repeal is imminent and is now likely to come forward in the new parliament.

5.0 RESOURCING THE ECSP

5.1 LPSA funding has come to an end and no new funding streams or partner resources have taken its place. The ECSP therefore has no pooled or central government resources for delivering added value projects to support the SCS.

6.0 THE POSITION OF THE ECSP THEMATIC SUB-GROUPS

6.1 The majority of thematic sub groups of the ECSP are no longer delivering added value projects. The groups have either been disbanded, not set up as intended or been replaced by alternative partnership arrangements. See Appendix A for a detailed position statement of each of the 5 sub-groups.

7.0 OTHER PARTNERSHIPS STRUCTURES NOW COVERING ECSP PRIORITIES

7.1 Local Children and Young People's Area Board: Cambridgeshire Children's Trust is a partnership between organisations with a role in improving outcomes for children and young people in the area. The Trust Board gives strategic direction and commissions county-wide activity. Area Partnerships inform the decisions of the Trust Board about the priorities in their area and commission local activity.

7.2 Area Partnerships have prepared local commissioning plans, (from 2011 to 2014) and started to oversee their delivery. Priorities for the East Cambs and Fenland Area Partnership include support for vulnerable children (5 to 13 years of age); children in Traveller and migrant families; and, children with mental health issues. Voluntary and Community Sector organisations play a key part in the Area Partnership.

7.3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): The LEP is based on the economic areas of Cambridge and Peterborough, alongside neighbouring market towns and communities. Its Board is made up of a Chair from the business community and 13 members, including one voluntary sector/ social enterprise representative. The LEP has secured some funding and is putting in place a delivery structure, which may include local partnerships with a locality focus to help inform its plans.

7.4 Local Nature Partnership (LNP) for Greater Cambridgeshire

¹ Required by virtue of Section 1 (a) of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by Section 7 of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. District Councils have a duty to consult and seek the participation of such organisations and people as they consider appropriate when preparing or modifying their Sustainable Community Strategy.

Recognition from DEFRA for 'LNP' status for the Local Nature Partnership for Greater Cambridgeshire is being sought. If the application is successful the partnership will cover Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The current membership of the partnership comprises organisations represented on the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Forum, Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Steering Group and Natural Networks Partnership in Peterborough. Other partners will be invited to play a role should LNP status be granted. A high level LNP Board will be created which champions the natural environment at a strategic level aiming to:

- Reverse the decline in biodiversity
- Mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Promote sustainable growth and economic development
- Support healthy living and well-being.

The LNP plan to work with the LEP and HWB to develop measurable targets covering the economic and social benefits of the LNP plan.

8.0 FEEDBACK FROM PARTNERS ON THE FUTURE OF THE ECSP

- 8.1 All of those Board members who have attended a meeting/s in the past and were consulted for feedback on the future of the ECSP, feel that the ECSP has already come to an end and no longer adds value.
- 8.2 There is a view that the ECSP was a “funnel for money” and that without LPSA (or other finances), there is no role for the ECSP moving forward. Another member observed that the LPSA money “gave a false sense of security” to the ECSP, so that the focus of the Partnership was on relatively short term projects rather than making decisions on key strategic issues or genuinely pooling funding around agreed priorities. However it was also recognised that without statutory powers, at best, the ECSP could only influence the mainstream agenda of partner agencies.
- 8.3 Some members felt that the theory of an LSP was sound and that “if there was ever a time to look at joint priorities it is now”, but that in reality, without key agencies committing resources, this isn't going to happen.
- 8.4 Some Board members expressed the desire for an opportunity to network with other agencies whilst acknowledging that this is not a primary function of an LSP. This seemed to be of particular importance to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) representatives.
- 8.5 The voice of the VCS has weakened in recent times in Cambridgeshire with the rationalisation of some partnerships focused on the VCS, previously set up to support Cambridgeshire Together and the LAA (for example the disbanding of The Cambridgeshire Regional Assembly). Concern was expressed at how the VCS will be able to contribute to strategic discussions within East Cambridgeshire should the ECSP be disbanded. One solution suggested was to ensure that VCS representatives are on the remaining and emerging partnerships, although it was felt that this approach would be more resource intensive for the VCS.

- 8.6 Other members expressed a desire for an opportunity for key statutory agencies to get together to share ideas and exploit opportunities for joint working (almost like a mini Public Service Board for East Cambridgeshire).
- 8.7 There was broad recognition that partners need to use existing structures where possible to engage the public and partners. Neighbourhood Panels were cited on several occasions as a potential forum to develop, with understanding from some partners of the government's intentions to place an increasing emphasis on delivering services at a Neighbourhood level.

9.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 Although the requirement to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy has not yet been repealed, Ministers have made the decision and therefore the Local Authority will not be required to produce another SCS. Given the slow progress on delivery against the Sustainable Community Strategy to date, it is unlikely that there would be any appetite to produce a SCS in future.
- 9.2 There are no obvious opportunities to secure additional funding to develop 'added value' projects and latterly public sector organisations appear unable to allocate sufficient officer time or other resources to ensure the thematic groups remain a thriving and effective delivery mechanism of the SCS.
- 9.3 It is clear that there are a number of opportunities for current ECSP members to directly influence the agenda of the existing and emerging partnerships, with no obvious way for the ECSP to add extra value to these arrangements directly.
- 9.4 The VCS needs to be supported to identify and access the existing and emerging partnerships that are working in East Cambridgeshire. This could be through statutory partners leading those partnerships ensuring that the Terms of Reference allow VCS involvement and that the VCS is invited to consider how they can most effectively contribute.
- 9.5 There may be an opportunity to look at the role of Neighbourhood Panels to support the Localism agenda, where the emphasis is less on 'consulting' and more on 'decentralising' and 'devolving'. Panels already enable Parish and Town Councils, the County Council, the District Council, the Police and public sector and voluntary sector partners to discuss and address issues of current or future concern to the locality area. The remit of the Panels could be broadened to include making plans and related decisions for the locality area (or constituent parts of the locality area) based on need / integrated community intelligence and supporting the development and effective delivery of Community / Parish Plans.

10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 If the ECSP is disbanded, this will result in savings for the partner agencies involved. If the ECSP Board decides to continue the ECSP, then the ECSP Board and in particular the thematic sub-groups need to be resourced, both with officer time and funding to develop projects that deliver the objectives within the SCS.

11.0 APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A - The position of the ECSP thematic sub-groups.

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THE POSITION OF THE ECSP THEMATIC SUB-GROUPS

The Sustainable Growth Partnership (SGP)

Due to declining attendance and lack of progress on delivering projects, a survey was sent to all 36 people on the Sustainable Growth Group email list in February 2012, seeking views on the value of the SGP. 16 responses were received. Some of the findings were that: i) capacity to deliver was low; ii) it would be good to identify key areas where the Partnership could work given the constraints on resources; iii) monitoring and evaluating partnership work could be improved; iv) external factors such as changing policies and climate change not being high on the political agenda make it hard to establish a direction or focus for activity.

Following on from the survey and discussion at their meeting on 17th April 12, the SGP disbanded because it was agreed that there is no 'added value' partnership work that could be undertaken on the 'Greener Communities' theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy through the ECSP, with current resource levels.

Cultural Advisory Group

The Cultural Advisory group is considering whether they wish to continue meeting under the auspices of the ECSP. Whilst some members value meeting to gain an understanding of local issues and to take forward joint projects, there is a view that there is no benefit with this being linked to the ECSP. There is a County Culture Task Group that appears to have a more natural strategic alignment. The Cultural Advisory Group last met on 16th September 2011, although a group has met since then to take forward specific work on the Olympics.

Well-Served Well Connected Communities Group

The ECSP Board made a decision in June 2011, to "instruct the Partnerships Officer to set up a new thematic sub-group responsible for delivering the aims of the 'Well-served and Well connected' theme of the Strategy". A meeting was arranged with key officers to discuss how to set up a group. The officers present however, strongly felt that there was no capacity to support the creation of a group or to develop new projects to meet the objectives set out within this part of the strategy. The agreement was therefore not to set up this group.

East Cambs Health and Wellbeing Partnership

The emerging Local Health and Wellbeing Partnership now includes GP commissioning and picks up health and well-being issues for the District. This new group will have a wider more strategic membership than the previous health and Wellbeing Partnership, which was a sub-group of the ECSP, with direct link to the County Health and Well-being Board (HWB). The work of the group will be steered by the priorities identified by the HWB and the GP Commissioning Group. There is no identified route for this group to link into the ECSP and no plan for this group to report performance to the ECSP.

The Local Health and Wellbeing Partnership may deliver a small number of local projects, through Task and Finish groups, to respond to pressing problems, where resources are available, but this is likely to be through commissioning, not in response to any aspirations in the Sustainable Community Strategy. There are currently discussions underway about how the VCS can most effectively link into the emerging health partnerships.

East Cambs Community Safety Partnership

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (and subsequent related Acts) places a statutory duty on the Police, Local Authorities and Probation Service – together with Health Authorities and other agencies, to develop and implement a Strategy for reducing crime and disorder in their area. The East Cambs Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has been established for over ten years to deliver this requirement within the District. Their work includes the preparation of Strategic Assessments, the delivery of their Community Safety Plans and Annual Reviews of progress in reducing levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in the district areas.

The work of the CSP has indirect links to part of the 'Stronger Together' section of the 'Active and Inclusive Communities' theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy, as the aims of the CSP are similar. However, the CSP's action plan does not directly link and their priorities are set through the Strategic Assessments (crime and demographic data and public consultation). The CSP has provided detailed updates on progress against their Action Plans for the ECSP upon request. Although there is a County Community Safety Strategic Board, the duties remain with the local Community Safety Partnerships, and therefore there would be no impact on this group of the ECSP dissolved.