

Report

Subject : Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Strategy for Wiltshire
Report to : The Cabinet
Date : Wednesday 15 November 2006
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Cabinet Member for Community and Housing : Councillor Cole-Morgan

1 Matter for consultation:

Cabinet is requested to approve the council's response to the Wiltshire Strategic Board consultation on the revised framework for the Sustainable Strategy for Wiltshire (appendix 1) and the long list of Local Area Agreement outcomes (appendix 2)

2 Introduction and background:

2.1 The Sustainable Strategy for Wiltshire is being revised so that it can provide a robust basis for joint working and action. It will inform the development of Wiltshire's first Local Area Agreement (LAA) with the government which is due to be signed in March 2007.

This council made a detailed response to the first consultation exercise in the spring and the draft strategy has now been substantially re-written.

The South Wiltshire Strategic Alliance Executive and Board have considered the consultation material and representatives of both the Alliance and the council attended a conference hosted by the Wiltshire Strategic Board on the 18 October 2006. The responses set out below take account of the views expressed by the Alliance.

2.2 The LAA is to all intent and purpose the Sustainable Strategy for Wiltshire's action plan for the period 2007-10, detailing how the Board intends to progress selected outcomes. It aims to achieve local improvements through partnership working between local organisations and with central government, and feedback from those that have already negotiated their LAA's suggests that the benefits could include:

1. Simplified delivery structures, clear accountability and performance management
2. More flexible use of resources – improved efficiency, reduced bureaucracy, pooled knowledge and resources, innovation, opportunities for shared procurement
3. Increased flexibility ('enabling measures') from central government, eg negotiating how resources may be used and freedom from other rules
4. Strengthened relationships between local partners



Awarded in:
Housing Services
Waste and Recycling Services



In relation to point 3, it is too early to form a view as to whether the benefits of signing an LAA with government outweigh the increased burden in relation to additional reporting and potential intervention.

Point 4 is relevant as authorities with LAA's are beginning to identify problems of governance – where partners are pulling away from commitments made in the LAA and so undermining its delivery.

The LAA will be organised around the following blocks:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Children & young people | 4. Older people |
| 2. Safer & stronger communities | 5. Economic development & enterprise |
| 3. Healthy communities | 6. Environment |

2.3 There are no new resources available for activities in the LAA. In developing activities, Blocks will need to identify improvements in the way things are currently done (to release resources by working differently). This would need to include identifying savings that may be achieved from 'enabling measures' from government. There may also be an opportunity to identify and pursue potential opportunities to bid for funding from external sources.

3 Consultation response:

The council broadly welcomes the strategy and its emphasis on supporting and creating Sustainable Communities in Wiltshire.

3.1 Local focus

It is considered that the strategy would benefit from a separate section for each district to highlight where there are differences. This is particularly noticeable in South Wiltshire, which has many features more closely associated with Hampshire and Dorset than with the rest of Wiltshire. The **unique features** of south Wiltshire that should be highlighted are:

- Affordable housing is a particular issue in south Wiltshire and Kennet
- The south west of the county (around Tisbury and Mere) has the poorest access to key services
- South Wiltshire is the only district in Wiltshire to have a large hospital
- A significant Army presence
- Salisbury is the largest settlement in the county, which brings specific issues relating to the night-time economy and community safety
- Tourism is very important in south Wiltshire, in particular thanks to Salisbury Cathedral and the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge.
- Salisbury has more cultural assets than other parts of Wiltshire, with the annual Arts Festival, five-screen cinema, Playhouse, Arts Centre and City Hall.

3.2 Priorities

We are concerned that partnership activity is being diminished by the need to recognise all interested parties and concerns and is therefore not focused enough around the top priorities. The list in Appendix 2 contains far **too many outcomes** and sub-outcomes and needs to be reduced to a manageable number that partners will be able to agree on for joint action.

Our view is that the four **priorities** currently championed by the Wiltshire Strategic Board (Healthier Wiltshire, better street scene, improved waste efficiency, and adult skills for life) **should be re-evaluated** in the light of the needs identified within the strategy.

The priorities should be assessed against key cross cutting issues for the county. This council believes these to be actions and outcomes that support:

- Access to services for rural isolated communities
- Targeting the socially excluded and disadvantaged
- Creating a stronger, safer and more sustainable county

Based on these principles the council has emboldened in appendix 2 its top headline outcomes and sub-outcomes in the draft local area agreement that it would support in broad terms, whilst acknowledging that it is a 'working document' and has and will continue to be subject to change.

3.3 Affordable housing

The **lack of affordable housing** is a key priority for the Salisbury and South Wiltshire area. It is clearly linked to all three priority themes set out in 3.2 yet there is only one sub-outcome relating to affordable housing in the current draft Local Area Agreement (Stronger sub-outcome 3.1).

Although we understand and accept that it may be difficult to link an outcome to one of the existing service blocks, it is important that it is included within the priorities of the Wiltshire Strategic Board and if possible in the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

3.4 Access to services

The western part of south Wiltshire has very **poor access to key services** according to the government's indices of multiple deprivation. The South Wiltshire Strategic Alliance has therefore adopted improving access to services as a key priority, and this should be better reflected in the Sustainable Strategy and LAA outcomes. Headline outcome 3 in the Older People block is a top priority for SDC and SWSA but should be reworded to read: '*All communities* have access to affordable, flexible and safe transport to a range of services and activities'. This outcome needs to be moved from the Older People's block and to the Stronger block.

4 **Our commitment to joint action and resources**

The council is committed to play its part in supporting jointly agreed priorities and outcomes where there is a benefit to residents and the communities of South Wiltshire. However, it will only commit resources where it meets the above requirement and it is considered to be a function of the district council. In view of this, the council is likely only to be able to support a limited number of activities unless additional resources are made available. It will also need to ensure that sufficient local resources are set aside to meet local priorities not included in the board's programme. Appendix 2 highlights the priority areas where the council is already committed or likely to be in the future.

The council welcomes the strategy's recognition that the principle of **subsidiarity** is important, so the action taken at each geographical level reflects what is best done at that level. The council believes that activities and outcomes should be dealt with at district level unless the issues are homogeneous across the county or there are economic reasons for addressing issues at county level. Where appropriate, action will be taken jointly with partners through district local strategic partnerships. It is also essential that where the voluntary and community sector are identified to play a key role in delivering an outcome that they have or are given the adequate resources to accomplish the task.

The council welcomes the recent proposals to strengthen **governance** arrangements put forward by the Wiltshire Improvement Partnership. It wishes to emphasise that district local strategic partnerships should have a key role in strategic decisions in the LAA process and in influencing the final outcomes. It is also important to recognise that district LSP's are not delivery partnerships and therefore can only implement the LAA through individual partners signing up to agreed actions. Where new partnerships are set up, the council strongly recommends that they focus exclusively on delivering specific outcomes in order to avoid a proliferation of new, possibly unfocussed partnership activity.

5 **Timescales:**

The current draft LAA is a living document, which is being worked on continuously. However, timescales have been set by government and are very tight.

The council's comments will be fed into the first draft of the LAA which is due to be submitted to the Government Office South West (GOSW) on 30 November 2006. The final draft will need to be endorsed by the council in the new year before the final submission to GOSW on 21 March 2007.

Even after the final LAA is submitted to government, there will be opportunities to review the outcomes and activities annually.

6 **Recommendations:**

The Cabinet is requested to :

- a) consider the revised framework for the Sustainable Strategy for Wiltshire and the Local Area Agreement outcomes
- b) approve the proposed consultation feedback set out in paragraphs 3 and 4 of this report

- c) approve in principle the prioritised in bold in appendix 2 and note the areas where support is current or likely in the future whilst acknowledging that unless further resources are forthcoming that it is unlikely that the council will be able to sign up to any additional activities over and above what it is currently being undertaken

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Implications:

Financial : As no new resources have been made available for activities in the LAA, the council will need to ensure that it only commits itself to activities that can be contained within existing resources.

Legal : none at this stage

Personnel : none

Community Safety : contained in the report

Environmental : contained in the report

Human Rights : none

Ward(s) Affected : All