

CABINET – 19 JANUARY 2010

CLOSER TO COMMUNITIES

ACTIONS TO FURTHER DEVELOP CORPORATE AND SERVICE ENGAGEMENT IN LOCALITIES.

Report by Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy)

Background

1. In 2007 we took our first steps towards a focus on localities when we agreed a Closer to Communities Strategy – an outline framework for locality working based around 25 “natural community areas”. We explored how to engage more actively with key local partnerships (for example in Bicester and Abingdon), communicate with the public about service provision in localities and promote the benefits of community led-planning (for example, parish plans).
2. It is now proposed that we reduce these 25 areas to **14 localities**, being a more manageable number in terms of officer support and communication. 13 localities are based around market towns and their hinterlands and the City of Oxford. These areas reflect administrative boundaries, except around Didcot, where it seems sensible to consider the town in relation to its surrounding parishes. See map, overleaf.
3. The proposed new localities boundaries do not always match the operational service areas of directorates, the police and the PCT. However, directors, the police and Primary Care Trust (PCT) support these proposals as a model they can work with.
4. By focusing our locality working within these 14 localities we aim to :
 - Enable more managers in localities to work across services on local issues identified through evidence, data and local engagement
 - Run “area summit” events for managers and elected members to consider the main issues in each locality and identify how we can work better together and avoid duplication.
 - Appoint lead officers for each of the localities who can participate in the relevant partnerships and support elected members. They will also provide a link to the county / district bi-lateral meetings and local strategic partnerships.
 - Help elected members to work with service managers on key local issues.
 - Help local partnerships to thrive in areas facing the challenges of development, regeneration and inequality.



Briefings and Consultation

5. During November the Closer to Communities report was circulated to all County Council elected members and discussed at Informal Cabinet and the Corporate Core opposition briefing. It was also circulated to all District Chief Executives, the Primary Care Trust and Police for comment.
6. The PCT and police are supportive and the majority of district responses are positive, welcoming the commitment to locality working and our continued support for local community led planning.

High priority places

7. Within the 14 localities Cabinet has already identified Didcot, Abingdon, Bicester, Carterton, Banbury and Oxford as being a high priority because of planned developments. For these priority areas we have used the following information to identify the key issues:
 - Research and intelligence profiles which include key statistics and Community-Led Planning evidence.
 - Meetings with the elected members identified by the Leader as leading in those areas.
 - Town and district council and partnerships priorities/plans.
 - Priorities/plans from other large organisations/groups in the area, including business groups.
 - An initial start in identifying county council priorities/plans.
8. We have summarised the key issues for each priority area which will help to guide the focus of our engagement and negotiate key actions with partners where required.

(a) **Didcot**

Summary of key issues:

- Large scale housing developments across parish and district boundaries planned.
- Population predicted to rise by 28,435 by 2016, an overall 24% increase from the 2001 census – infrastructure needs to keep pace with the housing development.
- Lack of leisure/sports and play facilities – which are likely to have to be provided outside of the town.
- Some deprivation issues (mainly) in All Saints and Northbourne wards: income, health issues, education, skills and training, crime; generally un-deprived in terms of barriers to housing, services and employment.

Recommendation:

- There is a great deal of work going on in Didcot and the County Council needs to engage more effectively with the networks that are already there. There may be a need for a town partnership similar to the Bicester and Abingdon town partnership examples.
- We propose to run a facilitated Area Summit for Didcot. We have canvassed dates and identified **Friday 26th March** as having the least clashes with other County and District meetings. The event is aimed at internal managers and elected members but it is important to ensure other key partners participate - for example: districts, PCT, parish/town councils - to contribute to the discussion. The aim of this event is to :
 - current data and information relating to the characteristics of the locality.
 - discuss key priorities for the future.
 - share service plans and proposals for the area.
 - identify possible gaps in evidence or plans.
 - look at existing networking, communications and governance arrangements in and around the area.

(b) Abingdon

Summary of key issues:

- Because of out-commuting and lack of retail attractiveness, the town centre is declining in vitality.
- The volume of traffic leads to congestion and air pollution.
- Forms part of the Science Vale UK which is an important area of growth and development for enterprise and innovation.
- Unemployment is low but the recent recession has led to a rapid rise in the number of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance.
- A number of health issues in some wards: e.g. Caldecott and Ock Meadow wards have higher than average levels of smoking.
- Abingdon's deprivation issues relate mostly to education, skills and training – parts of Caldecott ward rank in the worst 6% nationally for this – and to barriers to housing and services, which could reflect poor housing affordability.

Recommendation:

- Continue to support the Choose Abingdon Partnership (the new town partnership) to develop a new vision for the town and make links with relevant working groups on particular issues as required.
- We propose to run a facilitated Area Summit for Abingdon in 2010. The event is aimed at internal managers and elected members but it is important to ensure other key partners participate - for example:

districts, PCT, parish/town councils - to contribute to the discussion.
The aim of this event is to :

- current data and information relating to the characteristics of the locality.
- discuss key priorities for the future.
- share service plans and proposals for the area.
- identify possible gaps in evidence or plans.
- look at existing networking, communications and governance arrangements in and around the area.

(c) Bicester

Summary of key issues:

- Development and infrastructure (the town is positive about this – although there are local pressure groups opposing the North West eco-town development).
- Out-commuting is high and there is a need for more employment opportunities in the town itself.
- Developing sufficient community facilities and infrastructure, especially around leisure/green spaces and encouraging community cohesion, as Bicester grows.

Recommendation:

- Continue to support Bicester Vision Group (town partnership) which has established itself as a strong local partnership. We also need to ensure that we are engaging effectively with Police Neighbourhood Action Groups and the Bicester Traffic Advisory Committee.
- We propose to run a facilitated Area Summit for Bicester in 2010. The event is aimed at internal managers and elected members but it is important to ensure other key partners participate - for example: districts, PCT, parish/town councils - to contribute to the discussion. The aim of this event is to :
 - current data and information relating to the characteristics of the locality.
 - discuss key priorities for the future.
 - share service plans and proposals for the area.
 - identify possible gaps in evidence or plans.
 - look at existing networking, communications and governance arrangements in and around the area.

(d) Carterton

Summary of key issues:

- Development and infrastructure – issues include: access in, around and through Carterton (especially access to A40 for heavy military

vehicles and direct access to east-bound carriageway); Sainsbury's planned development.

- Areas prone to flooding are a big issue for the surrounding villages.
- Aspiration of town council to upgrade the town centre.
- Carterton have wanted a Fire station and post-16 education for a long time. The latter is being progressed.
- Shilton Park main area of development – ensuring this development becomes part of Carterton and not a separate community.
- Impact of the proposed expansion of RAF Brize Norton – Regular meetings between local government and RAF representatives are in the process of being set up.
- A perceived need for more employment and (higher) education opportunities in the town itself, targeted at local people including those leaving the armed forces.
- Carterton's aspiration for growth may not be shared by all in the surrounding area and there are concerns about the district council's Local Development Framework focusing development around Witney.

Recommendation:

- Appoint a senior manager to support elected members on the Carterton Fast Forward partnership and liaison with RAF Brize Norton and other local authorities.
- We propose to run a facilitated Area Summit for the Carterton area in 2010. The event is aimed at internal managers and elected members but it is important to ensure other key partners participate - for example: districts, PCT, parish/town councils - to contribute to the discussion. The aim of this event is to :
 - current data and information relating to the characteristics of the locality.
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(e) **Banbury**

Summary of key issues:

- Banbury has some areas that are amongst the most deprived in the county (including high incidence of teenage pregnancy and low skills levels). Partners are already undertaking a range of work to help address this and one of the main challenges is to link these approaches up more closely.
- Two areas, both in Ruscote ward, rank in the bottom 20% nationally for deprivation; mostly due to education, skills and training issues.

- Overall unemployment in Banbury is 4.7% (May 2009) which is slightly higher than the national average and it rose significantly due to the recession.
- Large scale housing developments planned.
- Traffic and transport issues – Banbury is a town with high-levels of in-commuting, including from adjoining counties all going through the town centre; so one of the key issues that we can help with is to make links with adjoining counties with regards to transport links and educational attainment.
- Banbury has the highest concentration of minority ethnic groups and communities in the county after Oxford.

Recommendation:

- Engage effectively in the town centre partnership.
- County Council can
 - facilitate local partners to make links across county and regional borders.
 - commit to working with Banbury Town Council and Cherwell District Council on looking into the transport issues again – based on issues identified in previous reports.
 - Consider further work to be done with the Developer Funding Team to ensure we maximise the potential of contributions to infrastructure costs.
- The lead officer will need to ensure that the regeneration work does not operate in isolation from Banbury's own initiatives and county-wide work.
- We propose to run a facilitated Area Summit for Banbury in 2010. The event is aimed at internal managers and elected members but it is important to ensure other key partners participate - for example: districts, PCT, parish/town councils - to contribute to the discussion. The aim of this event is to :
 - current data and information relating to the characteristics of the locality.
 - discuss key priorities for the future.
 - share service plans and proposals for the area.
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 - look at existing networking, communications and governance arrangements in and around the area.

(f) **Oxford City**

Summary of key issues:

- Oxford has some areas that are amongst the most deprived in the county and country (the Leys, Littlemore, Rose Hill and Barton areas) in terms of low skills, low incomes and higher levels of crime.

There has been a lot of regeneration work in the past with some positive legacies such as local partnerships/community organisations. Further work is now being planned, for example the work with the City Council, Health and the Police on breaking the cycle of deprivation and the City Council's Regeneration Framework.

- Further planned housing development in Barton and Rose Hill, South of Grenoble Road (in South Oxfordshire).
- City has a greater proportion of minority ethnic groups and communities than the rest of the county.
- There are many highly capable community organisations in the city with the potential to take on a greater local leadership, co-ordination and consultation role.
- Transport is a major issue both within and around Oxford.
- Housing is an issue especially affordability in relation to average incomes.
- The risk of flooding is a continual worry for householders in areas of flood risk.
- Carbon reduction is an issue for existing/new housing and transport.

Recommendation:

It is recognised that there are overlapping areas between arrangements for member engagement, locality working, and the work to break the cycle of deprivation in Oxford (which will be the subject of a further report) and major spatial planning and regeneration initiatives (which are picked up through other initiatives – such as the Homes and Communities Agency *single conversation* initiative / HCA <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/singleconversation>)

However, the following approach is proposed :

- (1) **Localities:** create a network of key service managers across directorates with special responsibility for working in the City to co-ordinate activity and information sharing.
- (2) **Area Committees:** ensure that we have consistent member and officer representation. It is proposed that we consult with Oxford City Council's Area Committee Co-ordinators to develop a forward plan of agenda items so that cabinet members can attend when there is an item relevant to their portfolio.
- (3) **Deprivation:** identify lead officers in the areas of highest deprivation to link the strategic groups working on breaking the cycle of deprivation and regeneration initiatives.
- (4) **Spatial planning and infrastructure:** identify lead officers from the **Environment** and Economy for the areas where significant development and regeneration is planned.
- (5) **Ensure the flow of information** from the localities to the district Oxford Strategic Partnership and the County and City bi-lateral meetings.

- We propose to run a facilitated Area Summit for Oxford in 2010. The event is aimed at internal managers and elected members but it is important to ensure other key partners participate - for example: districts, PCT, parish/town councils - to contribute to the discussion. The aim of this event is to :
 - current data and information relating to the characteristics of the locality.
 - discuss key priorities for the future.
 - share service plans and proposals for the area.
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Next Steps

9. We propose that the following work starts with effect from January 2010.

(a) **Lead officers in the priority areas**

Senior officers will be identified for each of the priority places to support elected members.

(b) **Area Summits**

We propose to run Area Summits for each of the 14 localities - starting with the 6 priority areas. These will be one-off events and we will evaluate their effectiveness before proposing any further activity.

It is proposed that the first Summit will be held in Didcot. We have consulted with county colleagues and district council colleagues and identified 26th March as having the least clashes with other meetings.

Invitees will include :

- County Council division members for the Didcot area and key service managers who work in and around Didcot.
- Representatives of the town and parish councils.
- A small number of elected members and senior officers from the district councils
- Local representatives from the PCT and Police.

(c) **More local information on the intranet**

We propose that each Area Summit shall be supported by a new locality webpage on *InSite* (County Council intranet) to improve the flow of data and information for local members and staff. We aim to include:

- Contact details for elected members and key service managers by locality
- links to sources of evidence/data (including the Data Observatory, area profiles, community-led plans, Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, e-Consult etc.)
- links to external information (district and local councils – relevant plans, VCF umbrella groups, local media etc.)

(d) **Place reports to Cabinet**

Quarterly Place reports on issues and progress to be received by the Cabinet

(e) **Continuing our commitment to community led planning**

Community led planning offers opportunities for the county council to:

- gain a better understanding of local community needs and priorities (identified through wider consultation by local volunteers than public sector can often achieve)
- gauge potential for developing self-help solutions or other service innovation
- start a dialogue with communities, together with their elected representatives.

Members can take on a crucial leadership role in their division, working closely with both communities and agencies offering advice and support, including the county council. In particular, elected members can help officers with local intelligence to spot potential pitfalls and find ways forward.

Proposals

- continue offering opportunities to promote, discuss and improve county council engagement in community-led planning for elected members and staff.
- develop the most effective and efficient ways of liaising with community led planning groups, working closely with local elected members (at the 3 main development stages: developing local consultation, drafting an action plan and implementing action plans).
- identify relevant strategies/key policies that should take into account community led planning evidence.

Support arrangements

The Partnership Working Unit (Corporate Core) is responsible for leading on this work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. **It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:**
- (a) **approve the 14 proposed locality areas for further discussion with partner organisations; and**
 - (b) **approve the recommendations for making progress on locality arrangements in the 6 priority places.**

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Background Papers: Nil

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County and district electoral boundaries

