

**Meeting of the Cabinet – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2009**

**Report of the Interim Chief Executive**

**Updating the Community Strategy and Engagement framework and Local Area Agreement**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report gives an update on a range of linked developments being undertaken by the Council to provide effective community leadership, promote local community engagement and progress the implementation of the Local Area Agreement

**Background**

2. As identified by the Audit Commission evaluation of the Authority, the Council has a sustained record of promoting effective local partnerships, and developing its community leadership role. This report provides an update on three areas of development arising from this area:-
  - The update of the Sustainable Community Strategy
  - The development of the Community engagement strategy
  - The review of the Local Area Agreement

**Review of the Borough's Community Strategy**

3. The Community Strategy provides the overarching forward plan for the Borough that sets out and works toward a vision encapsulating the expressed views and priorities of the Borough's communities. It was compiled as a result of listening to the views of 5,000+ individuals and 40+ community groups. The vision takes us to the year 2020, and sets out six key partnership priorities, each with a set of objectives. These act as a statement of action for the Dudley Community Partnership, with the Council acting as the lead partner.
4. The Community Strategy was approved in December 2005 and publicly launched in March 2006. It is vital that it continues to reflect the issues facing the Borough, as these will shift their relative priority over time, and be joined by new challenges. So the review is being undertaken for these reasons:
  - To take stock of what has been achieved over the last 3 years, and to understand what remain as priority issues and what, through tackling them

successfully, may be of less concern; it is important to communicate this to the public;

- We now have a Local Area Agreement (LAA), developed after the Strategy. The LAA is designed to encapsulate those priorities that can be tackled in the shorter term and therefore the Community Strategy needs to be reassessed to reflect this;
- The current Strategy does not fully pass the test of “sustainability”. It needs to do so as well as be able to reflect today rather than yesterday, as it will become a key focus for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).
- The current strategy is light on the spatial dimension, especially this borough’s expression of the Black Country Core Strategy. It is intended that the new document will incorporate more significantly that and specific actions under the Local Development Framework;

5. A Project Group coordinated from the Chief Executives Directorate is project managing the review process, which breaks down into the stages set out in the flow chart in Appendix A. Following the evaluation of a comprehensive intelligence update a revised set of key priorities will be developed through dialogue with key stakeholders and then subject to review with local stakeholders, and endorsed by the Council. The newly shaped priorities, and the achievements made, will be communicated to the public via “Dudley Together”.
6. The timeframe will deliver a revised, Sustainable Community Strategy alongside the CAA Area Self-Assessment, and due for Full Council approval by November 2009.

### **Development of the Council Community Engagement Strategy**

7. The work on the review of the Community Strategy takes place in parallel with the developments being led by the Council and partners on the Borough’s community engagement strategy. In turn this activity forms the Council’s response to new national challenges as outlined in the Government White Paper, “Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power”. Community empowerment is the central theme of the White Paper, which sets out to give local people and communities more influence and power to improve their lives. This involves more people being able to define the problems they face and being supported to tackle them in partnership with public bodies. The proposed framework of this report therefore supports the fundamental aim of Communities in Control; however we recognise that several key elements of the Government’s proposals are still subject to formal consultation and agreement as and when the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill is agreed by Parliament.
8. The basis for the Dudley Community Partnership (DCP) approach to community engagement is set out in the “In It Together” document. It identifies five areas where those involved in the DCP will focus improvement. DCP will work together to be a partnership which:
  - better co-ordinates engagement activity;
  - is open, supportive and accessible;
  - plans well and gives adequate time to community engagement;

- feeds back the outcomes of engagement to the public and partners alike;
  - continually engages a larger number and more diverse reach of people in its work
9. The principles and activities arising from the In it Together initiative are strongly supportive of the overall Council Plan vision - Local people matter. In the Council Plan the Authority makes the commitment that it will:-
- Listen to what local people say
  - Respond to what local people tell us
  - Be accountable for our performance
  - Provide value for money
10. The purpose of the new framework is to coordinate the Council's approach to community engagement together with its partners. A draft action plan has been prepared by the Authority to enhance the approach to community engagement, a summary of which is included as appendix two. It is based on two key themes as outlined in appendix three. The first theme concerns the consultation and engagement of local people on the local needs and issues facing a community. This focus emphasises those matters that involve groups of residents and/or service users and the impact and influence they have as a community or user group on the decisions and outcomes that affect them and the areas in which they live. Aspects of the work in promoting engagement around these issues include:
- Consultation on the Sustainable Community Strategy
  - Engagement of the voluntary and community sector on the local Compact
  - The development of the local area Community Renewal plans
11. The second major theme addresses engagement with individuals who require or receive services provided through the Council. This more personal aspect of consultation includes:-
- Developing a customer charter
  - Reviewing the customer feedback system
  - Undertaking customer satisfaction reviews
12. In order to support the development and implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy a series of corporate actions have been developed including:-
- A review of Directorate Engagement activities to help identify best practice and corporate improvement priorities.
  - Enhancement of a Council Community Engagement Database to record all engagement activity involving the Council,
  - Preparation of a local Community Engagement Toolkit as an online resource to help Council officers undertake community engagement. It provides a range of tools to aid officer's understanding, highlighting good practice and promoting shared learning.

- A Training & Support package will be developed by the Council in conjunction with public agency partners (such as the PCT) and the community & voluntary sector. This support package will provide staff with the skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to successfully plan, conduct and evaluate engagement with the community.
- Using employee review meetings to identify training & support needs of officers involved in community engagement.
- Developing a clear outline of the key roles and responsibilities within the Council relating to community engagement.

13. There are a number of high level performance indicators which are available to support the judgement on the effectiveness of the local community engagement arrangements. These are outlined below, and will be incorporated within the corporate performance management framework and reported back to members.

<b>LAA</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
NI 1 % people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together	To be established (Feb 09)
NI 7 Environment for a thriving third sector	To be established
<b>National Indicators Additional to Council</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
NI 3 Civic participation in the local area	To be established
NI 4 % people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality	To be established
NI 6 Participation in regular volunteering	To be established
NI 14 Reducing avoidable contact	To be established
NI 35 Building resilience to violent extremism (rating: poor 0 – good 5)	1.75 (2007/08)
NI 140 Fair treatment by local services	To be established
<b>Best Value Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
BV 003 Overall satisfaction with the Council	60% (Source: LGUSS, 2006/07)
BV 004 Satisfaction with complaints handling	50% (Source: LGUSS, 2006/07)
<b>Local Compact</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
12 weeks allocated for consultation period	To be established

### **Local Area Agreement Refresh 2009/10**

14. Members will be aware that the current Local Area Agreement was approved by the Council with effect from April 2008, and is a three year commitment entered into by the Council and its partners with the Government. As part of the national process for the management of Local Area Agreements, there is a requirement to undertake an annual refresh of the Agreement at the start of the year, in order that any revisions can be implemented with effect from April 2009. At the current time, representatives of the Council and partner agencies are involved in discussion with government contacts over the current levels of targets set for the key local priorities in our LAA. It is anticipated that these discussions will continue

into February, and the Authority will need to approve the final outcome of these discussions by the end of that month. At this stage it is felt unlikely that there are any significant variations in target outcomes or emerging priorities which will affect the current Agreement. Accordingly it is requested that the Leader and Interim Chief Executive be authorised to approve the final version of the LAA for 2009/10 subject to a report on the outcome of this process to the next full Council.

15. As part of this refresh, the LAA will reflect the outcome of the consideration of the Transitional Grant programme. Members will be aware that in the report on Transitional Funding made to the Cabinet in June 2008, the balance of the unallocated Transitional Grant was to be determined in consultation with partners in the Dudley Community Partnership. At the meeting in November 2008, it was recommended that this funding be allocated to reducing worklessness and will be used to help people gain sustainable employment.

### **Finance**

15. There are no specific financial implications of this report.

### **Law**

16. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, enables the Council to do any thing which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the borough, or any part of it.

### **Equality Impact**

17. The issue of equalities has been integrated throughout all elements of this report, for example the review of the Community Strategy has been undertaken so as to ensure the engagement of local people from all communities, including BME; children and young people; people with disabilities. The community engagement strategy proposed in this report also contains a number of improvements designed to enhance the inclusion of all priority communities.

### **Recommendation**

18. It is recommended that:-

- The work on the review of the Community Strategy to ensure that it is updated to become a fully sustainable local community strategy be approved, and subject to a future adoption by full Council.
- The proposed framework for the development of a Dudley Council Community Engagement Strategy as outlined above be approved.
- The Leader and Interim Chief Executive be authorised to approve and submit the LAA refresh to Government at the end of February 2009.

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### **List of Background Papers**

nil

**Sept-Dec 2008:**

Production of the intelligence update and initial scoping of remaining challenges;  
Initial sustainability appraisal of existing Strategy;  
Initial review of the “spatial development” content;

**January 2009:**

Thematic partnership coordinators workshop (21/22 January) to identify:

- Additional intelligence where gaps exist;
- Test out the thematic partnerships’ experience and actions since adoption;
- Discuss changes to original priorities;
- Identify additional emerging issues that should be considered;

**February 2009:**

Equality Impact Assessment of existing Strategy;

Summary of community consultation linked to key priorities where is evidence of consequent action;

SCS Review Group to summarise workshop output to consultation via Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector;

Public communication via Dudley Together of 2005-8 achievements with an expression of likely new priorities;

Engagement of and feedback from: directorates through directorate Policy leads and Assistant Directors

**Feb/March 2009:**

Engagement of and feedback from: DMTs

Engagement of and feedback from: Thematic Partnership meetings

Draft for consultation with Corporate Board, thematic partnerships, DMTs, VCFS;

Focus Groups – testing the temperature of change since 2005

**April**

Demographic Projections Phase II: spatial variance linked to LDF and Core Strategy

Equality Impact: input from Dosti Equalities Group

Review Group to produce draft content of new Sustainable Community Strategy and frame initial shape of new document;

**May/June 2009:**

Review of new Draft Sustainable Community Strategy and related delivery plan with performance management framework;

Informal Cabinet (to alert members to emerging revised key objectives for next 3 years)

Feed into CAA Area Self Assessment

**September 2009:** Approval of Corporate Board; Select Committee cycle

**October 2009:** Approval by Cabinet;

**November 2009:** Approval by Full Council;



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This framework is driven by the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and Corporate Improvement Plan. Both these key drivers are underpinned by community engagement and ‘Transformational Government’, which address the following themes:

- Citizen centred services which meet the needs of our local residents and service users
- Collaboration and shared resources to increase VFM for local people and the organisation (Gershon efficiencies)
- Consistent approach to engagement and enhanced capacity & skills to engage with and deliver better services to local people

<b>What?</b>	<b>By when?</b>	<b>Corporate implications</b>
<b>Overarching Partnership Strategy</b>		
DCP Strategy – ‘In It Together’	March 2009	Sign-off by DCP Exec Board (plus Corporate Board and Cabinet)
<b>What?</b>	<b>By when?</b>	<b>Corporate implications</b>
<b>DMBC Strand 1 – Place Shaping</b>		
Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) review and LAA – our new approach to engagement to be explicitly linked to the delivery of our ‘stronger communities’ vision and LAA delivery plans	July 2009	Stronger accountability & scrutiny to ensure DCP priorities and LAA actions involve and empower local people
A new Compact Code of Practice for Community Engagement	June 2009	A new way of working more closely together with partners on engagement
Community Renewal Service (CRS) – the local driver for empowering engagement with residents & services users within disadvantaged areas of the borough	Area Action Plans agreed by March 2009	- CRS Strategy endorsed by Cabinet Sept 2008 - Working groups set up to produce Township Area Action Plans - 5 Townships covered but CRS will focus on the priority areas within each township
<b>What?</b>	<b>By when?</b>	<b>Corporate implications</b>
<b>DMBC Strand 2 – User Views</b>		
Customer Charter	December 2008.	Corporate statement of common service standards.

Corporate Feedback System - Review and revision of existing system	October 2008	System up to date and fit for purpose.
Corporate Feedback System - Review of the need for a new system	March 2009	Process capable of incorporating new and emerging requirements.
<b>What?</b>	<b>By when?</b>	<b>Corporate implications</b>
<b>Making it happen</b>		
Directorate Review of existing engagement practices – initial findings and resulting actions	November 2008 – Policy Leads endorsement December 2008 –PWCG endorsement Corporate Feedback Group & Corporate Board (tbc)	Endorsement of improvement plan for community engagement
Engagement Database & Toolkit – update & revisions	Autumn 2009 <i>(work beginning April / May)</i>	Cost / partnership access to Database & Toolkit
Engagement training & support	Development begins Jan 2009 Corporate and bespoke training in place by Sept 2009	Openness of organisation to new ways of engaging and empowering both local people and staff
Customer Insight	Tbc	Assist in formulating a corporate customer strategy.
PRDs – to identify strengths / improvement areas	Tbc	Changes to the current PRD form. Any additional questions would only apply to those officers with an engagement role
Common Standards – best practice and agreed standards for engaging different audiences	March 2009	Openness of organisation to new ways of engagement & empowerment
<b>What?</b>	<b>By when?</b>	<b>Corporate implications</b>
<b>Communications Plan</b>		
Management Forum – launch our community engagement “package” (strategy & tools)	March / April 2009	Adoption of the new approach to engagement across the organisation
Staff communications – Internet, etc.	April 2009 onwards	Adoption of the new approach to engagement across the organisation
Council Plan 2009/10 refresh – stronger links with community engagement	Ongoing	Stronger accountability & scrutiny to ensure corporate priorities chime with what our local people tell us

Directorate Review of existing engagement processes to identify best practice and inform future policy development



**Partnership Strategy**

*In It Together*  
– A proposal for an empowering approach to engagement

*\*Please Note: This is a high-level overview of the key strategic elements that constitute community engagement within the Council; vital factors such as key performance indicators and training tools will be found in the underlying detail*

**DMBC Strategic Engagement Framework**

**Strand 1: Place Shaping (Collective)**  
*Our relationship with our citizens: outcome-focussed*

*Wider society interest*

**Local Compacts**  
*A partnership agreement involving the CVS in engagement*

*Agreement with partners*

**Community Strategy**  
*Delivering the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and related outcomes*  
**Community Renewal Service**  
*People & place based outcomes*

*Driving change*

**Engagement Activities**  
*Including Customer Satisfaction where relevant – **Resulting actions fed back to: (i) plans & policies; (ii) participants***

*Common Standards of Engagement e.g. 'Hear By Right' (engaging children & young people)*

**Linkages & Tools**

**Database & Toolkit / PRDs & Training**  
*To improve planning & learning of engagement*

**Strand 2: User views (Individual)**  
*Our daily relationship with individual service users: formal & informal*

*User-centred interest*

**Customer Charter**  
*Our promise and principles when dealing with the public*

*Agreement with customers*

**Corporate Feedback System**  
*The 3 C's (Comments, Complaints, Compliments)*

*Driving change*

**Customer Satisfaction Activities**  
*Customer Satisfaction of actual service users – **Resulting actions fed back to: (i) plans & policies; (ii) participants***

*Key Driver CAA (Transformation)*

*Key Driver Corporate Improvement Plan (Transformation)*

*Customer  
Satisfaction &  
Customer Insight /  
Strategic Intelligence  
links to both strands*