

SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Annual Council
DATE	9 May 2013
REPORT TITLE	Review of the Connect Partnership and Related Delivery Arrangements
REPORT OF	CORPORATE DIRECTOR (AR)
WARDS AFFECTED	ALL

Summary of report:

The Connect Partnership and related delivery arrangements for the four corporate priorities (community life, economy, environment and homes) have been reviewed. The review was prompted by a combination of member feedback, the outcome from the Peer Review and reduced staffing and financial capacity both within the Council and in partner agencies.

The issues included in this report have also been considered by:

- the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel (7 March 2013),
- the Community Life and Housing Scrutiny Panel (14 March), and
- Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Panel (18 April)

as the three member groups responsible for either monitoring progress of the Delivery Plans or the effectiveness of Partnerships.

As a key partner in the Connect Partnership, West Devon's Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a similar report on 12 March. On 16 April West Devon's Council resolved that the suggested way forward for the Connect Partnership and related delivery arrangements be adopted.

Financial implications:

No specific financial implications arising from this report, although the proposals are designed to streamline the current arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the proposals for the Connect Partnership and related delivery arrangements, as set out at paragraph 6 of the report.

Officer contact:

Alan Robinson, Corporate Director

tel: 01822 813629;

email: alan.robinson@swdevon.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Officers have reviewed the Connect Partnership and related delivery arrangements for the four corporate priorities (community life, economy, environment and homes). The review was prompted by a combination of member feedback, the outcome from the Peer Review and reduced staffing and financial capacity both within the Council and in partner agencies.
- 1.2 The Connect Partnership comprises the Leaders of South Hams and West Devon Councils and representatives of Devon County Council, Dartmoor National Park Authority, NHS Devon, Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, Devon & Cornwall Police Service, the Environment Agency, South Hams & West Devon Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB).
- 1.3 The Connect Strategy and Delivery Plans are the Corporate Plans of both Councils, particularly focusing on those actions that generally require a partnership approach for implementation. In many cases, the Delivery Plans have replaced or streamlined a wide range of previous policies and strategies, such as the former Housing and Prosperity Strategies, some of which were a statutory requirement.
- 1.4 Members were involved in developing the Delivery Plan actions and the Community Life & Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Economy & Environment Scrutiny Panel have been receiving regular progress updates at their respective meetings. The Leader of the Council also summarises the outcome of some of the actions undertaken that support the delivery of the Council's priorities in his address to the Annual Council meeting.

2. SUMMARY OF THE CONNECT PARTNERSHIP BOARD VIEWS

- 2.1 At the Connect Partnership Board meeting on 6 December 2012, the Partnership considered the attached report (see Appendix 2) and made suggestions as follows:
 - To refresh representation on the Board by including a representative of Town and Parish Councils from each Council area, nominated by the Devon Association of Local Councils;

- To reduce the number of Connect Partnership Board meetings to two per annum and ensure these meetings have a stronger strategic focus, including support for town teams and other localism initiatives;
- To reduce the number of actions within the Delivery Plans to make them more focussed and to address capacity issues;
- To use existing fora (e.g. Voice initiatives) to engage with stakeholders, rather than holding separate stakeholder events for each priority and simplify the engagement arrangements by removing the stakeholder groups as illustrated in attachment 2 to the report to the Board;
- To incorporate the Connect Strategy and the four separate Delivery Plans into a single document;
- To rationalise monitoring of the Delivery Plans so that the Board only receives exception reports, particularly where it is a partner organisation that is contributing to the identified issue;
- Further consideration will be required to assess how partners can more effectively support emerging town visions/strategies, in the current climate of reduced financial and staff resources.

3. SUMMARY OF THE VIEWS OF THE LEAD OFFICERS WITHIN THE TWO COUNCILS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DELIVERY PLANS

- 3.1 The lead officers felt that the Delivery Plans are important documents for coordinating partnership actions and that joint working is important for effective implementation. It was concluded that the 'Connect' identity provides a positive brand for cross agency working and is helpful when engaging with wider stakeholders.
- 3.2 There was support for rationalising the documentation and creating shorter, sharper action plans. It was also suggested that existing monitoring arrangements involving various member groups and the Connect Board could be rationalised.
- 3.3 Further clarity could also be provided in terms of key member involvement, particularly to simplify officer and member liaison arrangements. On-going member engagement in the development of action plans for homes and economy is clear (i.e. appropriate Lead Members from the Community Services Committee at WDBC and Portfolio Holders at SHDC i.e. Planning Economy and Community and Environmental Health and Housing). However, for community life and environment, the action plans cut across a number of member roles. Community life encompasses, amongst other issues, active communities (sport and recreation), localism, and children and young people, while the environment theme incorporates a wide range of issues, including recycling, renewable energy, and the built and natural environment.

- 3.4 As an interim arrangement, in relation to community life, informal discussions with key Members resulted in the Planning, Economy & Community Portfolio Holder and the Chair of the Community Life & Housing Scrutiny Panel Chair agreeing to represent South Hams. In West Devon, it was informally agreed that one member on the Localism Board and one of the Healthy and Active Lead Members would be the representatives.
- 3.5 Member representation/liaison has not been resolved in relation to the Environment Delivery Plan for either Council. Member engagement in one of our key external delivery plans might be helped by a more formal approach to future member appointments.
- 3.6 It is therefore suggested that support be given to the principle of appointing Lead Members for the Community Life and Environment Action Plans, and that the Leader be asked to nominate an appropriate Member for both these roles.

4. SUMMARY OF THE VIEWS OF THE THREE SCRUTINY PANELS

Economy & Environment Scrutiny Panel

- 4.1 At the Panel meeting, a number of Members expressed concerns that the Connect arrangements appeared bureaucratic and did not support localism. The Panel was advised that the Partnership incurred limited costs and the intention of the review is to further rationalise the number of meetings and supporting documentation. The Chairman of the Panel proposed that as the report dealt with matters of corporate control, it should be referred to the Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Panel with a suggestion that the costs and resources associated with the Connect Programme be considered.

Community Life & Housing Scrutiny Panel

- 4.2 It was noted that a report would be presented to a future meeting of the Executive or Council, but it would be helpful to incorporate the views of the three Scrutiny Panels, as each panel had different responsibilities in relation to the Connect Strategy and associated arrangements.
- 4.3 The Leader of the Council informed the Panel that the Partnership had initially struggled to work effectively but that it was now working well. However, partners had concluded that the processes in relation to the Connect Strategy were ready for a review.
- 4.4 Following debate, the Panel concluded that the Executive recommend to Council that the suggested way forward for the Connect Partnership and the related delivery arrangement be adopted.

Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Panel

- 4.5 The Panel considered value-for-money issues in relation to the Partnership and discussed the outcomes from the Connect Strategy arrangements. The Panel agreed to recommend that the Council retains the Connect Partnership and that the Partnership continues to support the work of the Delivery Teams, in particular ensuring that partner agencies contribute to achieving the Council's four priorities.

5. SUMMARY OF THE VIEWS OF WEST DEVON'S OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 5.1 The Committee supported the changes, in particular the proposal to combine the Connect Strategy and the four Delivery Plans into one document. The Committee resolved to recommend to the Borough Council that the suggested way forward be adopted.

6. THE PROPOSAL

- 6.1 The amendments to the current arrangements can be summarised as follows:
- That the Councils retain the 'Connect Brand' in terms of engaging with partners and wider stakeholders.
 - The Connect Strategy to become a single document that includes focussed action plans for each of the four corporate priorities and clearly identifies the roles of specific partners in any actions.
 - The Connect Partnership to become more strategic in terms of both its agenda and levels of representation and to meet six monthly rather than quarterly.
 - Delivery teams to continue to meet as necessary to drive progress on the action plans.
 - Future stakeholder events to be arranged using scheduled meetings linked to various Voice arrangements, rather than organised as separate events.
 - Monitoring of the action plans to be undertaken on an annual basis by appropriate scrutiny groups within each Council, but in-year exception reporting to the appropriate scrutiny meeting where problems may be occurring or targets unlikely to be met.
 - Member appointments to lead each theme to be adopted at Annual Council Meetings.

- A revised annual corporate timetable for the Delivery Plans is proposed as follows:
 - Autumn – stakeholder events linked to Voice initiatives
 - Winter – key Delivery Team meetings
 - March – progress report relating to current action plan and draft future action plans presented for each priority to appropriate scrutiny groups
 - Late spring/early summer – formal adoption of the Delivery Plans by both Councils.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Connect Strategy is one of the Councils' key policy documents that defines priorities and the Councils' strategic direction, and must be approved by both Councils.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 No specific financial implications arising from this report, although the recommended approach will create a streamlined process and reduce time pressures for members, partners and staff.
- 8.2 Concerns have been expressed by some Members about the costs associated with the Connect arrangements. Staff within the two Councils do not carry out such a level of detailed time recording that the costs directly associated with this specific partnership can be accurately identified. In general the majority of staff actions within any individual service are designed to support the Councils' strategic priorities. In relation to the Connect Partnership Board meetings, it is estimated the officer preparation, general support and attendance at each meeting amounts to approximately 3 full time equivalent days. In the absence of regular partnership meetings, officers would have to find other ways of engaging with partner agencies, which would probably result in comparable or even higher costs than those currently incurred.
- 8.3 The Corporate Performance and Scrutiny Panel considered the issues set out in paragraph 8.2 and noted that while the Council records and monitors the costs of each of its services, the time recording system is not so detailed that it records individual meetings of officers with a range of partners, whether part of the Connect Delivery Plans or meetings associated with other work activities. In terms of specifically recording time associated with the Connect Partnership, it was suggested that the Council needs to strike a balance between the resources required to record and monitor time compared to the level of officer resources involved in attending Connect Partnership meetings.
- 8.4 The Connect Strategy and Delivery Plans operate as the Councils' Corporate Plans and comparable documents will be required in some form to define the Councils' priorities and the actions required to be taken to support those priorities. The Connect Strategy and four Delivery Plans have also replaced and reduced a large number of policies and strategies that were previously produced. The costs of publishing the documents are reduced by limiting the number of printed copies and making the documents available on line.

- 8.5 There is a cost to engaging with communities and stakeholders as part of the Connect Strategy, but community engagement is a core area of work for the Councils, which underpins the Councils' Vision 'Shared Services and Beyond'. The Councils' ambition embodied in the vision is to work in partnership and build positive relationships, ensure that local communities feel supported and to engage with local people. The proposed changes to the arrangements are intended to streamline the current approach without undermining the adopted Vision of the two Councils.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The review has highlighted the need to streamline the processes to reduce time pressures on staff, Members and partners. The suggested changes include rationalising the Connect Delivery documentation into a single document with sharper, more focused action plans, and future monitoring to be undertaken on an annual basis, supported by in-year exception reporting to the appropriate Scrutiny Panel where there are significant issues adversely affecting an agreed action.
- 9.2 The proposed amendments will simplify the current Connect Strategy and Delivery Plan arrangements and respond to feedback received from the Peer Review, the Connect Partnership Board, informal comments from Members and a representative sample of officers.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 The risk management implications are appended to this report (Appendix 1)

11. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate priorities engaged:	Homes; Economy; Community Life; Environment
Statutory powers:	The scrutiny groups are responsible for monitoring and influencing the Connect Strategy and delivery plans. The delivery plans operate as the Corporate Plan but the only statutory requirement remaining is to produce a Homelessness Strategy, which has been embodied within the Homes Action Plan.
Considerations of equality and human rights:	An impact assessment was carried out on the overall delivery plans in 2011 and there are no significant consequences of the suggested amendments to the arrangements to necessitate a new assessment.
Sustainability considerations:	An impact assessment was carried out on the delivery plans in 2011 and there are no significant differences to necessitate a new assessment.
Crime and disorder implications:	An impact assessment was carried out on the delivery plans in 2011 and there are no significant differences to necessitate a new assessment.
Background papers:	Connect Strategy 2011- 2015/ Connect Strategy Annual Update 2012/13 Community Life delivery plan 2011-2015/ Community Life Annual Update 2012/13 Economy delivery plan 2011-2015 Environment delivery plan 2011-2015/ Environment Annual Update 2012/13 Homes delivery plan 2011-2015/ Homes Annual Update 2012/13 Connect Strategy and Delivery Progress Report
Appendices attached:	Appendix 1 - Strategic Risk Table Appendix 2 - Report to Connect Partnership Board on 6 December 2012 and associated attachments.

APPENDIX 1

STRATEGIC RISKS

No	Risk Title	Risk/Opportunity Description	Inherent risk status				Mitigating & Management actions	Ownership
			Impact of negative outcome	Chance of negative outcome	Risk score and direction of travel			
1	Strategic Direction	Provide strategic direction setting out how we will improve the quality of life in West Devon and South Hams working with our partners and the community.	4	3	12	↔	Local priorities identified and delivery plans offer clear strategic direction to meet local needs in West Devon and South Hams.	Delivery Plan Lead Officers
2	Community Engagement	Effectively engage communities in developing plans for their locality to meet local needs.	3	3	9	↔	Up to date evidence used to develop plans. Voice initiatives used to inform the development of plans. Delivery Groups to comprise key partners and community representatives.	Delivery Plan Lead Officers
3	Economic Conditions and Funding	Difficult economic conditions and reducing funding could impact on delivery.	4	3	12	↔	Resource requirements identified in Financial Strategies. Regular monitoring and updating to identify and address emerging issues.	Delivery Plan Lead Officers
4	New Government Policy	Actions need to be in conformity with Government legislation.	3	2	6	↔	Maintain understanding of Government legislation/policy guidance.	Delivery Plan Lead Officers
5	Differences in view emerging between SHDC and WDBC regarding the role of the Connect Strategy	There are opportunities and challenges arising from the current Connect arrangements.	3	3	9	↔	Ensure Members remain engaged in the process with the Leaders of SHDC and WDBC playing a key role in the Connect Partnership.	Corporate Director (AR)

Risk Score: 20-25: very high; 12-19: high; 8-12; medium ;< 8: low Direction of travel symbols = ↓ ↑ ↔