

CONNECT PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETING - 6 DECEMBER 2012**ITEM 3 - SHDC/WDBC CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE
SUPPLEMENTARY DISCUSSION PAPER
TO CONSIDER OPTIONS FOR THE CONNECT PARTNERSHIP
AND RELATED DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS****Background**

As part of the shared services agenda the two Councils worked with partners to jointly set local priorities for the area based on the themes of homes, economy, community life and environment. Delivery plans were initially developed during 2010 and adopted in 2011 with linked governance and delivery arrangements. In tandem, the Connect Partnership was developed from the two areas former separate Local Strategic Partnerships.

The objectives of the Connect Partnership are as follows:

- To develop and deliver a Joint Connect Strategy for South Hams and West Devon which clearly sets out the priorities for action in the local area.
- To strengthen partnership working to co-ordinate strategic direction and sharing resources, information and expertise to address key issues and local problems to support better outcomes for local people.
- To support local communities by focussing on those problems and issues which no one organisation can solve on their own.
- To empower communities to resolve problems and engage effectively with the local community to coordinate activity across the partnership.
- To ensure that there are the necessary linkages to wider strategic partnerships.

Since establishing the Connect Partnership approach, it has become clear that both the Councils and our partners have experienced capacity issues to meet the ambitious objectives we set ourselves and drive the wide range of actions within the delivery plans in a period of financial constraint.

The conclusions of the Corporate Peer Challenge

During October 2012, both Councils took part in a Peer Challenge. The key conclusions from the review that relate to the Connect Partnership and linked arrangements are as follows:

- Both Councils are well thought of by the majority of external partners;
- Partners are positive about the two Councils' willingness to engage and their strong commitment to encourage local solutions;
- Concerns about the capacity to continue the current level of partnership engagement.
- "One area that the councils may need to be watchful is partner buy-in into the Connect Partnership. This is a very ambitious programme and important for the councils' priority to progress localism. A number of partners told the peer challenge team that it seemed to them to be the councils' agenda, rather than a partner agenda, that some partners didn't feel engaged and that the agenda was too diffuse and insufficiently focused on the big issues of importance. The councils are intending

- to review the Connect Partnership and that would be an opportune time to check with partners on areas for adjustment.” (paragraph 6 page 4);
- “Providing shape for Localism will also be important so staff can understand the direction being taken and that concerns of increased workloads/reduced capacity can be addressed. It will also be important to be clear on what role partners might have and this will assist partners to better understand the choices available to them. The Connect Partnership, which involves a significant range of partners, presents a potentially important vehicle to progress the councils’ Localism programme.” (paragraph 4 page 11).

Possible future arrangements

Following receipt of the report the two Councils are developing a corporate improvement plan. Based on the Peer Challenge conclusions, there are clearly a wide range of potential opportunities for improving our current Connect approach. The following options are offered to stimulate discussion at the Board meeting.

(a) Connect Partnership Board

The original concept was to establish a shared agenda with partners. However, increasingly, the activities of the two Councils appear to dominate the meetings and the role of the Board potentially duplicates the role of the Delivery Groups. Many of the representatives on the Connect Partnership Board also sit on the various Delivery Groups.

Options for future arrangements include:

- Continue as now, meeting quarterly, with minor changes to the levels of representation to include a representative of Town and Parish Councils from each Council area nominated from the Devon Association of Local Councils Committee.
- Continue the current arrangements but reduce the number of meetings to either one or two per annum, with a much strong strategic focus to the agenda and the nature of agency representation.
- Disband the Connect Partnership Board and rely on ongoing engagement with partners through the Delivery Groups.
- Refresh the role and representation of the Connect Partnership Board and establish it as a strategic body supporting town teams and their emerging visions/action plans (summarised in Appendix 1).

(b) Stakeholder Fora and Delivery Groups

The initial concept was to encourage a “bottom up” approach to identifying delivery plan actions by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a shared agenda with local groups and partner agencies. Implementation takes place through a combination of stakeholder fora and delivery groups (summarised in Appendix 2). However, the aim to be inclusive has resulted in delivery plans becoming wide ranging and, in a number of cases, lacking SMART outcomes. Furthermore, there has been a lack of clarity about whether action plans are partnership plans or Council plans.

Options for future arrangements include:

- Continue as now but secure agreement from partners on key priorities and, as a consequence, reduce the number of actions within the delivery plans. To some extent, this is being achieved as the arrangements have matured and the recent delivery plans are more focussed than early documents, but capacity issues remain.
- Change the focus of the delivery plans from being partner based documents to becoming the Corporate Plan for the two Councils. In terms of working arrangements, the Council would engage with partners on a project-by-project basis.
- Continue a separate stakeholder forum for each priority to ensure on-going liaison between the delivery partners and other stakeholders.
- Arrange a single large scale annual stakeholder event, particularly as many of the stakeholders have an interest in a number of the Councils' corporate priorities. As part of the stakeholder forum update interested parties about progress on corporate priorities and encourage feedback from stakeholders so that the Councils remain aware of new pressures and challenges to ensure action plans remain up to date and relevant.

(c) Connect Strategy and Delivery Plans

The Connect Strategy is the overarching document that links the four separate delivery plans relating to the corporate priorities. The way the documents are structured creates a level of duplication which could be reduced.

Options for future arrangements include:

- Re-focus and produce shorter documents/action plans within the existing format.
- Incorporate the five existing documents into a single document and publish as the Councils' corporate external delivery plan, identifying those actions that specifically require a named partner to secure effective delivery.
- Rationalise monitoring of the delivery plans between various elected member groups within the two Councils and the Connect Partnership Board.

Conclusion

The peer review suggests that capacity issues and the need for greater clarity should encourage us to simplify current arrangements and prioritise actions. This supplementary paper to agenda item 3 seeks to encourage discussion on the way forward at the Connect Partnership Board on 6 December 2012.

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30 November 2012