



Policy on support for Local Area Partnerships

2012 - 2016

Working for West Dorset

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West Dorset District Council
Policy on Support for Local Area Partnerships 2012 - 2016

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The coalition are proposing to repeal the duty placed upon local authorities to prepare and implement a community strategy.
- 1.2 While the coalition government places less emphasis than the previous government on formalised local partnership arrangements, collaboration and joint working remain a key part of the national agenda on health reform, policing, and economic development
- 1.2 West Dorset District Council has chosen to retain its Community Partnership and Community Plan, recognising the benefits that this has brought about by allowing local communities to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities, and to co-ordinate the actions of local authorities, agencies and other organisations.
- 1.3 This policy sets out the council's approach to the continuation of Local Area Partnerships in West Dorset as part of the community planning process, and defines the council's expectations as to how the partnerships will promote the interests and needs of their local communities.

2. Legislative and Policy Context

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 will affect the way that the West Dorset Partnership and Local Area Partnerships operate. New measures set out in the act include :-
 - The introduction of various community rights and triggers for action
 - Allocation of new powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services
 - Giving residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases
 - Creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (to replace Regional Development Agencies) – joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities to promote local economic development
 - Creation of new trusts that would make it simpler for communities to provide homes for local people
- 2.2 The localism act has also introduced of a new 'general power of competence' for local authorities to replace 'the power of well being' This has the potential to expand the range of activities that councils can undertake on behalf of local partnerships. Previously, if LAPs put forward ideas for innovative or different ways of delivering services to meet local needs, one or other of the partner agencies would have to have existing powers to put such proposals into effect. This is usually the local authority for the area, therefore the new general power of competence has the scope to widen innovation of this kind.
- 2.3 The act will devolve planning powers, and reinforce the role of parishes and 'neighbourhoods. The strengthening the role of parish councils and neighbourhood forums, empowers local communities to have a greater say in planning needs for their area, with an expectation that they will be involved in producing local neighbourhood plans.

2.4 The 'Big Society' concept has three strands, relevant to partnership working, - public sector reform, community empowerment and, philanthropic action. The changes anticipated to bring about the 'Big Society' include increased transparency, 'social finance' and 'decentralization'.

2.5 The recent Health and Social Care Bill, may also have implications for partnership working, through the following clauses

- Clause 179 'imposes a duty on the Health and Wellbeing Board to encourage integrated working between commissioners of NHS, public health and social care'
- Clause 180 specifies that local authorities and GP consortia will have a duty to prepare a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) 'to be discharged by the Health and Wellbeing Board'

2.3 The council therefore values community planning as a way of giving local people the opportunity to identify and agree priorities for local action. Working in partnership with a range of organisations and groups will help to achieve improvements in local service delivery and should link with, and work alongside, established democratic processes.

3. Our aims

3.1 The council supports the Local Area Partnerships with the aim of:

- increasing local people's influence on decision-making about service provision in their area, including neighbourhood planning.
- making public service provision more responsive to community needs
- improving co-ordination between the agencies and organisations delivering local services
- improving efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources
- enhancing the potential for community responses to consultations to be better informed and have a greater influence on local services and policies
- improving community cohesion and addressing any inequalities.

4. The West Dorset approach to community planning

4.1 Since 2003, the council has worked closely with town councils and other partners to support the development of an approach to community planning that is suitable to a large rural area. This has involved the development of Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) based around the towns of Dorchester, Bridport, Sherborne, Lyme Regis and Beaminster and the establishment of the district wide West Dorset Partnership.

4.2 The Dorset Strategic Partnership has now been dissolved. Some elements of county wide partnerships will still exist.

4.3 These partnerships, and countywide groups, each with different but complimentary areas of influence, make a significant contribution to improving the quality of life for the communities of West Dorset and their environment.

- 4.4 In most cases, the town councils are significant partners in the LAPs, although other local organisations have an important role to play in the success of the partnerships. The council recognises the pre-eminent legitimacy of directly elected town and parish councils and intends LAPs to be complementary to their role in community leadership.
- 4.5 The council is committed to continuing the existing level of support for the on-going development and success of the following partnerships during the period 2011 until 2013:
- Beaminster & Villages Local Area Partnership
 - Bridport Local Area Partnership
 - Dorchester Area Community Partnership
 - Lyme Forward
 - Sherborne Area Partnership
- 4.6 However, the council may expect other partners to share the responsibility for supporting the partnership and will seek appropriate contributions to match the resources that it has committed to this process.
- 4.7 In Chickerell, the establishment of a LAP has been discussed with the Town Council but, with its agreement, will not proceed at present. The community has instead developed local action plan .
- 4.8 The council will support each LAP by:
- facilitating the involvement of the LAPs in the West Dorset Partnership facilitating liaison between LAPs and promoting best practice
 - facilitating engagement in the Local Plan and other consultations.
 - providing the assistance of officers and members of the council
 - part-funding the development and co-ordination of the partnerships.

5. Guiding principles for council's support of Local Area Partnerships

- 5.1 The following principles define the council's expectations of the Local Area Partnerships and will guide the council's support for the partnerships. LAPs should be based around the main towns and their rural hinterlands, working closely with town and parish councils and other appropriate agencies and local organisations.
- a) LAPs shall address local social, economic and environmental issues.
 - b) The LAP shall strive to ensure the membership is representative of the wider community. In particular, LAPs should be inclusive of all sections of the community including 'hard to reach' groups and individuals in accordance with the principles of equality. In particular, efforts should be made to enable the active participating of young people in the activities of the LAPs and the development of their action plans.
 - c) All parish councils shall be invited to join a local LAP so that they can be represented and take part in influencing decisions.
 - d) LAPs shall seek to represent the town and those communities that look to the town as a service centre.
 - e) Each LAP shall maintain appropriate governance arrangements that are transparent and accountable. The constitution should set out the aims, activities and role of the partnership, chair and steering group; how decisions are made, finances allocated and the partnership managed. The governance

arrangements should ensure that the processes in place are democratic and that the membership of the partnership is representative of the community. The key issues of equality and of child protection should be addressed in any governance documents.

- f) The legal status of each partnership shall be kept under review in order to ensure that they are best placed to help secure external funding and support projects.
- g) Each LAP shall prepare, consult on and agree an evidence-based local area Action Plan, reflecting the issues and concerns of importance to the community and setting out proposals to address these. The Plans should be realistic, achievable and sustainable, and appreciate the constraints and ability of service providers and partners to deliver. Action Plans should be subject to on-going review and will be taken into account by the West Dorset Partnership in the review and implementation of the West Dorset Community Plan.
- h) LAPs shall take account of and act as a conduit for other processes locally which also seek to identify community needs, such as the parish plans and proposals to arise from community forums.
- i) The LAPs shall keep their local communities informed of their activities. At least some of the steering group meetings should be open for the public to attend and minutes and agendas for meetings should be publicly available. An annual meeting should be held with the publication of an annual report.
- j) The LAPs will be expected to work in partnership with key local organisations/stakeholders and service providers to address local issues and help implement the Action Plan.
- k) Each LAP shall, in consultation with its main funders, monitor and evaluate the overall progress made by the partnership
- l) Wherever possible, LAPs should mediate and negotiate between differing interests to reach a positive consensus for the benefit of the community.
- m) Each LAP will be expected to make a positive contribution to the activities and decision making of the West Dorset Partnership and to the development and implementation of the West Dorset Community Plan.
- n) The LAP should be seen as a consultative body to articulate local needs and bring about improvements through their own actions and initiatives.

5.2 In general, the LAPs can expect the council to work with them in accordance with the principles of the Dorset COMPACT. In addition, the council will provide the following support:

- a) The council will assign an officer as a link to assist each LAP and liaise with other council services on significant issues.
- b) The council will nominate member representatives to become involved in the activities of the each LAP, report and feedback significant issues to the council.
- c) The council will encourage and facilitate good communication both between the LAPs and with the West Dorset Partnership .
- d) The council will part-fund the development and operation of the LAPs via an agreement with the appropriate local organisations.
- e) The council will provide advice and support on external funding and community development issues.

6. Links with the West Dorset Partnership (WDP)

6.1 Each LAP is represented on the steering group of the WDP in accordance with its constitution.

- 6.2 The LAPs shall provide regular updates as to their activities at each WDP meeting and provide the partnership with information on local issues and the outcomes of any consultation exercises. It is recognised that the LAPs are well placed to reflect the views of local communities, providing an essential conduit of community views identified through the community planning processes and thereby make a valuable contribution to the work of the WDP.
- 6.3. The council will encourage the WDP to reflect in its activities the views and priorities of the LAPs. The WDP will also seek to identify common issues identified by the LAPs and which are of district wide significance. Where necessary the WDP will lobby for service providers to address these issues.
- 6.4 When the LAPs review their Action Plans, they should be submitted to the West Dorset Partnership for its formal consideration in accordance with the adopted protocol (*LAP Action Plan Protocol July 2006*). The council will facilitate this process and seek to ensure that WDP members respond in accordance with the protocol.

7. Community engagement and local forums

- 7.1 The LAPs should establish links with existing community forums (e.g. youth, older people and disability forums) and seek their active engagement with the partnerships activities and reflect their views in reports to the West Dorset Partnership. Where needed, the LAPs should support the development of new community forums to help express community concerns.
- 7.2 There is the potential for the LAP's to take on the role of the PACT (Partners and Communities Together) to deliver the locally identified priorities where appropriate.

8. Role in Parish Planning

- 8.1 The LAP co-ordinators should make contact with surrounding parishes and encourage the development of parish plans, which can then, in turn, inform the LAP Action Plans. Where parishes have already completed parish plans, the co-ordinators should work with them to prepare a summary table of the proposed actions for submission to the West Dorset Partnership and to the council. Parishes should also be encouraged to undertake timely reviews and updates of their plans.
- 8.2 The WDP and the council recognise that parish plans are one of the building blocks of the community planning process and have adopted a protocol (*Responding to Parish Plans, July 2004*) to respond to parishes. This protocol aims to ensure that the WDP and the council respond to parishes in a co-ordinated and timely manner, and that this results in a more 'joined-up' delivery of services.

9. Promoting Equality

- 9.1 The LAPs have a significant role to play in contributing to the promotion of equality in West Dorset and in helping to tackle discrimination. Each partnership should seek to develop a steering group and wider membership that reflects the diversity of the local community, particularly with regards to race, age, sex, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation and religion and belief.
- 9.2 The council is committed to developing its practices and services in accordance with its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010. It will, therefore, work with the LAPs to promote equality and build good community relationships as part of this commitment.

10. Our support for Local Area Partnerships

10.1 **Liaison.** The Council will facilitate liaison between the LAPs in West Dorset. Regular co-ordinators liaison meetings will be organised by the council to discuss the progress made by each LAP and to identify and share examples of good practice.

10.2 **Training.** The council recognises that there will be a need for capacity building and training for both the co-ordinators and members of the LAPs in order to improve the long-term sustainability of the partnerships. The council will, therefore, liaise with each partnership to identify training and development needs and help to identify opportunities to meet these needs.

10.3 **Consultation.** The LAPs have demonstrated the potential to become a vehicle for more effective consultation with the community. Although the council will continue to consult widely with town and parish councils and community groups, there is an opportunity to further promote the co-ordinating role of LAPs in responding to consultations from the council and other public bodies. Promoting this role for the LAPs has many advantages, including:

- complementing and adding value rather than duplicating consultation responses.
- presenting views that are representative of the wider community.
- reinforcing the profile of the partnerships with the local community and amongst public agencies;
- providing town/parish councils and other groups with the opportunity to jointly discuss the local implications of consultation proposals and thereby share expertise;
- providing the opportunity for local groups to develop joint-responses to consultations under the umbrella of the LAPs, whereas individually such groups may not have the capacity to respond;
- the potential for meetings convened to address specific consultations to develop further into LAP working groups;
- increasing the potential for community responses to consultations to be better informed and to have a greater influence on local services and policies.

The council will, therefore, work with the LAPs to enhance their capacity in this area and encourage other service providers to similarly recognise their potential contribution.

10.4 **Funding.** As stated above, the Council will provide financial support for the Local Area Partnerships, primarily through a contribution to the costs of partnership co-ordination. The District Council will expect to support up to 50% of these cost however, in exceptional circumstances, a higher percentage contribution may be considered.

10.5 The Council's financial contribution will support the salary, on-costs, travel and subsistence of employing of a partnership co-ordinator, including running costs (e.g. computers, telephone, training, recruitment etc), printing/publicity and incidental meeting costs (room hire, refreshments etc). In principle, the council will consider making a pro-rata contribution to redundancy costs, but agreement will be required on a case-by-case basis.

10.6 Where the post of partnership co-ordinator is established, section 8 of this policy sets out the council's expectations for the role and duties of this officer. However, it is acknowledged that the exact role of each co-ordinator will be subject to local variation and will be influenced by their partnership steering group.

- 10.7 The maximum available for each LAP in Bridport, Dorchester and Sherborne will be £17,576. However, in Lyme Regis the smaller catchment of the partnership has been used to calculate an annual financial contribution of £10,986 based upon a 60% FTE co-ordinator post. To support the development of the LAP for the Beaminster area over the period of this policy, the council has allocated £5,358. An increase to allow for inflation may be added where appropriate. No funding will be allocated in the council's budget for the development of a LAP for Chickerell as the community has developed a Parish Plan.
- 10.8 The funding will be provided by the council through agreements with the lead local organisation for each LAP – typically the employer of the partnership co-ordinator. The council's Equality & Community Development Officer will monitor the implementation of the agreements and act as the point of contact for the LAP co-ordinators on day-to-day issues.
- 10.9 In addition, the council will also allocate a small budget to assist the LAPs with activities such as consultation, training and publication of Action Plans. Funding from this budget will need to be applied for by each LAP on a case-by-case basis but will not require match funding. This budget will not be used to supplement the employment costs of the co-ordinator posts.
- 10.10 In recognition of the major role that the town councils play in the success of the LAPs, it is proposed that where the funding agreement is with another organisations, as in Lyme Regis, Bridport and Sherborne, the district council will seek to enter into a partnership agreement with the town council to agree shared objectives for the community planning process.

11. Measuring the Performance of Local Area Partnerships

- 11.1 In return for council's financial support, partnerships will be expected to report on their performance on an annual basis, in accordance with funding agreements. These reports can be a narrative but must also have quantitative measures.
- 11.2 The council will meet annually with each partnership co-ordinator and the partnership chair to agree specific objectives for the coming year and to review progress. The objectives will relate both to the operation of the partnership and to its progress with its agreed action plan.

12. Facilitating the partnerships – our expectations

- 12.1 The council recognises that the role of co-ordinator is essential to the development and operation of the partnership. It is envisaged that the key duties of the post will be as follows, although it is recognised that the co-ordinators should be guided by the LAP's steering group or equivalent committee:
- a) to manage and facilitate the operation of the partnership as guided by the steering group, in accordance with the constitution/protocol
 - b) to support the community and appropriate organisations and partners in developing and sustaining a Local Area Partnership for the town and the surrounding area / parishes
 - c) to ensure the partnership is representative of the wider community and embodies the principles of openness, transparency and accountability

- d) to work with partners and the wider community to identify local needs and priorities through public consultation and represent them in an Action Plan
- e) to ensure that the views of hard to provide for and vulnerable groups and minority interests are included and to act as an advocate on behalf of excluded groups to ensure their views are heard
- f) to undertake regular reviews of local priorities to ensure they remain accurate
- g) to promote wide and inclusive involvement in, and ownership of, the partnership and its activities, and ensure that the community is informed
- h) to work in partnership with key local organisations/stakeholders, including parish councils, to address local issues
- i) to act as a key contact within the partnership area providing better liaison between groups, organisations and individuals, and providing advice and information
- j) to monitor and evaluate the progress of the Partnership
- k) to undertake general community development work with groups, organisations and individuals, helping them to increase their skills, confidence and voice
- l) to help groups to access and share information, build links and take up opportunities
- m) to work with individuals and groups to identify their local needs, develop initiatives to meet their local needs, provide advice and support for local initiatives through advice on developing groups, consultation methods, developing projects, funding sources, etc.
- n) to mediate and negotiate between differing interests to reach a positive consensus



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