

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

REPORT TO: South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership Board

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AUTHOR/S: Ch Supt Rob Needle, Cambridgeshire Constabulary

NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to
 - (a) outline Neighbourhood Panel developments that have occurred over the past year,
 - (b) provide an opportunity for Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Board members to comment upon the future direction of the panels,
 - (c) enable members to comment upon the proposed Neighbourhood Panel consultations.

Background

2. There are seven neighbourhood panels in South Cambridgeshire, covering five police neighbourhoods. The first South Cambridgeshire panel meeting took place in early 2006 in the Histon neighbourhood and all panels are now well established. The seven panels are:
 - Histon
 - Sawston
 - Linton
 - Swavesey
 - Comberton
 - Gamlingay
 - Bassingbourn & Melbourn
3. The panels cover a wide range of issues, which require action from various agencies. The South Cambridgeshire panels have predominantly been police led both during meetings and in taking forward actions, stemming from the Government's requirement on the police to consult with the public and allow them to have a say and influence the setting of priorities for their area. There is a great deal of variety across the district; some panels are well attended and vibrant, others much less so.
4. The Local Strategic Partnership has demonstrated its commitment to community engagement by supporting the inclusion of new national indicators related to engagement within Cambridgeshire's Local Area Agreement (LAA). In particular, NI 4, which will set targets for increasing the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality, has been selected as a Local Area Agreement (LAA) priority for Cambridgeshire and will be subject to Corporate Area Assessment (CAA) inspection in 2009.

Recent developments

5. On 2nd December 2008 Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) gave a commitment to engage more fully in neighbourhood panels across the county. Officers have been nominated to each of the neighbourhood panels in the district; they are required to represent the whole council rather than their specific team. The County Council's Cabinet also agreed a basic set of minimum principles that it would like panels to be governed by:
 - (a) A primary role for locally elected members from all tiers of local government;
 - (b) Substantial time allowed for open questioning from the public;
 - (c) Time set aside for Neighbourhood Policing issues; and
 - (d) 'Bottom-up' agenda setting.
6. The principle of 'bottom-up' agenda setting is in line with discussions at the South Cambridgeshire In Your Patch meetings held on the 24 September 2008 and 10 December 2008, where elected members from both CCC and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) were present. SCDC's Scrutiny and Overview Committee also discussed the principles at its meeting on the 8 January.
7. Both Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Cambridgeshire County Council consider that current arrangements fail to demonstrate publicly engagement opportunities and joined up working. The existing police focus does not give the District or County Council the recognition they deserve where they are involved in implementing solutions. To demonstrate the difference in approach across the county, sample agendas are attached for South Cambs (Appendix A) and for East Cambs (Appendix B).
8. The District Council, whilst feeling unable to fully support the County Council's minimum principles for panels, has agreed to consult panel members as to their wishes for future topics for engagement and the possibility of changing the name to 'Neighbourhood Forum' to more closely reflect the nature of meetings. The Swavesey Neighbourhood Panel has been selected as the first panel to be consulted, which will take place from the next meeting and will include a presentation to the panel and a questionnaire to parish, district and county elected members and community attendees of the panel (draft questionnaire attached at Appendix C) as well as possible consultation with community groups and young people at local schools.
9. The District Council has stated a commitment to senior level officer representation at panel meetings if the panels decide that the remit should widen to cover more district council related services.
10. Informal conversations have recently occurred on a county level with NHS Cambridgeshire to consider their involvement with panels across the area.

Recommendations

11. The LSP Board is recommended to:
 - (a) consider the panel developments outlined above and comment upon the desire to ensure that engagement is joined up across organisations; and
 - (b) comment upon the proposed consultation with the Swavesey Neighbourhood Panel, in particular the draft questionnaire.