

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 15 January 2009
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Partnerships Manager

NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS

Purpose

1. To adopt of the County Council's General Operating Principles for Neighbourhood Panels.
2. To agree proposed new arrangements for Neighbourhood Panels, which strengthen the District Council's role in:
 - (a) improving outcomes for local people by bringing agencies together to address problems in a joined-up way;
 - (b) helping citizens engage with and influence public service delivery and democratic governance; and
 - (c) supporting local communities in taking local action.
3. To request that Cabinet nominates a Member Champion for each Neighbourhood Panel by May 2009, as per the Council's Aims, Approaches and Actions for 2009/10.

Background

4. 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
5. 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 set up panels and involve the public in setting priorities for their area.
6. A new 'Duty to Involve' for local authorities comes into place on 1 April 2009. Neighbourhood panels provide one forum for elected members from all three tiers of local government to come together with the local community to set short-term priorities for the area and work together to implement change.
7. The Council has demonstrated its commitment to community engagement by supporting the inclusion of new national indicators for local authority performance,

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.

Considerations

8. Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) has recently given 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 will be required to represent the whole council rather than their specific team. The County Council's Cabinet has also recently agreed a basic set of minimum principles that it would like panels to be governed by:
 - (a) A primary role for local 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.

9. The principles are 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.

10. The table at **Appendix A** shows the current panel arrangements as well as proposed new arrangements, which would enable SCDC to:
 - (i) Engage more fully in neighbourhood panel meetings and highlight its role in resolving local issues, including those relating to community safety;
 - (ii) Allow people attending the meetings to raise local issues other than those pertaining to Cambridgeshire Constabulary should they so desire.

Options

11. Cabinet could
 - (a) agree the proposed new arrangements as set out in Appendix A; or
 - (b) opt to continue with the current arrangements plus increased input from the County Council.

Implications

12. Financial	The only financial implication relates to staffing (see below).
Legal	The proposed new arrangements will assist the Council in meeting the new Duty to Involve from April 2009.
Staffing	Seven third tier managers or above will each be required to attend approximately five panel meetings per year and chair meetings on an alternate basis with Cambridgeshire Constabulary.
Risk Management	None.
Equal Opportunities	Work is ongoing to ensure that venues are Disability Discrimination Act compliant.

Consultations

13. Elected members were consulted regarding the future direction of neighbourhood panels at the In Your Patch meetings on the 24 September 2008 and 10 December 2008.
14. The Cambridgeshire County Council director lead for community engagement and the Community Engagement Programme Manager were consulted in December 2008.
15. The Community Engagement Manager at Cambridgeshire Constabulary was consulted in December 2008.
16. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee will consider this report on the 8 January 2009.

Effect on Corporate Objectives and Service Priorities

17.

Work in partnership to manage growth to benefit everyone in South Cambridgeshire now and in the future
'Bottom-up' agenda setting will mean that any police, district council or county council led activity may be considered at panel meetings should attendees highlight it as an issue. Services led by other partners may also be considered by agreement.
Deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community
Helping citizens engage with and influence public service delivery should increase customer satisfaction with our services.
Enhance quality of life and build a sustainable South Cambridgeshire where everyone is proud to live and work
Neighbourhood Panels are one forum where the District Council can listen to and engage with the local community and work with parish councils to improve services. Existing Neighbourhood Panels primarily focus on issues relating to reducing crime and disorder and this will continue to be the main focus in the future.

Recommendations

18. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) adopt the County Council's General Operating Principles for Neighbourhood Panels (paragraph 8).
 - (b) agree proposed new arrangements for Neighbourhood Panels (Appendix A).
 - (c) nominate a Member Champion for each Neighbourhood Panel by May 2009.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Neighbourhood Panels report to Cambridgeshire County Council's Cabinet on 2nd December 2008.
- Local Area Agreement report to Cabinet on 8th May 2008.

Contact Officer: Gemma Barron – Partnerships Manager
Telephone: (01954) 713340