

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 12 JUNE 2012
title: REVIEW OF RIBBLE VALLEY LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the outcome of a review of the role and function of the Strategic Partnership.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions – the corporate ambitions of the Council are closely linked with those of the RVSP and the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).
- Community Objectives – the SCS and its associated action plans form the basis of the sense of place in common vision of the communities in the Ribble Valley.
- Corporate Priorities – to be a well managed authority.
- Other Considerations – none.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Local Strategic Partnership for Ribble Valley was formed in 2002 and developed its first community plan that year. A new Sustainable Community Strategy was developed through 2007 and published in December 2007. The Partnership Board underwent a restructuring in 2008 to ensure that it was fit for purpose to deliver the objectives of the SCS. The current SCS runs to 2013 and consideration needs to be given as to how the role and functions of the partnership will be developed.

2.2 The RVSP is responsible for the Sustainable Community Strategy which forms the basis for defining the Council's ambitions. The strategy itself is adopted by the Council. The RVSP Board currently makes recommendations on how funds are allocated where derived from the discounted second homes council tax in the district through a series of bids made by the theme groups of the partnership. The existing partnership has therefore been instrumental in delivering a wide range of Council ambitions.

2.3 All the funding decisions of the RVSP are subject to agreements and protocols with Lancashire County Council which require that those decisions are progressed through the regular financial allocation and accounting procedures of the Council. Those protocols have been the subject of a number of previous reports. The current relationship between the work of the RVSP and that of the Council needs to be reconsidered in relation to the review of the community strategy and the changing working environment that local government and partner agencies now find themselves in.

- 2.4 The partnership has played the key role in preparing and consequently implementing the Council's SCS. Working through a series of theme groups, the Chair of each group being a member of the Board to whom they report are responsible for identified actions in the SCS action plan. Themes cross a wide range of topics ensuring the Council is able to identify key issues relating to the economy, health, community safety, housing, the environment, community needs and so on. A principle aim of these theme groups is to draw together relevant public agencies, the voluntary sector and local community groups to work together to the benefit of the borough and its residents. Given the changes occurring with strategic partnerships, it is important that the current working arrangements are reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose. The loss of project funding in particular for theme groups to deliver against actions is a major issue.
- 2.5 Previously, there have been very strong linkages between the work of the Local Strategic Partnership and that of the former Countywide Partnership that sought to co-ordinate delivery and activity across the county area. This, in itself, generated substantial amounts of income to deliver work across the borough. Whilst the Countywide Partnership no longer exists in its previous form and there have been many changes in the way public agencies and groups are set up and funded, there remains many areas of work that the RVSP covers that are still relevant to the wellbeing of the borough – and consideration needs to be given to those areas that remain to be addressed and inevitably the priority for resources. Funding is in place to support the existing partnership to 2013, therefore there is a need to align the review with the preparation of budgets for the next financial year 2013-2014.

3 PROPOSED CHANGES

- 3.1 Members will recall that it was previously resolved to set up an officer working group to discuss the future of the Local Strategic Partnership in order to inform proposals for possible change. The Chief Executive, together with the Council's Corporate Management Team and Head of Regeneration and Housing have considered the nature of the partnership and how best it can be utilised to inform the work and delivery of services by the Council and most significantly provide an important link with the needs of the Ribble Valley community.
- 3.2 Firstly, give the change in the duty to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) which was prepared on behalf of the Council by the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership, coupled with the significant changing funding opportunities and there no longer being a countywide partnership (The Partnership of Partnerships) the working group concluded that it was difficult to support the continuation of the existing structure and approach to operating the partnership through a formalised Board and theme group arrangement.
- 3.3 Changes in financial arrangements have already seen the role of the Board alter from a decision making body with financial responsibilities to a broader steering group and advisory body to the Council and in particular the Policy and Finance Committee. However, it needs to be recognised that the theme groups provide an important opportunity to bring together compatible interests which can be used to inform the Council's roles and responsibilities. To date, the theme groups have worked under the auspices of the Board, led by a Chair and supported by the Partnership Officer as appropriate. It is considered that as one of the principle purposes of the theme groups was to formulate and help deliver projects funded through the partnership, the loss of funding opportunities is likely to have a significant impact upon the way in which themed groups may operate. Notwithstanding this, it is clear from feedback from the themed groups that there remains a view that there would be a recognisable

benefit in continuing to meet within the themes to enable sharing of information, opportunities for joined up working and to ensure successful working relationships that have been built up are not lost. If the Strategic Partnership is no longer a formal body in itself, there is a strong likelihood that themed groups would continue in any event. From the Council's viewpoint, there would continue to be opportunities for the Council to be included in joint working and theme group activities and within the available resources, the ability for support to be given through ongoing work of the Council and within the scope of the Partnership officer's role. There would certainly be scope for the Partnership Officer to work on maintaining and building partnerships at a strategic level with less focus on individual project delivery.

- 3.4 Within the existing structure themed groups such as the Housing Forum, Economy themed group and Environmental theme groups can be readily associated with Council functions either directly or by way of Council involvement as attendees. Theme groups such as the Ribble Valley Health Improvement Group, increasingly align with the Council's Health and Wellbeing Executive that has been established to support and inform the Council's work relating to the emerging Health Reform Agenda and the roles and responsibilities of the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Boards. Other linkages around such areas as the Children's Trust and the Community Safety Partnership, are anticipated to continue to operate pending any proposals to alter their structures and subsequently there is not anticipated to be any significant impact upon the Council or the community that benefits from their functions, if the partnership in its existing form was to be abandoned.
- 3.5 Within the existing partnership, there are key areas that although related to Council activities are nevertheless not as directly related with the Council's traditional service areas, yet are extremely important to the wellbeing of Ribble Valley residents. The People and Communities Group, Older persons forum and wider activities supporting young people, are important areas that the Council needs to consider how it can work with, support and ensure that the role of the traditional third sector (including voluntary, faith and community interests) are not disadvantaged by changing the Strategic Partnership. Indeed, it is this sector which provides an important area of support to the community where the Council needs to ensure it can support its residents. It is considered that developing relationships, in this sector, enhancing engagement and opportunities for joint working would be an important focus of the Partnership Officer within this revised structure and thereby the Council would be able to enhance its linkages specifically with this sector.
- 3.6 The working group recognised the important contribution that the partnership has made to supporting the local community and enhancing the work of the Council. However, it was apparent that in its existing form, the Board structure was neither sustainable or would potentially serve to duplicate roles and functions that would be within the remit of the Council's duties and responsibilities. It was very important to recognise the benefits of bringing the wide variety of groups, bodies and agencies together in order to encourage joint working, collating ideas and issues of concern and consequently enabling the Council to benefit from this information to inform its service delivery and practices which of course was the origin of the Community Strategy approach itself.
- 3.7 It is suggested therefore that if the existing Strategic Partnership is dissolved as a formal body, that there would be a need to look at how the themed groups would be able to operate but that it would also be important to put in place a Partnership Forum as a structured meeting, probably bi-annually under the auspices of the Council. This would enable the continuation of the opportunity to discuss relevant issues and a formalised means of enabling the Council to engage and develop its

relationships with partners. The role of the Partnership Officer would focus more towards strategic working and supporting the forum and developing external relationships for the Council.

- 3.8 As Members will be aware, the responsibility for the Strategic Partnership budget, sits with this Committee. Consequently, the role of Committee in determining how funding is applied would remain unchanged. The use of performance reward grants and second homes money would be subject to the Council's budget planning process, however it would be anticipated that funding continued to be applied to activities that supported the aspirations of the Council reflecting its Sustainable Community Strategy and by developing ongoing work areas and projects with its partners. What needs to be borne in mind going forward is that funding is in place essentially through the current PRG and second homes arrangements up to 2013. As part of the budget planning process, consideration will need to be given for supporting partnership working beyond 2013 in due course.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – None directly, however, the outcome of the review and changes to available funding will need to be considered within the 2013-2014 budget process.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – none.
- Political – none.
- Reputation – the work of the partnership interfaces with a wide range of local groups, public bodies and other organisations who may be affected by the review.
- Equality & Diversity – The proposals would include measures to promote equality and diversity.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Endorse the conclusions of the working group and that the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership be dissolved in its current form.
- 5.2 Ask the Chief Executive to establish a Ribble Valley Forum in accord with the proposals set out in Section 3 of the report and that resource requirements to support the Council's partnership work beyond March 2013, are considered within the Council's normal budget procedures.

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