

Report Heading: Ellesmere Port APB – Future Direction

Purpose of the Report:

The purpose of this report is to:

- i) set the changing national and local context for partnership working; and
- ii) highlight the potential implications of these changes on the future shape, function and governance of the Ellesmere Port Area Partnership Board (APB) to inform further discussion.

Recommendations:

That the Ellesmere Port APB:

- i) note the content of the report and the changing wider partnership landscape; and
- ii) receive further recommendations on the future shape, function and governance of partnership working in Ellesmere Port at the next meeting following a task and finish group of partners to be held during March.

Introduction:

The Ellesmere Port APB was established following Local Government Re-organisation in April 2009 as part of the wider partnership framework for the borough – West Cheshire Together. Alongside four other Area Partnership Boards covering Chester; Northwich and Rural North; Winsford and Rural East; and Rural West, the core purpose of the APB is to **“provide differential services to meet differing needs across Cheshire West and Chester in order to improve outcomes for local communities”**. In addition, the APB has undertaken a number of functions to support the work of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) including:

- the development of an Area Action Plan to meet local priorities and underpin the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement; and
- performance management of Local Area Agreements and related National Indicators

However, whilst the purpose of the APB remains valid, the context for partnership working and indeed the landscape around it is rapidly changing and, at the request of the LSP, work is now underway to review all current arrangements across the partnership framework to ensure continued 'fitness for purpose'.

The Changing Context:

Since the election of the Coalition Government last May, local authorities and their partners are responding to unprecedented change and challenge including:

- substantial cuts in public spending;
- the emerging Localism and Devolution agenda;
- the 'Big Society';
- significant Health, Policing, Education and Housing reforms;
- a changing regional and sub-regional landscape (including the replacement of Regional Development Agencies with Local Enterprise Partnerships and the creation of new Health and Well-being Boards);
- the introduction of new Community (Place-Based) Budgets (initially across 16 local areas); and
- the removal of much of the top down partnership 'wiring' including the abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), Public Service Agreements (PSAs), Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and the National Indicator Set.

All of the above signals a shift towards greater local autonomy, ending top down government and centralist control and devolving more power and control down to the local level. In turn, this approach is fundamentally re-directing the focus for partnership working with a much greater emphasis being placed on:

1. 'outward accountability' (being held to account by the citizen rather than by Whitehall);
2. renewed interest in localism and devolution (ensuring issues are addressed at the lowest practicable spatial level);
3. local authorities and their partners adopting more of an 'enabling' role (helping people and communities do more for themselves and each other; and
4. consideration of new and radical approaches to public service provision (through shared services, joint strategic commissioning, whole area budgets, new markets and new models for service delivery).

Locally, Ellesmere Port is already attuned to the changing national context and the localism challenge through "Our Place and the development of a 'Local Integrated Services' (LIS) model to provide tailored services which better meet the needs and priorities identified by communities. This represents a fundamental shift away from simply consulting with residents and service users, 'professionals' deciding how to use the resources available and delivering universal services within borough boundaries to best fit those needs; to one that is led by residents and service users who will themselves decide what they need in their individual neighbourhoods and will ask the

council and its partners to commission those services for them so that they are delivered in the way that they choose.

Elements of this work are already underway with the creation of the new Residents Advisory Panels (RAPs) and the development of Neighbourhood Plans across the ten identified 'Our Place' neighbourhoods through which local service priorities are identified. This new layer of engagement and influence will need to be connected with other (still to be developed) mechanisms for service development, commissioning, resource allocation, service delivery and scrutiny at the local level.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the role of local residents, service users and partner organisations will fundamentally change as will the role of the local authority, its officers and councillors to meet new demands of enhanced community development, capacity building and engagement; neighbourhood planning; service review, re-design, commissioning and delivery; and scrutiny.

This will require a review of all partnership arrangements – both in terms of governance and work programmes – to ensure they are fit for purpose, appropriate and relevant for the changing context.

With the agreement of the APB, it is therefore proposed to convene a task and finish group of partners during March to inform the development of revised partnership governance arrangements for Ellesmere Port.

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