

Cheshire West and Chester Local Strategic Partnership

General meeting report.

AGENDA ITEM 2.

Report title	Representation of community sector on Chester West and Chester LSP.
Description	Community sector involvement in the work of Cheshire West and Chester LSP.
Document purpose	To ensure a broad range of local sectors and interests are engaged and represented on the new Cheshire West and Chester LSP
Circulation list	Cheshire West and Chester LSP
Decision/Action required	The LSP is being asked to approve the recommendation set out in Section 5 of the Report.
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Target audience	Cheshire West and Chester LSP
Cross reference	CAA Guidance, Community Empowerment duties, LAA Guidance.

Report narrative

1. Introduction

One of the key issues raised at the LSP Working 24th February 2009 was how the LSP could secure community sector representation and officers were asked to consider options and make a recommendation to deliver this aspiration.

This report sets out the rationale for the community sector having a place at the LSP, options considered and practical steps to achieve delivery of the recommended option.

2. Representation on Cheshire West and Chester LSP

Community involvement and empowerment is a core strand of Government requirements for local strategic partnerships and effective community planning processes.

Cheshire West and Chester's partnership framework and the work of individual agencies already demonstrates commitment to engaging with community groups, from local area working to ongoing processes to renew Cheshire West and Chester's Sustainable Community Strategy and associated work.

In a similar vein, there is currently a planned election process for a representative to sit on the LSP drawn from the 3RD Sector Assembly whose composition includes a number of community organisations. The elected representatives' roles will include representing the voluntary and community sector in its diversity rather than a specifically community based perspective. The allocation of a place at the LSP for a community sector representative would be a recognition of both the contribution of community organisations to quality of life locally and of the "community voice" to planning processes.

The principle of specific constituencies or interests having their own representatives on the LSP is already established with, for example, CHAWREC and the Third Sector Assembly. These are both constituencies that form part of the wider voluntary and community sector, whilst having their own place at the LSP because of their specific interests and contributions.

3. Options Considered

Options Appraisal		
Option	Benefits	Uncertainties
Do nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No cost to LSP partners ▪ Less work at busy time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor community engagement at strategic level ▪ Poor evidence of community involvement, engagement and leadership for CAA ▪ Poor demonstration of delivery of NI1 and NI4 for the partnership. ▪ Lack of community sector constituency development for LSP.
Public sector partner officers assemble a community sector constituency and run an election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Control of the process rests with public sector partners. ▪ Costs within current budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor community engagement at strategic level ▪ Poor evidence of community involvement, engagement and leadership for CAA ▪ Poor demonstration of delivery of NI1 and NI4 for the partnership. ▪ Lack of community sector buy in or commitment to

		the process
LA commission 3 rd sector to support the assembly of a community sector constituency and public sector partner officers support an election process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involvement of community sector at strategic level ▪ Demonstration by CWaC and partners of commitment to supporting community engagement. ▪ Demonstration to CAA inspectors of commitment ▪ Delivery of NI1 and NI4. ▪ Development of community sector constituency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small cost to LSP/public sector

4. Practical Steps

Cheshire West and Chester will need to develop a 'community sector constituency' from which one or two member can be elected onto the LSP. This will fulfil part of its role in engaging the local community and ensuring that community representatives are part decision making at the highest strategic level. Chester Voluntary Action has successfully co-ordinated the postal election for the 2 voluntary and 1 community sector places on the Chester in Partnership Steering Group (Chester's LSP). Other 3rd Sector groups also have the skills to undertake this role. Supporting an election process for an authority-wide community sector representative would involve:

- i. preparing a specification for the representative's role
- ii. developing a nomination and election process which is accessible, open and transparent.
- iii. preparing, with assistance and support from Cheshire West and Chester Council, an authority-wide mailing list of community organisations in urban, sub-urban and rural areas to form the constituency for a postal nomination and voting process
- iv. ensuring that ongoing support and feedback processes to the community sector constituency are in place to enable the representative/s to play a full part in the work of the LSP.

Any practical arrangements to support the representative would need to avoid being over-bureaucratic, time consuming or duplicating of existing effort. One step which would help the flow of information is the use of an authority-wide community groups' website. This would offer a time efficient way of enabling ongoing communication to and from the elected community representative/s and wider constituency and more generally between community organisations.

This would need to be backed up with mail-outs for those without access to the website to ensure that communication processes do not exclude groups with limited resources or infrastructure.

The community representative would also need support in preparing for LSP meetings and in circulating reports to community organisations for feedback and or comment, in order to ensure that the views of the community sector constituency are represented, this support could be offered by a CWaC partnership manager. Another step would be to form a strategic group of community representatives whose remit was to assist the representative in their role through meetings in advance of each LSP. In addition, the convening of an annual conference for community groups which enabled discussion of policy, strategy – including the work of the LSP- might also strengthen input to authority-wide issues. This could be one of the planned LSP Network events

Next steps should be informed by the following factors:

- that any new arrangements should add to community organisations' independent voice and strengthen their engagement and influence in partnership working.
- that this development should not undermine or duplicate processes or networks where community groups are active e.g. Area Programme Boards, Voluntary Action Groups and Community Forums.
- that this work is co-ordinated with current LSP activities around developing a stronger communities thematic work.

5. Recommendation

Agreement is being sought for:

- i. a place on the LSP being allocated to an elected community sector representative in line with the approach set out in Section 3 of this report
- ii. option 3 being agreed as a method of making this aspiration a reality and that officers are tasked with taking this work forward in liaison with the LSP Director.