

**A COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR HERTFORDSHIRE**

*Report of the Chief Executive*

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**1. Purpose of the report**

To consider proposals for taking forward the new statutory duty to produce community strategies.

**2. Summary**

The paper considers how the county council can lead the creation of a county wide community strategy that sets out the future vision for Hertfordshire. This will ensure that local communities have a voice through local community partnerships that express their direct aspirations and work closely with districts and other statutory agencies to ensure consistency and reduce duplication. Specifically this involves the following actions:

- Setting up a community planning forum chaired by the Executive member with responsibility for community development, supported by an officer group
- Recommending that the Resources Select Committee creates a member panel
- Roll out of local community strategies, starting with 4 local pilots
- New structure for partnerships

These proposals will be considered by the Resources Select Committee at their meeting on 25 January 2001.

**3. Conclusions**

The new legislation regarding community strategies provides an opportunity to develop a shared vision for the future with all sections of society in Hertfordshire. It also presents some new opportunities in terms of rationalising existing council work. This document outlines proposals for developing community strategies in order to exert their potential to work for Hertfordshire's interests.

## **1. Background**

The Local Government 2000 Act presents local authorities (at District and County level) with the duty to prepare community strategies alongside the power to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their area. The Community Strategy is regarded as the main way in which local authorities will exercise this new power. The county councils contribution to the community strategy is being expressed in the Best Value Performance Plan.

The term community planning describes the process resulting in a community strategy. The process is seen as equally important as the production of the strategy itself. Government guidance identifies 3 objectives for community strategies:

- communities articulate their needs and priorities
- co-ordinate the activities of public, community, voluntary and private sectors to provide tangible benefits
- shape these activities to meet community needs and aspirations.

Community strategies will bring together the work of all our partnerships, providing an opportunity for rationalising these and focussing work on a number of key themes, which can be linked to the county priorities. The Treasury is to issue guidance in April 2001 on rationalising existing partnerships.

Government guidance also indicates there will also be opportunities to opt out of certain statutory requirements (to be agreed between the authority and the secretary of state on an individual basis) if both the community strategy and the BVPP are sufficiently robust.

Community strategies will have close links to other current areas of work -Best Value Reviews, Public Service Agreements and the emerging county Compact between voluntary and statutory sectors, for example.

## **2. The proposed Hertfordshire approach**

The proposals outlined in this paper have been developed through extensive consultation with external stakeholders, in addition to colleagues in all internal departments. Hertfordshire LGA have endorsed the proposed countywide approach, agreeing to 5 community planning pilots between now and April (see paragraph 3)

The aim is to produce a countywide strategy, led by HCC. It would encompass countywide issues in addition to District, Borough and smaller area based community strategies. This process will necessitate close working relationships with Districts and the smaller area community plans (e.g. for South Oxhey). The countywide strategy will provide a long term vision set within key themes. These themes will cut across our own services and those of other partners. Initial thinking suggests themes such as 'living healthier lives', 'creating safer communities', 'increasing prosperity', 'learning throughout life' and 'improving

environmental quality' will be used at a countywide level. At a local level, strategies will echo the countywide themes at the same time as reflecting local concerns such as 'reviving the town centre' and 'neighbourhood management'. Issues such as social inclusion and sustainability would cut across all these themes.

At a local level, strategies will have a clear focus enabling people to see how the strategy relates to their lives. The links to the wider policy context should be transparent. Local community plans will have an accessible language - compared to the countywide plan, which is more likely to be more strategic in its language.

Community strategies will need to recognise and build on existing local best practice and partnerships. It might be, for example, that they are developed from Community Safety or Regeneration Partnerships or the Local Health Improvement Programmes.

A clear commitment to developing a sound community planning process would:

- enable HCC to strengthen links with local communities
- rationalise the current partnership arrangements
- improve our external and internal communications
- seek to reduce the number of statutory plans we produce
- promote the councils plans and strategies within the countywide community strategy
- establish clear links between the community strategy, the BVPP and statutory and service planning (including LA21 and planning guidance).

### **3. Recommended Approach**

It is recommended that HCC approach to community planning involve the establishment of the following activities.

- A new Hertfordshire Community Forum, constituted as an outside body chaired by the Executive Member with community development portfolio, to operate at a member level and represent all sectors and partnerships. This group will develop the Hertfordshire Community Strategy, supported by an officer group representing the same breadth of interests and organisations and recommend it to the County Council for adoption. In addition to HCC, the forum will include key partners from appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies and representatives of the local community.
- A new panel for community planning, to be set up by the select committee, to meet for the first time in January 2001. This will ensure that the community planning strategy is in keeping with HCC corporate objectives.

- 5 community planning pilots to operate from November 200 to March 2001. In some of these local area plans HCC will lead, and in others it will actively contribute where work is already underway. The objectives are to develop a mode of 2 and 3 tier community planning working and define the process and framework for rolling out community planning throughout the county from April 2001. The pilots will be Watford, South Oxhey, Buntingford, Hitchin or Royston.
- New structures for partnerships, which will aim to rationalise the existing structures into more logical forms. This will be possible once the key themes for the countywide strategy have been agreed.

#### **4. Member Involvement**

The role of members as community leaders and representatives will be vital to the success of this process. Local members will be invited to get involved in the 5 pilots, in their role as community leaders. It is likely that each District will have at least one community planning partnership, which will necessitate the close involvement of local members at a county and district level.