

## Cheshire Local Area Agreement– Progress Report, Next Steps & Future Development

### Introduction

The purpose of this report is to update the Communities of Cheshire Partnership on the current position concerning the preparation and delivery of the Cheshire Local Area Agreement.

### Finalising the Agreement

Following submission of the final draft Cheshire Local Area Agreement to GONW on 9 March and subsequent clearance of the Agreement by central government departments, the final ‘polished’ version of the Agreement was submitted to GONW on 23 March. As with previous versions, a copy of the final Agreement can be downloaded from the Cheshire Partnerships Framework website ([www.cpframework.org.uk](http://www.cpframework.org.uk)). Hard copies will now also be produced.

Minor amendments to the final Agreement included:

- Removal of the ‘Train to Gain’ sub-outcome - 15.2 (ii);
- Revised baselines and three trajectories across a range of indicators, particularly in relation to Children & Young People and Economic Development & Enterprise;
- Revised lead partners across some sub outcomes, particularly in relation to Safer & Stronger Communities (Blacon Neighbourhood Management and Lache Neighbourhood Element Boards) and Economic Development & Enterprise (4<sup>th</sup> Block Strategic Group); and
- Reallocation of funding streams from pooled to aligned (School Improvement Partners, School Development Grant, Children’s Fund and Basic Command Unit funding) vice versa (Rural Social & Community Programme) on advice from GONW and amended Primary Strategy Central Co-ordination figure.

The final Cheshire Agreement was formally signed on Thursday 29 March at an event in London hosted by Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion. Formal signatories to the Agreement are Cllr Paul Findlow (Leader of Cheshire County Council as the Accountable Body for the Agreement); Wendy Wright (on behalf of the Communities of Cheshire Partnership) and Ruth Kelly (for Her Majesty’s Government). It is intended to follow this event with a more local signing and launch event for the Communities of Cheshire Partnership and the Cheshire Governance Board during April / May.

## **Meeting with GONW**

During the same week, a meeting was held between the Cheshire LAA and GONW Block Leads to reflect on the development process over the last twelve months and discuss future expectations in relation to delivery and performance management.

In general the meeting was positive, recognising the efforts of all involved in the development of the Agreement and the strength of the new Cheshire Partnerships Framework in identifying Cheshire-wide and more locally focussed LAA priorities and engaging a wide range of partners.

Concern was expressed, however, in relation to Government expectations for the development of LAAs in partnership with others in two-tier areas, the lack of clarity from central government throughout the process, failure of agreement to proposed enabling measures, changes in personnel and general communications issues.

## **Delivery & Performance Management**

Following a successful “Mobilisation Workshop” held on 9 February and the subsequent production of concise delivery planning guidance, work has started on the production of Action Delivery Plans with key milestones and trajectory targets to underpin the delivery of the Agreement; performance monitoring, reporting and management requirements; financial processes and general support systems. Each LAA sub-outcome has an identified ‘owner’ responsible for overseeing the administrative tasks associated with the sub-outcomes though not necessarily directly accountable for their delivery. Whilst the role of the sub-outcome owner is evolving, it is expected that they will have responsibility for ensuring the achievement of the following actions:

- Develop a delivery / action plan on an annual basis
- Develop / inform appropriate performance indicators, if not already identified
- Measure the progress of performance indicators
- Measure the progress of actions
- Record this information in Excelcis – the IT based performance management system (if not done separately)
- Present a quarterly report on the achievement of milestones to their respective block co-ordinator
- Develop and co-ordinate action in areas of under performance

In turn, it is expected that the block co-ordinators will:

- Quality assure the sub outcome delivery plans
- Receive quarterly progress reports from sub-outcome owners
- Chase outstanding information for quarterly reports
- Amalgamate quarterly reports from sub-outcome owners for block report
- Present quarterly block progress report to respective thematic partnership
- Liaise with other block co-ordinators
- Support sub outcomes displaying underperformance as detailed in the ‘local ladder of intervention’

- Support thematic Chair on LAA performance issues
- Provide financial information for performance management and audit purposes, where applicable (only applies to automatically pooled LAA funding streams)

It is expected that, in accordance with the terms of reference of the constituent parts, a formal mechanism of performance reporting will flow across the wider Cheshire Partnerships Framework through the respective thematic partnerships to the Communities of Cheshire Partnership and Cheshire Governance Board on a quarterly basis and ultimately to GONW every six months. However, it is hoped that through the use of the IT-based performance management system – Excelsis – all partners, if trained, will be able to access this performance information at any time through the Cheshire Remote Access Gateway (CRAG) via the Internet.

### **Additional LAA Resources**

Partners will recall that the LAA process does not bring additional resources into the area as the intention is to use existing resources more flexibly to achieve LAA outcomes. That said, the Cheshire Local Government Association have identified some additional financial resources (£47,500) which will be generated through changes to second homes taxation and which have been earmarked specifically for 'shared LAA priorities'.

Work has begun on the development of options for the use of this additional funding as detailed in Appendix A. These have been considered in outline form by the Cheshire (Local Authority) Chief Executives though no firm decisions regarding the use of the resources have yet been made pending further work.

### **Developing the Future Arrangements for LAAs**

In February, the Department for Communities and Local Government published their latest thinking on how the new LAA arrangements as part of the new performance framework outlined in the Local Government White Paper 2006 might be implemented.

Under these arrangements, new LAAs to be introduced in April 2008 will:

- Be the only place where central government will agree targets with local authorities and their partners on outcomes delivered by local government on its own or in partnership with others.
- Contain up to 35 improvement targets plus 18 statutory DfES attainment and childcare targets. Locally identified targets can also be included.
- No longer be about specific funding for specific targets. Because they will now include all targets agreed with central government, delivery should be supported by all resources in the area.
- Include a new unringfenced area based LAA grant with a presumption that all area based funding will go through this route unless there are very strong

arguments for retaining a ring fence. This grant will have no performance reporting or other conditions attached.

Local authorities and local strategic partnerships are encouraged to use this latest thinking to inform debate and help identify what this might mean for them in practice and what they need to do to prepare for and implement these changes. A series of regional roadshows have already been held across the country and these will inform the operational guidance to be published by CLG in the summer to inform the negotiation of new LAAs for 2008/09.

However, at this stage and on the basis of the delay in announcing the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review which will inform the new national priorities from which new LAAs will be developed, new arrangements for LAAs are unlikely to be in place before April 2008.

## **Recommendations**

### **That the Communities of Cheshire Partnership:**

- (i) note and comment upon the contents of this report; and**
- (ii) consider the implications of the future arrangements for LAAs when further guidance becomes available.**

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## OPTIONS FOR THE USE OF SECOND HOME TAXATION FUNDING

### 1. Secretariat Support to the Cheshire Partnerships Framework\*

This particular need has been highlighted by the recent Audit Commission project, "Improving Partnership Working in Cheshire" and was the key message to emerge from the project feedback given by the Audit Commission to the Communities of Cheshire Partnership on 8 February. Whilst the Cheshire LAA Group currently fulfil this secretariat role, the arrangement was only intended to be a short-term solution and cannot be sustained in the longer term. In addition to the support needs of the new Communities of Cheshire Partnership and Cheshire Governance Board, other components of the Framework are also struggling to fulfil their expanding roles with limited support.

### 2. Proposal to Develop a Third Sector Hub\*

The LAA is intended to be a new way of joint working which seeks to engage as many partners as possible in delivering the outputs in the Agreement. This requirement is further developed in the 'roadmap' included in the new guidance which requires a joint sector development of a new Community Engagement Strategy to replace the Statement of Community Involvement.

There are over three thousand voluntary, community and faith sector organisations in Cheshire, ranging from very small groups dealing at very local level with a small number of vulnerable/potentially vulnerable individuals through to larger organisations delivering multiple projects and large infrastructure organisations supporting and advising the others, which make up the Third Sector.

These organisations have put forward the idea of a Hub to:

- provide LAA partners with a single contact for the Third Sector across Cheshire thereby saving valuable time and effort for non Third Sector partners;
- provide an agreed means of consultation, ensuring that the same information has been distributed in an agreed format;
- facilitate genuine engagement of the sector in the LAA by enabling views to be sought from a wide range of organisations with many interests;
- enable LAA partners to benefit from knowing the contribution the sector can make to meeting LAA targets;
- ensure that the action plan in the SCI is implemented and that an effective Community Engagement Strategy is produced through a genuinely multi-sector approach;
- provide the Cheshire LAA and its partners with an example of best practice by supporting a Third Sector led engagement programme;
- facilitate a shared ownership of issues to be resolved and outputs to be met; and
- open up opportunities to lever in additional funding to support specific LAA outcomes.

Additionally it is expected that the ongoing development of the Hub would add value to the work currently being undertaken by the ChangeUp Consortium.

The Hub would have a Co-ordinator who would distribute information and requests for proposals to a number of networks who would in turn pass on to their own members and feed back to the Hub and then to the LAA team. Whilst this officer will receive support in terms of staff time from local infrastructure organisations such as the CVS and in the additional workload of new LAA related consultations, the post and administrative costs need to be funded. An approach for funding is also being made to GONW.

### **3. LAA Performance Management System Support**

Effective performance management will be critical to the delivery of the Cheshire LAA, both in terms of monitoring and reporting to the thematic partnerships, Communities of Cheshire Partnership and Governance Board as well as the performance management expectations and requirements of GONW. Performance management is more than a monitoring process. It is about learning from results and taking action where required. As a result, a robust performance management framework has been devised to ensure that the progress of the agreement is monitored, managed and evaluated on a quarterly basis.

The Cheshire LAA contains around 190 indicators reporting to over 50 sub outcomes delivered in partnership by a large number of organisations. Based on latest estimates, the sub outcomes are 'owned' by over 70 responsible officers for development and reporting purposes.

In order for this complex agreement to be effectively performance managed, an electronic system is currently being developed. Excelcis is an IT based system used by Cheshire County Council to support their corporate performance management arrangements. After an extensive feasibility study and in view of the County Council's role as Accountable Body, it has been decided that a parallel version of Excelcis should be developed for the purposes of the LAA. This would have separate Communities of Cheshire Partnership branding and reflect the structure and terminology of the LAA. It will also be accessible to partners to input data and monitor performance.

### **4. Equality Strategy for Cheshire / Equality Impact Assessment for the LAA\***

The recent CLG publication – Developing the future arrangements for Local Area Agreements – signals the replacement of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) with a new community engagement strategy to be adopted within the Sustainable Community Strategy.

However, communities in Cheshire require different approaches and resources to become involved in engagement processes. An equality strategy needs to be developed to ensure that Cheshire's minority communities are included and consulted in both the policy development and service planning exercises in a consistent and co-ordinated manner.

Furthermore, in addition to existing practices required to respond to the Equality Standard, equality assessment statements are a statutory requirement and the Cheshire LAA will need to be assessed to ensure there are no negative impacts on race, disability, gender, age, religion and beliefs. The development of a Cheshire Equality Strategy can help to fulfil the requirements to be placed on LAAs and LSPs.

Finally, LAAs and LSPs are expected to address the cross-cutting issue of community cohesion. This has different meaning across our communities and localities and an adopted approach developed through consultation to produce an equality strategy can help improve understanding.

Investment in this area will provide:

- Establishment and delivery of six minority community focus group sessions to produce first hand qualitative information concerning the Cheshire LAA.
- Supporting evidence to undertake a full equality impact assessment of the Cheshire LAA.
- Supporting evidence for the Cheshire community cohesion agenda and assist in the delivery of the respective LAA sub-outcome.
- Supporting evidence to establish the basis of a co-ordinated equality strategy for Cheshire and ongoing expert advice to ensure its vision and action plans are universally adopted.

NB. This work will need to be continually refreshed as new iterations of the LAA are produced annually.

## **5. Re-offending and PPO targets**

Within the LAA, measurement of the re-offending outcome 4.1 (ii) - Reduce the volume of convictions by Prolific and Priority Offenders who re-offend, measured by conviction rates pre and post entry to the scheme by 30% by 2010 - will require new work on managing Police National Computer data over the next three years. This will involve running checks on between 150 and 300 offenders, looking at their conviction in the last twelve months prior to a set date and then repeating the task at six monthly intervals. This is new work that the Administration of Justice office would struggle to prioritise and resource. No other agency has access to the relevant information.

This is a mandatory LAA outcome under the Safer and Stronger Communities block. If financial support from this pot is unavailable, it is likely that Govt would expect the work to be funded from the Safer Stronger Communities Fund to ensure the establishment of the baseline and measurement of targets. This would require a recalculation and reallocation of the funding already agreed for next year to each of the six CDRPs.

## **6. Partnership Training & Development\***

The Audit Commission project identified the need for a development programme for partnership working at all levels across the Cheshire Partnerships Framework, from the Communities of Cheshire Partnership and the Cheshire Governance Board to operational on the ground delivery. The importance of this will be heightened as

LSPs continue to develop and their roles strengthened in the context of the Local Government White Paper.

**7. Support to specific LAA priority sub-outcomes or actions struggling or failing to deliver**

This would support the “local ladder of intervention” principles identified within the Performance Management Framework of the LAA which aims to ensure that the appropriate package of challenge and support is directed towards targets and sub outcomes that are under-performing.