

Report to: East Sussex Strategic Partnership
Date: 12 March 2009
Title: Governance, Communications and Engagement Review
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Purpose: To report findings of governance, communications and engagement issues arising through the Sustainable Community Strategy action planning process

Recommendation: That the ESSP Executive Board agree to:

1. Invite Job Centre Plus and the Highways Agency to join the ESSP board
2. Ask ESCC support staff to develop detailed governance, communications and engagement proposals and consult partners on them, and
3. Consider and approve any recommended changes at the July ESSP board.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. At its meeting in September 2008, the ESSP board agreed to use Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) action planning to gather information on governance, communication and engagement issues that might need to be tackled.
- 1.2. At its meeting in November, the board were informed of emerging governance, communications and engagement issues and agreed to consider inviting Job Centre Plus and the Highways Agency to join the Executive Board, because they have become key delivery partners in the new Local Area Agreement (LAA).
- 1.3. In addition to issues identified through the action planning process (below), there have been a number of significant developments for ESSP recently including a new Local Area Agreement; Government guidance on 'creating strong, safe and prosperous communities'; and the new, forthcoming, Comprehensive Area Assessment. However, Local Strategic Partnerships continue to receive no direct funding for their activities.

2. Principles for change

- 2.1. The key principles for change are to ensure that the ESSP is fit for purpose, and that governance, communications and engagement arrangements and activities can be sustained within available resources.

3. Issues

The review confirms that current arrangements are fundamentally sound, however:

- 3.1. Currently the ESSP, as described in the Constitution, comprises an Executive Board and Assembly. In reality, the ESSP Executive Board undertakes all the key tasks, roles and responsibilities of the ESSP, and the Assembly operates as an important consultative and advisory forum. It is therefore proposed that the Constitution be updated to reflect the actual and distinctive roles and responsibilities of the board and Assembly, and to reflect the new SCS and LAA.
- 3.2. Whilst the overall size and membership of the Executive board remains fit for purpose, Job Centre Plus and the Highways Agency have become key partners in delivering the new LAA and should therefore be invited onto the board.
- 3.3. Whilst the overall size and membership of the East Sussex Assembly remains fit for purpose, there are some gaps in membership which should be addressed through proactive and targeted recruitment.
- 3.4. More needs to be done to broaden and deepen partners' engagement with and participation in the work of the ESSP.

- 3.5. Links with the District and Borough LSPs are strong and effective. The LSPs are members of the East Sussex Assembly, and LSP Chairs and Coordinators meet regularly to oversee joint ventures such as the SCS; exchange information; discuss relevant policy developments; identify common themes that could lead to joint working; and share ideas and best practice. District and Borough LSP Co-ordinators, and thus potentially LSP members, are copied into, or can access online, all LSP meeting agendas, minutes and papers.
- 3.6. Whilst most Executive Board members are aware of, if not involved with, relevant countywide thematic partnerships – the nature of the partnerships' relationship with ESSP is not well articulated or understood. New mechanisms to involve countywide thematic partnerships in reviewing the SCS will help to clarify their distinctive contribution to the work of ESSP and improve communications and engagement.
- 3.7. Progress through Partnerships (PTP) funded activities, including an event for LSPs and thematic partnerships, will do much to improve communications and engagement with wider partners, other partnerships, elected members and the public, but more could be done to make the work of ESSP more 'engaging' and accessible, for example more proactive and joint communications with partners and partnerships.

4. Summary of proposals

- 4.1. To update the ESSP Constitution and Terms of Reference to more accurately reflect the actual and distinctive roles and responsibilities of the board and Assembly, and to reflect the new SCS and LAA.
- 4.2. To address gaps in Assembly membership through targeted recruitment.
- 4.3. To fully exploit the implementation and review of the SCS and its action plans, and complementary communications and engagement activities, to broaden and deepen partners' engagement with ESSP and its work.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. Due to the late confirmation of PTP funding it was not possible to run a planned consultation event before the March board. The proposal now is that ESCC support staff take forward the proposals above; consult partners in accordance with the current Constitution and the East Sussex Compact; and bring recommendations to the July ESSP board for approval.