

Report to: East Sussex Strategic Partnership
Date: 17 July 2009
Title: Governance, Communications and Engagement Review
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Purpose: To report findings of governance, communications and engagement consultation

Recommendation: That the ESSP Executive Board agree to:

1. Consider and approve the recommendations.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. At its meeting in March 2009, the ESSP board agreed to undertake consultation with wider partners on ESSP governance, communication and engagement. The rationale for this consultation was to ensure that the ESSP is fit for purpose, and that governance, communications and engagement arrangements and activities can be sustained within available resources.
- 1.2. A detailed consultation document was sent to ESSP board and Assembly members, and key countywide thematic partnerships not currently members of ESSP but who are working increasingly closely with it e.g. the Older People's Partnership Board.
- 1.3. The consultation ran for a Compact compliant 12 week period, ending on 8 July.
- 1.4. The consultation has been coordinated on behalf of ESSP by its support team at East Sussex County Council. Copies of all the responses, with names removed to protect the confidentiality of responses, is available on request.

2. Summary of Consultation Responses

- 2.1. 21 responses were received in total from board members (9), Assembly members (5), key thematic partnerships that are not a member of ESSP Board or Assembly but who were invited to participate in the consultation (4), and organisations and individuals that are not a member of ESSP Board or Assembly who were not invited to participate in the consultation (3).
- 2.2. Responses to the proposals were predominantly positive with the majority of respondents 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' with the proposals. However, some board and Assembly members 'disagreed' that:
 - i. The updated structure chart reflects and clearly explains how ESSP operates
 - ii. Lines of communication and engagement between ESSP, sub-groups, thematic partnerships, LSPs and the East Sussex Assembly are clear and appropriate
 - iii. The updated Constitution and Terms of Reference clearly reflects, guides and supports the key roles and responsibilities of ESSP
 - iv. The proposed new Terms of Reference for the East Sussex Assembly are clear and appropriate
- 2.3. Only four of the 21 respondents 'neither agreed or disagreed', although one unsolicited response from a non-members 'disagreed', that:
 - i. The proposals will help to increase and improve awareness of and engagement in the work of ESSP
 - ii. The proposals will improve and strengthen ESSP and partnership working in the county

3. Summary of Comments Received

Where comments were given, these fell into 4 broad categories:

3.1. Membership

- i. Three of the five District and Borough LSPs and two district and borough councils believe District and Borough LSPs should have a seat on the ESSP, two citing their role in assisting delivery of Pride of Place and the Local Area Agreement as the reason for this. One other respondent believed District and Borough LSPs and thematic partnerships should be involved with ESSP in a meaningful way to move forward the current levels of partnership working.
- ii. One respondent did not feel Assembly membership was sufficiently clear. On the one hand the Constitution seems to be saying only countywide organisations should be members of the Assembly, and on the other that any group can ask to join. One respondent believed an invitation to Assembly meetings should be extended to all members of the East Sussex Youth Cabinet, representing young people across the county.

3.2. Structures and relationships

- i. A number of board and Assembly members, and key countywide thematic partnerships not currently in membership, believe that if the structure is to properly reflect Pride of Place then the direct and cross-cutting relationships of the key countywide thematic partnerships and their countywide plans to ESSP and Pride of Place needs to be more clearly reflected and articulated in the Constitution and the structure diagram. One respondent also proposed that the Rural Partnership be added as a third cross-cutting Partnership with a similar cross-cutting relationship.
- ii. A number of respondents felt it would be beneficial to clarify relationships between the LSPs and thematic partnerships in their area; between countywide and local thematic partnerships; and cross-cutting connections between thematic partnerships locally e.g. Health Improvement Partnerships and Children's Services Planning Groups.
- iii. Two of the countywide thematic partnerships not currently in membership, but working closely with ESSP welcomed the proposal to become members of the Assembly. A further countywide thematic partnership would like the Health, Housing, Social Care and Probation Strategic Forum included in the structure. The Strategic Forum is the governing body for housing support services in the county including the Supporting People programme.
- iv. Two respondents felt that the rationale, role and responsibilities of the 'to be determined' Health and Wellbeing Partnership is unclear. One believed that if a new countywide thematic partnership is established to address health and wellbeing issues, its scope should not include children and young people as this is a key focus for the Children and Young People's Trust partnership, at county wide and local level. Two partnerships with parallel remits would be confusing.
- v. A number of respondents stated that the structure chart could be interpreted in many ways and gives the appearance of a hierarchy. As such it fails to reflect the non-hierarchical yet interdependent nature of partnership relations.

3.3. Constitution

- i. The Constitution was bound up in the mechanics of delivery and some regard should be given to what we are trying to deliver (i.e. the priorities of the local population), not just the how.

- ii. Under point 6 (Operating Values): 6.1.1 - suggest adding ...whilst recognising the distinctiveness of areas within the county and the differing needs that cannot be addressed in a uniform way. 6.1.6 – suggest adding ... using accessible language appropriate for the audience
- iii. Under point 7 (ESSP Membership) it may be more helpful to re-categorise members of ESSP as Elected Local Authorities (which would include ESALC); local non-statutory organisations (which would include Private, Voluntary and Community Sector Representatives), and other Statutory Agencies (locally chosen from the 'CLG list of 22'). This would help reduce the stereotyped categorisation of partners, help ESSP to keep under review partners who are formal members of ESSP for delivery reasons and focus the responsibility of observers on their distinctive role.
- iv. Under point 9 (Chairperson and Vice Chairperson) and the related point 11 (Decision Making) the process for nominating and electing the Chairperson should be made clearer; and that if a vote is to be taken, that the Chair has the casting vote and that this is delegated to the Vice Chair if the Chair is absent.
- v. Under 13 (Support to the ESSP) consideration should be given to the degree to which the Chair and Vice Chair can direct and call upon the support staff and whether it is necessary, reasonable and overly bureaucratic that claims for assistance should be put in writing as set out in 13.4
- vi. Under point 15 (Changes to the Constitution), given that partnership working is constantly evolving, it may be helpful to include an annual light touch review of governance, communications and engagement (not just the Constitution) using an agreed self-assessment framework, with a more in depth review, if required, once every three years.

3.4. Communications, engagement and representation

- i. Two respondents felt that lines of communication and engagement between ESSP and the joint LSP Chairs and Co-ordinators Group need to be clarified and strengthened.
- ii. Two respondents believed that Private Sector representation remains disproportionately small within the proposed ESSP (currently known as the board). One also believed that there is a need to strengthen connections between the private sector and the third sector.
- iii. One asked if the opportunity to increase VCS representation on the delivery partnerships could be maximised.
- iv. One respondent felt the role of and for local communities was confused. Little attention seems to be given to the voice from the grassroots. An unsolicited but useful response noted the lack of engagement of Parish councillors.
- v. One respondent felt there is more ESSP can do to use modern methods of communication (social media) – this should form part of a wider communications strategy

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1. Overall, the vast majority of respondents support the proposals and believe they will help to increase and improve awareness of and engagement in the work of ESSP, and will improve and strengthen ESSP and partnership working in the county. However, some extremely useful suggestions have been made to better explain and facilitate governance, communications and engagement within and across the complex 'family' of partners and partnerships connected to ESSP.

4.2. Membership

- i. Consideration needs to be given to the most effective and appropriate way to strengthen relationships and lines of communication and engagement between ESSP, the District and Borough LSPs, and key thematic partnerships (countywide and at District and Borough level). Also, how these can be reflected in the ESSP Constitution and structure diagram and, where relevant, the Constitutions and structure diagrams of other partnerships.

It is recommended that a special meeting of the six LSP Chairs and Chairs of Countywide Thematic Partnerships be held to explore options. Proposals would be incorporated into a further draft of the Constitution, structure diagram and Communications and Engagement Plan as appropriate. The outcomes of the recent 'Better Connected, East Sussex Partnerships event' to explore relationships between LSPs and thematic partnerships in East Sussex could usefully form the basis for these discussions.

- ii. Further clarification is needed on whether the Assembly should restrict its membership to countywide organisations, networks and partnerships (plus others where no countywide structure exists so as to fill representational gaps), and – as currently proposed - to open membership up more widely to more local organisations, networks and partnerships actively involved in the development and delivery of Pride of Place that are not represented by other members. More effective communications, engagement and representation could ensure wider voices are heard without having an Assembly that is too large to support and develop within available resources.

It is recommended that membership be restricted to countywide organisations, networks and partnerships (plus others where no countywide structure exists so as to fill representational gaps); and that the ESSP Communications and Engagement Plan include actions to strengthen the representational role of these members so that the voices of their members are fed into Assembly discussions as appropriate.

4.3. Structures and relationships

- i. The interest expressed by a range of countywide thematic partnerships in joining the Assembly is to be welcomed.

It is recommended that these partnerships are invited to join the Assembly.

- ii. The structure diagram does not adequately or accurately portray the non-hierarchical nature of ESSP and its relationships with other partnerships in the county.

It is recommended that ESSP does not approve the structure diagram as presented but instead agrees it as 'work in progress' to be further refined when the relationships between different parts of the diagram are clarified and agreed.

4.4. Constitution

- i. All the proposals regarding the Constitution seem sensible and practical by helping to focus ESSP on outcomes, not just processes; building in greater transparency in some processes; and enabling greater flexibility and responsiveness as circumstances change.

It is recommended that these suggestions be built into a further draft of the Constitution.

4.5. Communications, engagement and representation

- i. Suggestions for improving communications and engagement are very helpful.

It is recommended that the current ESSP Communications and Engagement Plan (2007) includes actions relating to 'representation'; that actions to advance the issues highlighted be built into this plan, including increased engagement with elected members at Parish, District/Borough and County level, and the Youth Cabinet; and that an updated plan be brought to a future meeting of ESSP for consideration and approval.

It is further recommended that guidance on communications, engagement and representation is developed for ESSP and Assembly members.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. Following the discussions proposed at 4.2i above, that a re-drafted Constitution, structure diagram and Communications and Engagement Plan be produced, circulated electronically for final comments and brought to the ESSP in October or January 2010 for approval.
- 5.2. In the meantime, that a further draft of the proposed Constitution - incorporating the recommendations at 4.2ii and 4.4 above - be produced and circulated electronically for final comments and approval within the next few weeks. This will provide ESSP with:
 - i. A Constitution that more accurately reflects its roles and responsibilities than the existing Constitution
 - ii. The ability to invite new members (including the countywide thematic partnerships) to join the Assembly, as recommended at 4.3i above
 - iii. The ability to take immediate action to improve communications and engagement as recommended at 4.5 above.