

Connecting People, Connecting Places

CABINET

Date: 11 June 2008

Author: Leader of the Council and Chief Executive

Parish / Wards Affected: All

Purpose

- For Cabinet to approve this outline approach for the *Connecting People, Connecting Places* programme to be introduced from July 2008.

Recommendation

Cabinet is requested to

- agree the approach contained within this paper and authorise the Chief Executive to implement the planned approach referred to in the joint report;
- to authorise the Chief Executive to establish the cluster and governance arrangements for the programme, in consultation with the Cabinet members;
- to authorise the Chief Executive to make the appropriate staffing arrangements to enable the progress of the programme;
- to authorise the Chief Executive to develop a data strategy to support this locality working, ensuring effective two-way support and information with Customer Services;
- to authorise the Director of Law and Democratic Services to bring a report to Cabinet outlining the implications for local governance arrangements once Section 236 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 has been implemented; and
- to authorise the Director of Law and Democratic Services to bring a report to Cabinet setting out the options and scope of functions to be delegated for Cabinet approval.

1. Reason

- 1.1. Cabinet approved a recommendation on 12 September 2007 for the Chief Executive to progress the neighbourhood management strategy with partners and stakeholders and to submit a further report to the Cabinet.
- 1.2. This report is brought to Members for deliberation and approval for the next stage in implementing this strategy, which has now been branded *Connecting People, Connecting Places*.

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2. Detail

Swindon's Strategy for *Connecting People, Connecting Places*

2.1. Goal

- 2.2. Cabinet agreed the following goal for locality working at its meeting on 12 September 2007-

Swindon is a place where the Council, its partners and residents work closely together to develop strong neighbourhoods that influence local provision and delivery of services to improve the quality of life for all our residents.

- 2.3. The Council is very ambitious for the Borough of Swindon in terms of regenerating not only its town centre, but also its neighbourhoods. The Council believes that if we are seriously to address issues of improving the local neighbourhood environment, reducing crime and increasing community safety, more effectively targeting increasingly scarce financial resources for care and other people-related services, then a new way of delivering those services more locally needs to be developed. Building upon existing relationships, we want to see real partnership between the Council, other stakeholders and its residents at a more localised level.
- 2.4. This will strengthen the role of ward members as we increasingly allocate resources to locality priorities. This process will strengthen service delivery by aligning resources to localities, further empowering Councillors to represent their residents and their residents' needs. It will enable ward members to more strongly hold agencies to account for their work in the locality.
- 2.5. This report outlines the Council's initial steps in addressing the elements of service delivery associated with the programme. There will be further consultation on how engagement with residents, communities and local groups will take place. This paper provides us with a platform to grow the approach as our experience matures.

3. Objectives

- 3.1. The four strategic objectives that underpin this goal are:

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3.1.1. Empowered Ward Councillors

Ward councillors are the elected, visible and accountable human face of local government. By localising both the delivery of services and the development of priorities to smaller geographical areas, ward councillors will gain a more prominent role as ward leaders and as “place shapers”.

3.1.2. Swindon residents can better influence decision-making

We want to develop a range of ways to enable local people to influence what happens and how it happens in their area. We see this as an opportunity for on-going dialogue about services, and not just a one-off consultation.

3.1.3. Better local access to services

We will investigate the feasibility of utilising existing assets more effectively to extend one-stop-shop provision within our communities, so they can access a range of services nearer where they live. Those services, which can be better delivered centrally, should remain so, with the locality director having ownership of delivery and accountability and responsibility for this to the Area Forum.

3.1.4. More localised service delivery

We aim to make more use of data that is available at local level to develop profiles and plans that are specific to each locality. From ward councillors' local knowledge, we will develop and agree a locality plan with other service providers and local people. This locality plan could be renewed each year and serve as shared objectives for delivery within the locality.

These objectives will be underpinned by use of:

- Service Level Agreements to define what outcomes are desired.
- Clear, SMART, performance indicators so that all can judge what is being delivered.
- Regular reporting by officers and contractors so that good performance can be rewarded and augmented while under-performance can be corrected.

4. Outcomes

4.1. The key objectives for this phase of the programme are:

- Ward councillors enabled to have greater contribution to the priorities and quality of service delivery in their area within the framework of service level agreements, namely:
 - Safer and healthier communities
 - High quality opportunities for education
 - Cleaner streets and neighbourhoods

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- Better maintained facilities
 - Good quality roads and paths
 - Adequate, well maintained street-lighting
 - Accessible leisure facilities.
 - Maximise the opportunity of successful delivery of the Local Area Agreement objectives through specific focus at local level.
 - Developed plans for each locality that feed into the Council and partners' business planning processes.
 - Contribute to the achievements of young people through a stronger link to the social, economic and physical environment in which they live and learn.
 - Continuous improvement in services.
- 4.2. This paper outlines an approach that enables the Council to focus on the key issues facing us in Swindon, and provide a local as well as a corporate response.

5. The Present System

- 5.1. The local government reorganisation of the 1970s, reinforced by the move to a unitary authority in 1996, was built on the corporate assumptions of the 1960s and 1970s – that bigger was more efficient and more effective, that larger authorities would attract better staff and better councillors. The reality was that ward councillors have had difficulty in getting local issues resolved because of the systems that had developed.

6. Design Principles

- 6.1. At an early stage, there were some specific concerns expressed by some Members that officers, through their research and consultation should address.
- How can we ensure that any proposed governance arrangements enhance existing democratic arrangements and enhance the role of ward councillors?
 - How could this strategy be implemented within existing resources, not *increase* Council Tax and provide efficiencies over time?
 - How can the Council ensure that any form of community engagement will be relevant and accessible to local people, so that residents and stakeholders feel there is value in getting involved?
 - How can our partners (public, voluntary, community and private) play an active role?
 - How can resident expectations be aligned to what can be realistically achieved through more localised service delivery?
- 6.2. What became clear through our research was that these and other questions were being asked by other Local Authorities up and down the

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country and that authorities were at very different stages of implementation.

- 6.3. However, there was very clear evidence that the characteristics of the most successful implementations were:
- Pro-active partner commitment
 - Well thought through local governance
 - Comprehensive use of quality local data
 - Localised service delivery that was integrated via a localised management structure.
- 6.4. During our research we also took into account the growing importance of the Local Area Agreement (LAA), although we recognise that this is just one factor influencing the debate on what policy outcomes are desired. The LAA priorities and outcomes are built largely through a bottom up approach using partner data that focuses on need in specific locations. From a performance management perspective therefore this lends itself to more localised performance monitoring if the LAA were broken down into localities.
- 6.5. A key element of Swindon Borough Council and our partners is our determination to drive up educational attainment in our schools and raise the aspirations and expectations of all of our young people. Whilst having improved in recent years, lower than average KS4 results still persist in Swindon. Evidence shows us that whilst a strong focus in schools is critical, so too is a wider understanding of the social and economic context in which our young people learn. Therefore, given Swindon's specific agenda of raising attainment and aspiration there is a strong argument for basing locality clusters largely around our secondary schools admission areas. This sends a strong message about the level of importance that the Council places on schools as the heart of learning communities, and the role that wider community involvement can play in raising standards.
- 6.6. Building on this approach, future education provision could be characterised by the development of neighbourhood learning communities. These learning communities and extended schools can play a key role in social, economic and neighbourhood regeneration through the promotion of linked learning, care and cultural opportunities.
- 6.7. Two specific issues need to be taken into account and, if possible turned into opportunities. If secondary schools adopt the new trust status, then Swindon Borough Council can use area forums and the presence of headteacher representatives, to build a productive relationship in which the schools will work with the Council in achieving the shared objectives. These goals could be local ones as identified through the forum, or

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strategic ones as identified by Cabinet. The second opportunity comes from pupils and families who enter the education system with low expectations of achievement or improvement, which has an adverse effect on exam results. Locality working should help educate all residents as citizens and so improve the level of qualifications each child attains.

- 6.8. This way of working will provide a framework where schools will be at the heart of their communities and where they put the needs of children and families first and provide services that make more sense to the parents, children and young people and the whole community.

7. Implementation Approach

- 7.1. Neighbourhood Management is not new and many local authorities have been deploying a locality working approach for many years. The Council has had limited experience in recent years of aligning service delivery to localities and its only recent experience of regular community engagement was via Area Panels.
- 7.2. In the light of this, it is critical that the Council and its partners take a flexible and pragmatic approach to implementation and is prepared to listen and respond responsibly to people and act on the feedback from residents, stakeholders and Members with regards to what works and what doesn't. This is the essence of Community Leadership where ultimately the Council takes the decisions but that those decisions are informed by balanced resident feedback combined with good quality data.
- 7.3. The implementation approach outlined here has been informed by extensive research taken from national pilots and case studies, combined with local interviews and discussions.

8. The Proposal - *Connecting People, Connecting Places*

The locality clusters

- 8.1. The starting point for any strategy on neighbourhood management is gaining agreement on the locality structures, which in Swindon we are proposing be known as 'locality clusters'. There is no absolute here and the clusters are usually informed by a combination of existing ward boundaries, what is meaningful to local people (a sense of place), the distribution of secondary schools in relation to primary and secondary school catchment areas and the capacity of the Council and its partners to support them.
- 8.2. Having explored the range of potential options around 'what is a locality' and what is a 'cluster', we believe that a definition of locality based on

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wards is the best fit. This approach enables the Council to make the most of the experience and democratic accountability of ward councillors, and has the potential to enhance their role. The proposal recommends that wards are then clustered to enable economies of scale and effective organisation. In this case our existing school cluster boundaries align very well to Council Ward boundaries.

- 8.3. Given that there are a number of possible clusters, and that there may be many different versions that are equally valid, it is imperative that the final model is one that the Chief Executive is confident can be delivered. Therefore this operational task should be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Members.

Locality Governance

- 8.4. One of the elements that will define success over time will be the extent to which this process helps local people to become involved. Over time a wider dialogue with communities will be undertaken on how together we can best make this happen. There will a range of engagement processes to determine the views of local people and stakeholders, which will be fed into the governance arrangements for a decision and action. Both Section 18 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 236 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provided for the delegation of executive functions to a) groups of councillors as an area committee or b) as individual ward councillors. However, the later legislation has not yet been implemented.
- 8.5. For each locality cluster there has to be strong local governance to ensure that ward councillors, along with the appropriate Cabinet Members, engage with and hold to account all service delivery partners and other stakeholders. For each cluster it is proposed that an area committee under s18, called an **Area Forum**, is established, which will meet on a regular, annually published timetable. Given the range of views and the potential complexities that will be raised, it is proposed that it will consist of all ward councillors, one of whom will be elected annually to act as chair, the locality director, and any other non-voting representatives as the Area Forum shall decide. The prime roles of the Area Forum will be to:
- Hold agencies to account for local service performance, as defined by the service level agreements;
 - Develop locality-working plans, under the guidance of the locality directors, containing local priorities that can be fed into Partner business planning cycles.
- 8.6. The Area Forum must reflect the democratic mandate of local ward Councillors, but it will also recognise the need for participation and support

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by officers, especially the locality directors in shaping priorities. Therefore all locality-working plans must be approved by ward councillors, be in accordance with the strategic policy determined by Cabinet and delivered by locality directors, following consultation with all relevant stakeholders. If any decision comes to a vote, then only ward councillors are able to do so.

- 8.7. Future development of the Children and Young People's agenda may provide further opportunities for stakeholders, especially head teachers, to engage with the area

Locally Aligned Service Delivery

- 8.8. Any programme that seeks to bring the Council and its partners closer to people and places must contain a strong element of localised service delivery. A strategy of local engagement that is not backed up by local delivery is doomed to failure.
- 8.9. The timing for implementing this strategy in Swindon is good as more and more service delivery teams are striving to align their services to localities so that they are better informed by local knowledge and therefore more locally relevant.
- 8.10. In Children's Services there has been significant progress in integrating education, social care, play services and youth services into locality teams under one Integrated Services Manager role. Adult social care and health are moving in a similar direction, with staff consultations currently taking place on the development of integrated locality teams. Locality working is key to the Council's newly developing Street Scene project, and plans are already being put into place to ensure the two are complementary. The proposals here further develop these existing arrangements, and expand them to new areas of the Council's work.
- 8.11. We will continue to work with other partners, such as the Police, who already have locality working arrangements in place, as well as supporting other partners who are keen to develop similar practices in their organisations. There is significant potential in the future to link with localised health services through GPs, who can bring their understanding of need to shape services locally.
- 8.12. Conscious of the financial constraint not to increase cost, the role would be filled by existing Service Directors. The role would be primarily to undertake the following:
- Work with ward councillors to support them in carrying out their role.
 - Be the principal adviser to ward councillors to develop the locality working Plans. These plans will be based on sound service level

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agreements and supported by SMART performance indicators; they will also incorporate other targets where appropriate e.g. LAA goals.

- To be accountable to ward councillors and residents for service delivery by all partners in the locality through the provision of regular reports.
- Provide a central focus and named lead for the work in each locality.

8.13. We would also make more people responsible at a local level to support this process and reporting to their area forums. These staff would work with the Locality Director and ward councillors to carry out the duties described below.

8.14. We will explore external funding opportunities that could contribute to building our capacity to deliver this programme.

Locality Working Plans

8.15. In order to develop effective dialogue about priorities in each area, following engagement with local people, we will develop locality plans. The provision of information that is available at ward and locality level will be crucial to ensuring that these discussions are rooted in the reality of the issues in that locality. The Council has recognised that this is a key development area for this programme and will work with partners and stakeholders to develop a common approach to managing information. Account will be taken of services that may affect a locality but which are delivered outside the Borough.

Engagement with Communities

8.16. At the heart of this initiative is the Council connecting more effectively with its residents and communities. This programme will be inhibited without the active involvement of local people. It is recognised that this provides the Council with a challenge.

8.17. Increasingly, we are seeing engagement with local people in two ways. The first is through their elected representatives, who are democratically accountable to their constituencies. Swindon's elected members will be provided with additional support in this role, to enable them to take on the challenges associated with locality working. The second method is direct contact with individuals themselves and their involvement in a variety of activity.

8.18. There is a strong evidence base of 'what works' in engaging with residents and communities and what does not. We will be drawing on this evidence base to develop an approach that works for Swindon. The benefit of

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locality working is that it enables the Council and its partners to respond in different ways to different needs.

9. Programme governance

- 9.1. As outlined above, any implementation plan must be flexible and pragmatic and therefore open to change and refinement. To reflect this a programme management structure is proposed that will oversee the implementation of the programme and identify success and potential improvements.
- 9.2. It is proposed that the programme management structure will take the form of a multi-agency Governance Board that reports to the Cabinet and the Swindon Partnership Board on a regular basis. This Board will take responsibility for the monitoring of the programme, and the learning that comes from this.
- 9.3. The Leader of the Council will chair the Programme Governance Board, with representation from, the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities, the Deputy Leader and the Cabinet Member for Resources. The Council Chief Executive will also attend as will key partners and key stakeholders.
- 9.4. Within the Council structure, the programme will lie within the Leader's portfolio and report to the Scrutiny Committee.

10. Alternative Options

- 10.1. Do nothing and retain our current arrangements. This will incur a severe risk that Swindon will attract a low Comprehensive Performance Assessment/Comprehensive Area Assessment rating and undo the progress made since 2003. Such underperformance could lower the public perceptions of Swindon Borough Council, reduce funding and impede the Council's other policies. A low rating might have adverse impact on the regeneration programme, especially if central government were minded to use their reserve intervention powers.

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Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- The financial implications arising from this report relate to the intention of seeking external funding of £70k for the programme management role, as an interim measure until September 2009 (£35k per annum plus on-costs for 18 months). If external funding is not secured, the costs of this post will be an in-year call on the Council's Transformation Fund. All other proposals are cost neutral.
- There will be implications for how the Council manages its finance and procurement as we move to locality working. These will be considered through the initial phases, with a full set of proposals being developed by September 2009.
- Whilst Service Directors acting in dual roles as locality directors is strongly welcomed, a careful balance of workload and priorities will need close scrutiny to ensure objectives are met.

Legal / Human Rights Implications

- There are no legal or human rights implications arising from this report.

Links to Corporate Plans and Policies (in particular to Swindon 2010 Promises)

- This is a key priority as outlined in the Swindon Borough Council Corporate Plan 2006-2010 and the Annual Operating Plan for 2006-07 and 2007-08. It will assist the Council to meet a range of objectives, both internally and with partners.

Consultees

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.
- 'Core Group' members: Group Director – Business Transformation; Director of Housing & Leisure; Director of Community; Director of Strategy & Commissioning (Children's Services); Director of Partnerships & Policy; Director of Environment & Streetscene; Director of Public Health; Director of Customer Services, Revenue & Benefits; Change Manager – Business Transformation
- Leaders of the Opposition and Minority Party Groups on Swindon Borough Council
- Swindon Partnership Board
- Swindon Police, Primary Care Trust, Fire & Rescue Service, Job Centre Plus

Background Papers and Appendices

- Neighbourhood Management in Swindon, Cabinet Paper, September 2007

Key Decision / Decision in Forward Plan

- This is a key decision and is in the Forward Plan for June 2008

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from *Gavin Jones* on 01793 463008 or Email gjones@swindon.gov.uk.