

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 7 JULY 2009

THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT 2007

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, PERFORMANCE & PARTNERSHIP

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. To put in place a process in the Borough to enable local organisations to put forward proposals that require Central Government action to support and improve the sustainability of local communities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. **That the proposals set out in paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8 to enable proposals to be submitted to the Council and considered and agreed by a ‘Sustainable Communities Act Local Panel’ are endorsed;**
- 2.2. **That the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to submit the proposals(s) prioritised and agreed by the ‘SCA Local Panel’ to the Local Government Association.**

3. INFORMATION

- 3.1. The Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (SCA) aims to enable local communities, organisations and public bodies to propose, through their local councils, changes at a national level to help deliver projects and work locally to support and improve sustainability. All proposals need to be submitted via councils.
- 3.2. The Act begins from the principle that local people and local organisations know best what needs to be done to encourage the improvement of the economic, environmental or social well-being of their area, but that sometimes they need Central Government to act to enable them to do so.
- 3.3. The Government has issued an invitation for local people and organisations to identify issues and submit proposals, via their council, on which Central Government should take action to promote the sustainability of local communities. Government advice suggests that proposals would be more likely to succeed if they are specific about the action required of Central Government, do not require additional public expenditure, and are not already within the powers of local authorities.

- 3.4. As there are likely to be proposals from across the country, the Government has asked that local areas should first try to prioritise and agree the proposals to be submitted via a 'Local Panel'. Following this, the Council would submit the proposals to the Local Government Association (LGA) in London which will be responsible for short-listing a small number of proposals it receives for the Secretary of State's consideration. Local areas must submit their proposals to the LGA by the end of July.
- 3.5. The LGA has indicated that proposals should have significant impact on local sustainability, be specific about the barriers that need to be removed and the action required by Government have been consulted on within communities. Given that only a very few projects in the country will even be submitted to the Government for consideration, it would seem evident that only proposals that organisations have already been developing for other purposes for some time would be best placed for submission under the SCA. The Council would not advocate committing additional significant resource to develop proposals, particularly as the Government has yet to confirm whether there will be further rounds of seeking proposals under the Act.
- 3.6. As mentioned above, in order for the Council to submit proposals on behalf of the community to the LGA, the Act specifies that there must be a Local Panel to consider and agree the proposals to be submitted. The Act requires that such a Panel should include representatives of the local community including people from under-represented groups.
- 3.7. There is no statutory requirement to participate in the SCA process. However, the Council has received expressions of interest in principle from a significant number of Town and Parish Councils, through the Wrekin Area Committee of Local Councils encouraging it to put in place the necessary process to enable any proposals to come forward. In order to do this, the following steps have been taken:
- A letter has been sent to all Town and Parish Councils and the Council for Voluntary Service asking them to promote the SCA and for any proposals to be submitted to the Council for a Local Panel to consider;
 - The SCA was an agenda item at a meeting for all Town & Parish Councils arranged by the Wrekin Area Committee on 3 June;
 - A presentation has been given to the LSP Agenda Group;
 - Proposals have been requested by 17 July.
- 3.8. In order to convene a 'SCA Local Panel' meeting, it is proposed to form this from the Local Parishes Forum with additional representatives invited from the Council for Voluntary Service and Wrekin Area Committee. The LSP Agenda Group has also suggested inviting the Chair (or their nominee) from the Connecting Communities Group, Disability Forum, Young People's Forum and Senior Citizens Forum. A meeting will be arranged towards the end of July.

3.9. The Council will submit the proposal(s) agreed by the Panel on behalf of the Borough.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The SCA aims to identify actions that Central, not Local, Government should take. The Council will manage the SCA and Local Panel process from within existing resources. The SCA does not advocate proposals that seek additional public expenditure.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There is no legislative imperative for the Council to respond to the Secretary of State's invitation to submit proposals under the Act and there is no statutory or formal process to 'opt in'. The purpose of the Act is to identify areas of Central Government policy, action or expenditure where a change is required to improve local sustainability. Actions which are already within the powers of local authorities do not fall within the remit of this Act.

5.2. The proposed approach set out in this report places the Council in an enabling role, submitting the proposal(s) agreed by the Local Panel, which is being established for the specific purposes of the Act, on behalf of the local organisation(s) which submitted the proposals(s).

6. EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The Act requires the participation of representatives of the local community including people from under-represented groups. The proposals put forward for taking this process forward seek to achieve this by drawing from existing consultation structures.

7. LINKS TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND OTHER PRIORITIES

7.1. The SCA can link to all the Council's priorities as it seeks proposals to improve the economic, environmental and social well-being of communities.

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