

Cabinet

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Response to the Draft Sustainable Community Strategy

Report of Ann Campbell, Head of Policy & Improvement

(Cabinet Portfolio Holders, Councillor Simon Henig, Leader and Councillor Clive Robson, Deputy Leader)

Purpose of the Report

1. To agree the Council's response to the draft Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

Background

2. Principal authorities are statutorily required to develop, alongside their partners, a sustainable community strategy that provides a shared long term vision and high level plan for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of communities within the area. County Durham's first community strategy, 'The Strategic Vision for County Durham' was produced in 2003, setting out a vision looking forward to 2023, to be delivered through a series of Challenges. This new draft Strategy, which covers the period from 2008 to 2023, reviews and updates the original strategy, taking account of new guidance from government and the need to link to the Local Area Agreement, which is now seen as the delivery mechanism for the most pressing priorities emerging from the SCS.
3. The County Durham Partnership has developed the draft SCS alongside the Local Area agreement for 2008-11. Having established a set of guiding principles, the Partnership has collected and analysed a great deal of evidence on local needs and issues. Working through a series of stakeholder workshops, supported by impact assessments and a process of sustainability appraisal, partners arrived at a consensus on a long term vision with 18 long term goals and 47 contributory outcomes that make up the current draft.
4. The consultation period commenced from July 7 and will continue to 30 September. As the strategy has been developed from a great deal of existing evidence and knowledge of community priorities, the focus for the consultation is on confirming that the draft accurately reflects stakeholder and public concerns rather than being a new bottom up development process.
5. The County Council has an opportunity to respond as part of the consultation process. The SCS is a key document for the Council and will stand as the community strategy for the new Unitary Council, acting as the overarching plan that will shape future developments, including the Local Development Framework and future Local Area Agreements.

The draft Sustainable Community Strategy – summary

6. A summary version of the document has been provided with this report and the full version can be accessed via the electronic link on the agenda.
7. The long term vision for the Strategy is expressed as: 'A county where strong economic growth is matched with a community that believes in itself and aims high, and where everyone can achieve to their potential and enjoy a high quality of life'
8. Goals, outcomes and indicative actions are set out in the summary document, and the goals and outcomes within the Strategy are grouped around a framework of seven themes:
 - Economic wellbeing
 - Achieve
 - Physical place
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Safe
 - Enjoy
 - Positive contribution

However it is recognised that the majority of outcomes contribute to a range of themes and this is shown diagrammatically at the end of each section of the Strategy.

9. The guiding principles for the Strategy are the same as those for the Local Area Agreement:
 - Place shaping
 - Equal and inclusive
 - Aspirations
 - Sustainability
 - Gap narrowing
10. Sustainability is particularly important in respect of new government guidance on the development of community strategies, which emphasises that they must contribute to sustainable development, integrate social, environmental and economic priorities and address longer-term needs and cross boundary issues.
11. The most pressing priorities from the SCS have already been identified by partners, and have informed the development of the Local Area Agreement (2008-11), which was signed off in June 2008. The first review and refresh of the LAA is underway and there is an opportunity for views from this consultation process to impact on the review. Delivery plans for both LAA and wider SCS priorities will be developed by partners based on:
 - The guiding principles
 - Evidence of what works
 - Tackling causes, not just symptoms
 - Views of service users and the community

12. A shared performance management framework is being developed for both the goals and outcomes set out in the Strategy and the related delivery plans, including the Local Area Agreement. The Partnership will be accountable to local people for the delivery of the Strategy and performance will be reported regularly to the public, wider stakeholders and the Partnership Board. There will be a scrutiny role for Members in relation to the performance of the Partnership against the outcomes and targets it has set out. From 2009, the Comprehensive Area Assessment will provide independent and external evaluation of whether the Council and its partners are achieving these shared outcomes and an assessment of the impact on local people.

Proposed response

13. A proposed response on behalf of the County Council is attached at Appendix 2. There are also a number of suggested textual changes to improve readability or expand on specific points and some additional suggestions of 'some things we will do', which should be incorporated into the redraft of the summary and main document.

Recommendations

14. Cabinet is recommended to consider and agree the proposed response.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?)

The draft document, once finalised and approved will stand as the Sustainable Community Strategy for the Unitary Council and its partners.

Finance

The Strategy, together with the Local Area Agreement, as the delivery plan of the SCS, will inform both short term and long term priority and budget setting for the Authority.

Staffing

None directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity

An initial Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the Strategy's outcomes. Organisations representing different communities of interest have been consulted and invited to engage in the further development and delivery of the SCS and the LAA.

Accommodation

Not applicable

Crime and disorder

Community Safety is one of the Strategy's themes, addressing priority issues that have been identified through analysis of a wide range of evidence.

Sustainability

The SCS is seen as key to the delivery of sustainable development and sustainability is a guiding principle for the Strategy and its delivery. Sustainability appraisal has been carried out and is ongoing.

Human rights

Many aspects of the Strategy support Human Rights in setting out to tackle issues such as poverty, homelessness, sub standard homes and inequities in health.

Localities and Rurality

The Strategy recognises the differential needs of geographic communities, and through applying the principle of gap narrowing to the delivery of outcomes will ensure that needs are tackled fairly. Rural proofing principles will ensure that the specific characteristics of rural areas do not disadvantage those communities from achieving the same improvements in quality of life as those in urban areas.

Young people

Young people's needs and aspirations have informed the development of the Strategy and are relevant within every theme. Through the principles of gap narrowing and the delivery of equal and inclusive services young people's needs will be considered and acted upon.

Consultation

The development of the Strategy has been informed by a wide range consultation and engagement with communities, organisations and partnerships. Consultation on the draft document has provided further opportunities for the public and key partners to give views on the priorities selected.

Health

Health is one of the Strategy's themes, addressing priority issues that have been identified through analysis of a wide range of evidence.

Draft response to the Sustainable Community Strategy

Focus of the Vision

The Council agrees that the vision is focused on the right issues to deliver sustainable communities and improved wellbeing.

Do the goals and outcomes within each theme capture the right priorities to help deliver the Vision?

In general yes, they are focused on the needs of the area but are broad enough to be inclusive of a wide range of issues.

Is there anything important missing?

It is considered that the Strategy doesn't give a strong enough feel for the distinctiveness of County Durham and its key strengths. More emphasis should be given to developing a Vision that promotes and builds on the high quality of life experienced by local people with less commuting, good access to urban centres outside the County and to coast and countryside in County Durham and beyond. A key message should be that people, above all, enjoy living and working here and this should influence the place shaping agenda, i.e. creating a place where people can thrive.

There is clear guidance from government that local authorities must align and co-ordinate the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework with the SCS. Key spatial priorities for the area will need to align with the SCS priorities and local planning policy will support the delivery of outcomes agreed for both the SCS and the LAA. This important relationship should be given greater emphasis and acknowledgement within the SCS.

Mention should also be made of the potential new growth area for south and east Durham, which potentially could deliver an additional 4,800 homes across the network of main centres. This would have significant implications for economic expansion, transport and community development.

The Strategy should make some reference to the role of the 2012 Olympics and other major events in providing inspiration and promoting aspiration for local people.

Reference to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) would benefit from being strengthened and the countywide community safety assessment should also be mentioned.

Principles

The principles are supported and in particular the principle on "gap narrowing". It should perhaps be emphasised that this is a 'levelling-up' process designed to reduce inequalities between different areas and communities.

Economic Wellbeing section

It is important that sustainable employment opportunities are developed in such a way as to provide access to opportunities for people living in all parts of the county, whilst

reducing the need to travel as far as possible. However this needs to be supported by good transport services.

Develop and sustain vibrant attractive and successful towns – listing development initiatives for specific towns, may give a misleading impression that these are the only areas to be developed. There should be a general reference to other work in a much broader range of major centres.

Physical Place section

Reference should be included to strategic housing initiatives, such as the potential housing growth points for south and east Durham, as there will be implications for the delivery of the SCS.

Fuel poverty is rightly referenced as an issue to be tackled, and linked to affordability. This could also be linked to the use of renewable energy.

Reference should be made to the development of cultural activity such as community festivals and public art, which can strengthen the 'sense of place' and develop local pride.

Health and wellbeing section

Although gap narrowing is a guiding principle within the strategy, it is felt that health inequalities are so important that there should be a clearer reference to this within the table setting out goals and outcomes.

The text relating to the support and protection of vulnerable people should be strengthened by reference to a wider range of work and targeted initiatives that will help to promote social inclusion, such as work with carers, promoting independent living, promoting people with learning disabilities into employment and personalization of services.

Enjoy

An additional outcome is suggested of 'developing a sense of pride in our heritage and encouraging people to look forward to our future'. There should also be reference to the role that culture, leisure and sport play in improving health and economic wellbeing.

Positive contribution

The reference to promoting volunteering should make it clear that people of all ages will be encouraged to take part.

General comments

It should be made clear that the SCS will have a review period so that assessment can be made on progress and priorities can be changed accordingly.