

Herefordshire Partnership Management Group Meeting

23rd February 2009
2.00 pm, Hereford Room, Plough Lane, Hereford

Minutes

Present

Councilor Roger Phillips – Leader of Herefordshire Council (Chair)
Chris Bull – Herefordshire Council/Herefordshire PCT
Lynda Wilcox – Herefordshire Association Local Councils
Paul Amos – Fire and Rescue Service (for Lucy Phillips)
Richard Quallington – Voluntary Sector Assembly
Sharon Gray – Learning and Skills Council
Paul Baker – Safer Communities
Andrew Hasler - Health, Well-being and Older People (for Dr Ian Williams)
Natalia Silver – Economic Development and Enterprise
Hilary Hall – Children's and Young People (for Chris Baird)
Bill Bloxsome – Environment

In attendance

Mary Ann Bruce – CAA Lead, Audit Commission
Steve Martin – Herefordshire Council
Oliver Goode – Local Improvement Advisor, RIEP
Chris Bucknell – Herefordshire Partnership Support Team
Philippa Lydford – Herefordshire Partnership Support Team

Apologies

Lucy Phillips - Fire and Rescue Service
Dr Ian Williams – Health and Wellbeing
Mark Turner – West Mercia Constabulary
Chris Baird – Children and Young People
Tony Southall – Government Office West Midlands

1. Introduction and Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded the group of their role in overseeing the Herefordshire Partnership's performance, especially in respect of the current economic downturn and the challenge we all have if the strategic partnership is to add value.

2. Apologies

The apologies and corresponding substitutions were noted.

3. Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

i. Key Messages (Mary Ann Bruce – CAA Lead)

Mary Ann introduced herself as the CAA Lead for Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire. Mary Ann gave a presentation, outlining her emerging thoughts regarding Herefordshire, its challenges and opportunities.

As well as the notes of the presentation, background notes are available to anyone who wishes to have them although it was stressed these notes are for limited circulation and should not be openly distributed. These notes did not represent assessments and were merely part of the ongoing CAA dialogue.

The final assessment framework has now been launched and was distributed to those present. The process will be to share information from inspectorates on a quarterly basis. Every twelve to thirteen weeks there would be a challenge discussion and from September to November 2009 findings will be assessed and a draft report produced. The key principle is that there should be no surprises and all issues will have been discussed with organisations and localities in advance of the report being produced.

The Area Assessment has three key questions: Understanding our own needs and aspirations, improving and delivering services and assessment and self evaluation.

ii. Concerns, challenges and timescale

Mary Ann went on to describe the emerging issues, such as demographics, the ageing population, rural access, the economic position, housing, public health, substance misuse, sustainability and international issues (borders with Wales).

Mary Ann recognised the importance of tourism and agriculture to the local economy and small business enterprise. With regard to housing, there is still some work to do, but affordability is the biggest issue. Mary Ann needs more understanding on the issues around homelessness and the growth point. There are some surprises around Public Health, which require further investigation, such as infant mortality, prescribing costs and why adult obesity is not recognised in the Local area Agreement (LAA).

Paul Amos noted that Fire and Rescue have recorded five deaths (all older people) in the last two years. These have been mapped by area. The signposting scheme is very useful in addressing the issue.

Mary Ann has still to talk to the Environment Agency regarding flooding. There are cross boarder issues which need more investigation. The Leader mentioned that communities on the western side of the county do not recognise the borders, but there is increasingly different legislation in England and Wales which is not always helpful.

The Audit Commission will monitor the current economic downturn and will seek to understand what is happening locally and the Partnership's response. The Leader explained that the Partnership had put together an action plan to address local issues and, where possible, budgets will be made aligned to this work.

Mary Ann said that the things she had covered were issues rather than things that would result in red or green flags. It was confirmed that there was no quota of flags to be issued and these would be driven by the audit commission findings.

Chris Bull queried the position of Ofsted, which seemed to be pushing hard regarding CAA. Mary Ann confirmed that the Audit Commission will not give more emphasis to one area and that all issues relating to the county and its residents would be treated equally.

Timescale: In May the Audit Commission will seek to agree possible red flags and an early draft of the report. This will be followed by a period of fieldwork with the Research Team. A draft Area Assessment will be available in September.

Action: Mary Ann Bruce to attend relevant meetings of the Herefordshire Partnership Board and Management Groups to report and receive feedback as the process progresses.

iii. Self Assessment (Steve Martin)

A self assessment has been produced which has to be seen as work in progress. There have been two meetings where members of the Partnership have come together to discuss and challenge the assessments made, a further meeting was planned for the end of April. The biggest challenge is to be selective and not to try and detail everything that is happening in the county.

The State of Herefordshire Report has just been updated, and the strategic needs assessment has increased our knowledge of the community and identified gaps. There are cross-cutting issues emerging and there is a need to balance where it's going well and what needs addressing. The Place Survey results will soon be available, they are not likely to have significant impact, but may affect some of the issues.

Sharon Grey said it was helpful to cross reference some concerns over the economy, as it doesn't feel like Herefordshire, we mustn't lose the flavour of the county or its positive attributes. The Leader and Chris Bull agreed.

Chris Bull said that while the self assessment worked technically it doesn't tell the story on its own, and needs the support of the Sustainable Community Strategy, Story of Place and State of Herefordshire Report.

The Leader suggested that the paper go back to the Policy and Delivery groups to get more input, encouraging them to comment on other areas and not just their own areas of expertise.

Action: Policy and Delivery Groups contacts to pass on the CAA self evaluation to their groups and feed back comments to Steve before the end of March.

4. Local Area Agreement Refresh

The LAA Refresh was ongoing with the next iteration due to go to Joint Management Team on the 24th February and to Government Office on Thursday 26th February.

Chris thanked partners for their help in the refresh process. There are some 'hot spots' such as new business rate, where evidence was required to support the targets being proposed. Natalia said that historic figures show wide fluctuations in VAT registrations between years and the new target was based on this.

Chris explained the difference between locked and unlocked targets and their impact on reward grant. The economic targets are not locked, which means that we can re-negotiate them year on year as the situation changes and only the final targets will count towards the reward grant calculation. Only the designated indicators were in scope for reward grant and not local indicators or the mandatory Early Years indicators. Guidance on the reward grant has now been published.

The Leader commented that the next few years are going to be challenging and we need to be sensible about what can be achieved. We have to challenge ourselves on our priorities, given the current circumstances. Chris Bull said that investment decisions in the next twelve months would be different from those that we thought we would be making, so we may need to invest less in some areas and more in other areas. Richard said that we don't want perverse incentives to deliver on areas which are not now key priorities.

Action: Natalia to provide Chris Bucknell with further evidence for the revised target on Business registrations.

5. Performance Management

i. Performance on LAA indicators for the period April – December 2008

Chris referred the group to the performance report in the meeting papers. The Red/Amber Green rating is based on that agreed by the Policy and Performance Team, so as to maintain conformity with the corporate systems. If there is no data available, judgments are based on the information provided in reports, but this was, inevitably, subjective.

ii. To agree the process for performance management and reporting

Managing performance will be a key role for the Management Group and there was a need to agree the process. The Leader said that the traffic lights system was good, and the LAA indicators were a sensible number to manage.

Chris Bull suggested that we look at the reports around every three months.

It was suggested that the group address exceptions, and where movement between grades had occurred. The Leader asked that if performance moves to red we need feedback before the meeting so that the issues can be considered.

Action: the group to receive quarterly updates and focus on those areas that they could collectively address. Where an indicator moved to red these would be notified in advance so that the issues can be investigated and report to the meeting.

iii. Area Based Grant – to update the Management Group as to the current position and the way forward

ABG expenditure and prioritisation had now been addressed twice in order to ensure that there was a transparent and robust prioritisation process. The results have been analysed and are with the Herefordshire Council Director of Resources, who is suggesting setting up challenge meetings before any decisions regarding allocation are made. The 'status quo' will be maintained until this process has taken place and it was suggested that current allocations are maintained until June to allow time for contracts etc to be adjusted if necessary.

Chris Bull said that any proposals needed to reflect the main priorities. Richard felt uncomfortable with the areas already in receipt of funding being challenged, before new areas could be considered. Chris Bull said that any allocation of freed up funding should be based on priorities and should not be a bidding process. Sharon said that we want to get to a point where this group can commission activity, being clear about what we want delivered and who delivers it, we need a commissioning process.

6. Items for information

Learning to deliver project

State of Herefordshire key findings

Community Strategy Refresh

These items were noted, there were no questions from the group.

7. Any other business

Natalia mentioned the economic downturn action plan (circulated to the group). The HP Board had asked that each of the Policy and Delivery Groups look at the action plan and agree how they could contribute. Natalia mentioned that they are looking for funding to take the plan forward and delays in funding could cause the timetable to change.

Natalia added that there were two areas where there could be a Partnership wide response, firstly the support of quicker payment to local companies and also a commitment to buy locally. The Leader said that the Minister is pushing for payment in 10 days, but he felt this was difficult, with 20 days being more realistic. It was also important to businesses that payment was guaranteed, no matter the timescale.

Buying locally didn't just mean food, but all services, although balanced with achievement of value for money. Oliver imagined that the purchasing power around the table was significant. Chris Bull confirmed that Herefordshire Council is changing their policies to look at 20 days payment and local procurement.

8. Date of next meeting

23rd March, 2pm at Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford