

Minutes of Management Group Meeting

Friday 23rd July 2010

10am, Hereford Room, Plough Lane, Hereford

Present

Councillor Roger Phillips – Leader of Herefordshire Council (Chair)
Lynda Wilcox – Herefordshire Association of Local Councils
Gabrielle Wright – West Mercia Police
Chris Baird – Children’s Trust
Peter Brown – Stronger Communities
Richard Quallington – Third Sector
Jon Pryce – Fire and Rescue Service
Liz Smith – Safer Herefordshire
Natalia Silver – Economic Development Partnership
Bill Bloxsome – Environment Partnership
Dean Taylor – Attending on behalf of Chris Bull

In attendance

Julie Gethin - Herefordshire Partnership Support Team
Chris Bucknell – Herefordshire Partnership Support Team
Philippa Lydford – Herefordshire Partnership Support Team

Apologies

Chris Bull – Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire
Mark July – Environment Partnership
Mark Yates – Fire and Rescue Service
Susan Roberts – Government Office West Midlands
Stuart Downing – Government Office West Midlands

1. Introduction and Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked people to introduce themselves. Apologies were noted.

2. Minutes of last meeting – 8th March 2010

The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

3. Action sheet from last meeting and Matters Arising not on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

4. Area Based Grant – Julie Gethin

Julie Gethin talked through the report provided. The first page shows the £1.1m cut and detail where the cuts were directed by central government. In theory, there is the flexibility to achieve cuts. The support team have worked with the Policy and Delivery Groups and looked at the effect on service delivery. Some other grants have been unringfenced, but there is not much uncommitted. Risks to delivery are outlined in appendix 1 of the report. There are other uncommitted funds such as LPSA that could assist with managing the cuts.

The Supporting People Transition Board met yesterday and asked that the process agreed also includes this element of ABG. There is some capital funding committed at the moment which is on hold.

The proposal is a pragmatic, policy led approach, preparing for the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). This will involve a fundamental review of expenditure, with the freeze as it stands remaining. The outcome from the review will be proposals for the Management Group to agree what can continue, needs to be cut or revised. This needs to hook into existing work of all partners and looking ahead to future years. The work needs to be completed in September and needs to take on board viability of areas if start is delayed. Uncommitted funds remain as they are. Need to look at unintended consequences in making any changes that may affect other areas through the Policy and Delivery group facilitators.

The Chair explained that we have had in-year cuts that need to be dealt with in the current financial year. It is sensible to assume, post CSR, that Area Based Grant will stop, but some areas will still need support. It is about managing out the impact. For instance, free swimming grants were ended by government in July, so after discussion it was agreed to make the cut from this date rather than later. The Regional Development Agency (Advantage West Midlands) is stating that if funds are not committed the schemes cannot go ahead. It is recognised that some areas cannot be stopped, due to the nature of the work i.e. support for carers. The process needs to be orderly, taking an evidence-based approach and following a clear timetable.

Natalia Silver queried if funds can be carried over at the end of the financial year. Chris Bucknell thought this might not be possible as it's the end of the three year period. To be checked with Finance.

Chris Baird looking at the approach said the challenge was right and it is important to consider unintended consequences. With regard to timing, some of the Children's Trust work funded by Area Based Grant is planned to end March 2011. This is being managed out, ensuring a sustainable exit strategy, and is something they would seek to continue. Need to check what is included in agreed not contracted i.e. Extended schools is an agreement for use, staff are employed, so would need to be clear around implications, taking on board what is statutory.

The Chair said that with statutory duties there is a legal obligation, with further guidance expected, but not all on the 20th October. If it isn't sustainable, consideration should be given to closing down, because the Government has withdrawn the funding. People need to be aware that cutting something is an option.

Peter Brown said looking at services we need to be careful about support for the vulnerable. There are many ways to deliver services for less money. There needs to be clarity about responsibilities, and how the decisions will be made. Julie Gethin explained that the Policy and Delivery groups are accountable for the decision about priorities in their area as they know the detail. Natalia Silver suggested that challenge sessions need to bring in those people who know the detail.

Lynda Wilcox explained they are talking to Parish Councils, who may be able to bridge some gaps if their communities see something as a priority. People need to think differently now. Richard Quallington said we need to consider the impact on the most vulnerable and engage them in how cuts could be made and services delivered. This needs time, is the timescale realistic? We need the opportunity to move to a different place and harness the energy. When looking at areas remember some projects are based on activity funded from elsewhere.

David Taylor felt the policy led approach is right, we need to make decisions, but think differently how to provide services. Themes can create silos, consider how we might deal with the consequence. Even if we have a 25% cut, we still have 75% that we are spending, we need to value this.

Gabrielle Wright agreed in principle but questioned if the timing was realistic and asked what the process would be. We need to take the hit earlier rather than later, we will be better informed after 20th October. Good to hear prioritization and being done in an evidence-based manner. The policy approach needs to be outcome led.

Julie Gethin confirmed it should be outcome focused, with Policy and Delivery groups having the information to do their own prioritisation. Trying not to prescribe, but linking into other work being undertaken. We need to be clear what processes and performance management mechanisms groups currently use and how to support the groups with this review. Chris Baird offered to circulate their scoring/templates used by the Children's Trust as an example. It might need to be adjusted to fit other groups and it is still being refined.

Jon Pryce felt the link is not being made locally with the national news. The Fire Service is suggesting to staff to start with zero budgets, rather than looking at what is currently done and trying to do it for less. The results can be quite surprising. This is helping to make the economies needed.

Bill Bloxsome sought clarification on the policy led approach. A lot of talk led to the LAA indicators, but there are issues that have a longer term perspective, which need to be recognised. Julie Gethin explained that the policy led approach meant a considered approach, thinking about the implications, linked to other budgets and work. The Chair said we could pass cuts where they were made, but we need to manage this as the impacts are not just this year, we need to look ahead.

Dean Taylor said we need prioritisation, being clear about the policy that is leading and the framework. Need to be clear about the partnership priorities/drivers i.e. vulnerable groups and sustainability, investment which builds capacity at a high level and use to determine the final outcomes. Gabrielle Wright said that was helpful. The Chair said we have got to be practical, use common sense in the process, if something is uncommitted, why pick it up? We should be driven by what we have got and can practically do.

Chris Baird said this approach will only work well if all are honest about use of resources. Julie Gethin said the expectation is that each policy and delivery group will apply a partnership approach, liaising with Chris Bucknell, to determine what support is needed, to ensure there is a common framework leading up to the peer challenge.

It was suggested that the timetable for this process be August and September, changing the meeting date of the next Management group meeting to the end of September so that reports go back to the group.

Natalia Silver explained that as decisions have not yet been made, and the freeze on uncommitted spend remains should the policy and delivery groups be going back and saying there is no chance. Julie Gethin said this is up to each group, if the delay means something is unviable, or it could be funded from elsewhere.

Liz Smith said the risk of stopping everything not contracted/committed is the impact on other areas, so it needs looking at in the group, in the round, against all priorities, without raising expectations.

Action:

- Partnership Support Team to get confirmation on whether Area Based Grant under spend can be carried over at financial year end.
- Children's Trust scoring template to be circulated to the groups.
- An e-mail to go out to Policy and Delivery groups confirming the way forward on Area Based Grant.
- Re-arrange date of next Management group meeting to end September or early October

5. Post Comprehensive Area Assessment, local approach – Julie Gethin

Julie Gethin explained that although the CAA has been abolished we still have the LAA set of performance indicators and targets. There is an assumption that the reward grant will be abolished, but this has not yet been confirmed. There are priorities in the Community Strategy and it is important that the partnership demonstrates achievement. The suggested approach

will join up with existing work and keep bureaucracy to a minimum. Capturing case studies will be useful as they can be published and shared through the Herefordshire Partnership website.

The Chair said that it needs to be done in a simple and meaningful way with evidence that it adds value.

There was general consensus that we need to build on what works and doing what suits locally. The peer challenge should ask what difference has the work of Herefordshire Partnership made.

Richard Quallington explained that the voluntary sector had previously expressed interest to be involved in supporting the CAA, for instance a peer exercise for health groups, bringing people / service users in as part of the process. The Interim Third Sector Board would be happy to continue with this, focused on a specific area.

Gabrielle Wright said we also need to consider Total Place. The Chair said that the big issue is locality delivery. Lynda Wilcox asked to ensure that Parish Councils are involved.

Dean Taylor said the questions at the end of the report need answering. It is important that there is consensus and not to lose partnership momentum.

There was general agreement to the overall approach, subject to minimising bureaucracy. A further report to be brought to the next meeting with suggestions on the role of the group, how the evidence will be captured and input from the policy and delivery groups.

Action:

- Report to next meeting responding to questions at the end of the report
- Partnership Support Team to discuss with Interim Third Sector Board their involvement

6. Supporting People Transition Board – Julie Gethin

The Supporting People Transition Board met yesterday. David Powell agreed to be Chair. The group is focusing on preparing for next year and getting key messages out to providers in a timely manner. Integrated Commissioning processes are underway, links to the Health and Well-being Board and other Policy and Delivery groups need developing to ensure the re-prioritisation is by the Partnership and not one organization. All contracts end in March 2011.

The group will next meet after the Comprehensive Spending Review. The prioritisation and impact assessment work will be linked in to the wider work around Area Based Grant.

There are representatives from Policy and Delivery groups, the SP Provider Forum and the Alliance on the group.

Action: Action notes of the Supporting People Transition Group meeting to be circulated to the Management group.

7. Partnership Development Plan update, including Engagement Framework – Julie Gethin

Work on the Engagement Framework continues, looking at how we can make engagement meaningful and join it up in a partnership way, making best use of resources. A mapping exercise of who does what currently is underway. An event is planned for the autumn with the outcome from this being specific actions that will deliver a partnership approach to community engagement and join up resources.

In response to queries from Lynda Wilcox and Gabrielle Wright about the purpose of the event and who should be involved the Chair suggested that this be clarified as this is a key area of work for the partnership.

Action: Julie Gethin to clarify purpose of the event and intended invitees.

8. Compact Update – Lynda Wilcox

Lynda had previously reported difficulties in signing people up to the working group, but this has now improved. They are now focusing on making the meetings more meaningful. They plan to develop shorter brighter versions of the Compact documents which will be easier to sell the message to people.

Richard Quallington said what is fundamental is maintaining working relationships and questioned the government's line on Compact, accepting there needs to be something locally. Chris Bucknell said it is important to get the message across.

9. 2010/11 Community Strategy – Philippa Lydford

Philippa explained that a report had been taken to the Herefordshire Partnership Board on Wednesday, scoping the format and contents of the next Community Strategy, bearing in mind current and future changes and ensuring that there is something useful for the Partnership to move forward from next year onwards. The Board gave invaluable feedback, with a consensus that the document should be:

- About people and places
- Developed into what is useful locally
- A focus for the Herefordshire Partnership moving forward and at the heart of what we do
- Developed over the autumn, but leaving flexibility to adjust to developments, including the Big Society and Localism
- Using community engagement to agree how priorities are delivered

The Chair felt this summarised what was received at the Board meeting. It needs to add value and assist partners in service planning. It is a valid and important piece of work.

10. Any other business

Discussion of thoughts coming out from the meeting:

Richard Quallington observed there is something here about leadership in the county and how we get the community involved. There is a collective responsibility to help the community respond to the situation they find themselves in. It's something to think about, the bigger picture and the local response.

The Chair said that there is a theme here, the reality now and taking it forward. There will be more certainty on the 20th October, but we need to go out to communities and give them confidence. There will be dialogue with Town and Parish councils and there is a huge dialogue with businesses around Local Enterprise Partnerships. We all need to make people aware of the impact – being honest.

Richard Quallington explained there is a great deal the community and voluntary sector can do to help, and mobilise resources/action collectively. Need to recognize, for example, that PACT is one method and looking wider at the community are there different ways of working together and supporting our communities.

Gabrielle Wright said that West Mercia Police are committed to the PACT process. Although there is a review of PACT meetings underway she was not clear of the timescales for this or its remit. The PACT process as a whole is not being considered as part of the review.

Dean Taylor said the issue of leadership and collective responsibility and the roles of individual groups and organisations would be a useful focus for the engagement event.

Julie Gethin said that the PACT review detail would be picked up at the planned PACT working group meeting on Monday.

Date of next meeting –

Friday 10th September to be cancelled and new suggested dates to be circulated for the end of September to early October.