

Herefordshire Partnership Management Group Meeting

23rd March 2009
2.00 pm, Brockington, Hereford

Present

Councilor Roger Phillips – Leader of Herefordshire Council (Chair)
Chris Bull – Herefordshire Council/Herefordshire PCT
Lynda Wilcox – Herefordshire Association Local Councils
Mark Turner – West Mercia Constabulary
Paul Amos – Fire and Rescue Service (for Lucy Phillips)
Richard Quallington – Voluntary Sector Assembly
Sharon Gray – Learning and Skills Council
Natalia Silver – Economic Development and Enterprise
Chris Baird – Children and Young People
Mark Turner – Safer Communities
Bill Bloxsome – Environment Partnership

In attendance

Chris Bucknell – Herefordshire Partnership Support Team
Philippa Lydford – Herefordshire Partnership Support Team
David Powell – Director of Resources Herefordshire Council
Michael Brown – Herefordshire Council Research Team (for agenda item 5)

Apologies

Paul Baker – Safer Communities (Mark Turner represented CSDP)
Lucy Phillips - Fire and Rescue Service (Paul Amos attended in her place)

1. Introduction and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. The apologies and corresponding substitutions were noted.

2. Minutes of last meeting (23rd February) and Matters arising not on the Agenda

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

The Chair opened the meeting with a comment on the recent incident which had resulted in the death of a 17 year old boy and invited Mark Turner to update the group. Chris Bull emphasised how impressively local people had worked together and well the Police had managed the situation. The Chair highlighted the risk to community cohesion and ensuring that the Partnership is engaged.

Updates on the Comprehensive Area Assessment self assessment had been requested at the last meeting. Only one Policy and Delivery Group had responded only one had been received to date. The Chair re-iterated that it was important to have this information back by the end of the week, even if it is confirmation that there was nothing to add.

Action: Policy and Delivery Group contacts to pass on the CAA self evaluation to their groups and feed back comments to Chris before the end of March. If there are no additions groups to confirm that.

The Economic Downturn Action Plan had been updated and this will go back to the Partnership Board as previously agreed. Work has started, with a web guide and leaflet now available and a seminar coming up. Funding is required to support the actions in the plan. The Chair noted that the number of Herefordshire residents claiming unemployment benefit had significantly increased.

Sharon said that feedback from colleges suggested there was a significant increase in behavioral issues that could be linked back to economic difficulties in families, both in Herefordshire and elsewhere in the region.

It was agreed to take agenda item 4 and 5 before item 3.

3. Performance Management and Delivery Planning

Chris Bucknell talked to the papers that had previously been circulated to the group. In relation to the risk report, one area of key concern was that there were still some LAA Performance Indicators without a Delivery Plan. Chris Bull suggested contacting the Chairs of the Policy and Delivery Groups and relevant Directors, where Plans are still missing to pick this up. Members were asked to note the paper relating to the Commissioning and Procurement strategy which is being developed as this has particular relevance to the item on Area Based Grant and LPSA funding. All members had been asked to attend the meeting on the 17th April where the procedures will be discussed and agreed.

Action : Check list of missing Delivery Plans and notify relevant Chairs of Groups and Directors. All plans to be completed by the next meeting.

Chris Bucknell circulated the latest version of the LAA refresh document. Two targets are yet to be agreed (NI 171 and NI 21). Appendix A refers to reward grant which is only relevant to designated indicators (not local indicators). The LAA Refresh has been approved by Herefordshire Council Cabinet with designated responsibility being given to the Chief Executive to finalise negotiations and submit the document to Government Office.

4. Resourcing Issues

To discuss and agree the way forward for distribution of the Area Based Grant

David Powell referred to the report circulated in advance of the meeting and the need to move the process forward. The current proposals had come out of a meeting that the Chief Executive had called with the Chairs of the Policy and Delivery Groups in early January. This submission process had been gone through twice and there was now a need to agree what kind of challenge should be applied to these proposals and to finalise allocations to ensure service continuity.

Chris Bull said he understood the frustration with delays caused by partnerships varying in the way they tackled the process. He was not seeking to radically change funding but demonstrate a shift in priorities.

Mark Turner said that the principles needed are firstly that no Partnership should lose more than 5%, but not assume it will be a 5% variation. He said that the group should set out a series of commissioning priorities, going back to the Community Strategy and priorities in response to the economic downturn and invite groups to bid, redirecting funding to support the identified priorities.

The group was invited to discuss the way forward and the following comments were made

- If we say everything has some value, if some funding is given up, we need to know that what it will be replaced by is something of better value. The value of the money to each Partnership differs, as do the amounts.
- There is a need for criteria to be developed for the challenge i.e. whether activity is statutory or not is not enough.
- It is important to target funding at need and we need a commissioning approach.
- There should be challenge on whether we spend more on one area or another.
- The opportunity could be taken to put the LPSA Reward Grant and ABG together, thus making a bigger pot into which to bid.
- The ABG needed critical appraisal against current priorities. We need to demonstrate this as part of CAA.
- We need to consider the 6 month pledge under Compact compliance regarding contracts with the third sector.
- Although commitment to the third sector compact was good to hear, there needed to be a cultural shift with a view to next year and a focus on outcomes, but this needs time.
- There is a clear link between the economic downturn and the effect on families and children, with the links to behaviour and performance.
- A clear criteria for challenge is important, encouraging different ways of working better together - this could be picked up in the Commissioning workshop. The commissioning should ensure fit with priorities rather than pure hand outs.

- Consideration should be given to groups that currently do not have any allocation of ABG and how they can link in with the process.
- The Chair said there needs to be clarity and certainty on finance especially where the third sector are affected. There is not a lot of time and in the meantime there is a reputational issue for all partnerships.
- Chris Bull said that a top slice works if the groups have the opportunity to bid back for it, so it may be allocated back to where it came from.

Mark Turner proposed a 3% or 5% funding “top slice” (unpopular as it might be) placing the emphasis on a robust commissioning process rather than relying on everyone interpreting and responding to direction to release funding in a consistent and equally altruistic way.

The Commissioning and Procurement Strategy needed to be transparent with clear timelines, criteria such as impact on outcomes, priorities, areas at risk i.e infrastructure. There is a role for the Partnership groups is to look at this and the Management Group too. It was hoped that this would come out of the work that was being done by RIEP.

Chris Bull suggested that we needed to develop (one side of A4) commissioning priorities arising from the Community Strategy and downturn and invite all groups to bid into the process, meeting the criteria or demonstrating something new. This should be done in advance of, and feed into, the Commissioning and Procurement Workshop on the 17th April.

Natalia Silver suggested that we look at the CAA self assessment for weaknesses for inclusion in the criteria.

Chris Baird asked how the decision making process will take place. Some Partnerships are in their infancy in working in this way, it is important that all partners have an active role in the discussion.

The Chair said that we should inform groups that 95% is safe and that 5% is not lost, but needs to be bid for, against agreed criteria. The challenge process should involve three or four people from the Management Group, with reps from the Policy and Delivery Groups to discuss targeting the 5%, with the culture that it is Herefordshire’s money which needed to address the priorities. Proposals should be developed and sent around to the group by e-mail before the next meeting of the group.

Action :

- 1. Confirm to the Policy and Delivery groups that 95% of their current funding is secured for the coming financial year.**
- 2. Before the 17th April workshop, e-mail commissioning and procurement priorities for endorsement.**
- 3. Groups to e-mail around proposals and have the challenge process before the next meeting of the Management Group on the 6th May.**

LPSA2 Reward Grant

Chris Bucknell presented the report on the LPSA2 Reward Grant. It is likely that the total reward grant claim will be around £2.6m (half capital, half revenue). The appendix shows which targets have been achieved and the level of pump priming grant and reward grant attached to each. The pump priming figure consists of funding from central government and from the LPSA1 reward grant. There is currently about £250,000 underspend (still to be confirmed) from the LPSA1 Reward Grant, which does not need to be repaid and is available to be reallocated.

David Powell explained that out of the £2.6m, £1.9m is left, with £712,000 revenue allocated to support the overall Council budget, due to budget pressures, to save services. David clarified that of what funding is now available £1.25m is capital, the balance is revenue.. In addition, the underspend can be included for allocation.

Sharon Grey had some concern that some of the reward grant had already been allocated and suggested the principle that it is added to the ABG and we ensure that it is targeted against priorities and not necessarily goes back to partners who generated it. The LSC generated some of the reward, but didn’t want it back if it could go towards supporting priorities.

Chris Bull explained that any agency could make an assumption on budget setting that the grant would come back to them. If this assumption was not true, this needs to be managed. With regard to the

principle to discuss and return to those who gained the reward; we need to consider incentivising performance.

Paul Amos asked what was agreed at the beginning of the LPSA2 (in Worcestershire they have re-invested it). Sharon said that the initial understanding was the reward grant was under the control of the Partnership and could be reinvested in priorities.

Herefordshire Council's assumption needs to be consolidated, as many partners had difficult budget decisions to make and if all partners are equal there needs to be a Partnership debate, particularly as revenue only has been allocated and capital funding is harder to spend.

The Chair explained that there was a steer to Officers from the leadership to avoid capping of the Council tax.

Chris Bull noted with disappointment the percentage of targets achieved (59%) and Chris Bucknell said that there were lessons to be learnt from the management of the pump priming grant and setting of targets which had not been done by the current Partnership Team.

Chris Bull said that if the Partnership was not alright with the decision, they would need to work out what this means and what the money would be spent on.

Mark Turner said that it is not necessarily the outcome that was the issue but the procedure. It should be realised that this is Herefordshire's money and that no one had been consulted outside of Herefordshire Council. He stated that whatever the outcome the Council needed to take the various partners with them. Chris Bull accepted the need for a clear formalised agreement at the beginning of any process regarding what will happen at the end. He said we needed to find a way to take account, through the Partnership, of Herefordshire's money, and committed to finding a way to do that.

Sharon suggested whether some funding could support the Herefordshire Partnership Team (Worcestershire have used this approach), as Herefordshire Council contributes the greatest amount of funding towards the cost. She felt this would be more acceptable to partner organisations.

The Chair suggested that in future we deal with any funding using the same approach as Area Based Grant.

Richard asked how much of the pump priming funding came to the Third Sector.

Action: Chris Bucknell to work out how much funding came to the Third Sector and report back.

Action: A note to be produced outside this meeting as to how to achieve a way forward.

5. Herefordshire Quality of Life Survey briefing – Michael Brown

Papers were circulated to the group. Mike explained that the Place Survey replaced the Satisfaction Survey which had been more focused on Herefordshire Council Services. The survey has been called the Herefordshire Quality of Life Survey and is branded Herefordshire Partnership.

These results are provisional, awaiting Audit Commission sign off, so can not yet be published.

Some questions have been asked in a slightly different way to the Satisfaction Survey so a direct comparison of results is not always possible although many of the results were similar to the recent Council budget consultation.

Some areas have shown dramatic improvements and these will be better understood when comparisons can be made nationally (once results are officially published).

Mike said that 4,200 households were sent a survey, of which 46% responded which makes it statistically sound. Some analysis can be made by area.

Mark questioned whether the branding under Herefordshire Partnership, although unifying, affected views regarding individual organisations eg Council or WMC. Mark explained the effect the results had on the choosing of targets against some LAA indicators in the refresh process and sought views from the group.

6. Refresh of the Sustainable Community Strategy

The Community Strategy report (previously circulated by e-mail) was tabled at the meeting. The refresh will be a 'desk top' exercise using existing information and the timing will be in line with that of the Herefordshire Council Corporate Plan. Richard Gething from the Partnership Board is supporting the Partnership Support Team who are taking this work forward. The meeting was asked to note the requests under recommendations.

Action : current list of local Strategies used in the refresh to be circulated to the group, who should then reply with Strategies from their areas that should be included in the process.

The Guiding Principles were discussed, particularly in relation to how they were used and whether there was a requirement to evidence their impact on services.

The Chair suggested a refresh of them in light of the current economic downturn.

Chris Bull suggested that the Community Strategy should drive common endeavour and be signed up to.

Action : The Guiding principles to be circulated to the group

7. Items for information

Community Led Planning

The Community Led Planning report had been deferred, awaiting an update from the Transition group.

Performance Plus software

Herefordshire Council has purchased an electronic Performance Management tool (Performance Plus). The LAA was being used as a pilot which will help to identify any risks and would enable reports to be produced showing progress towards achievement of the targets.

State of Herefordshire Report

Copies of paperwork connected with the State of Herefordshire Report were circulated to the group.

Chris asked for feedback that can be incorporated into the final document. Mark noted that the document is being made available electronically now, but paper copies are still useful.

Chris Bucknell said that some hard copies, by theme, will still be available.

Sharon said that the document was easy to read and in a good format.

8. Any other business (to be notified in advance)

None identified.

9. Date of the next meeting

6th May, 9.30 a.m. Kindle Centre, Belmont Roundabout, Hereford

Other work to be managed by e-mail in between meetings.