

LOCAL SERVICE AGREEMENTS – PROGRESS REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the progress made on this initiative and seeks Members' agreement to the way forward.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the July Council meeting, Members considered a report concerning the potential for establishing a Local Service Agreement (LSA) between Essex County Council and this Authority. This initiative, promoted by Lord Hanningfield, the Leader of Essex County Council, is aiming to secure improvements in service delivery/target achievements through negotiation and agreement between the tiers.
- 2.2 At the July meeting, Members agreed that exploratory talks be held with the County Council around the potential for such a Local Service Agreement. The services identified as possibilities for investigation included the elderly, youth services, highways and back office issues such as recruitment, training and development. (Min. 378/02)

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Officer discussions have now taken place in an attempt to look at the potential for a Local Service Agreement between the District and the County to secure service improvements for local residents in these areas.
- 3.2 The detailed outcomes of these discussions are outlined below. Subject to Members' views, these will be submitted to the County Council as Rochford's proposals by the deadline date, 18th October. These will then be considered by the County Council's Cabinet on 28th October. Subject to views as to whether the proposals as outlined are worth pursuing further, detailed negotiations will then commence, involving both Members and officers at County/District level, at various stages, with a view to finalising a Local Service Agreement document for signature by both Authorities by February/March 2003.
- 3.3 The proposals which have emerged from the officer discussions to date are as follows:-

Elderly

- 3.4 Four items have been identified under this heading.
- i) Co-ordinated management/service delivery of care/support services to the Council's sheltered housing schemes.
- 3.5 At the present time, a number of care/support services are provided by a variety of providers, primarily the County Council and the Health Agencies, to residents within the Council's sheltered housing schemes. Often these services are provided with little co-ordination/communication between the providers and often they are responsive rather than pro-active.
- 3.6 The County and the various Health Agencies, through their studies around service provision to the elderly, have already identified this as an area for improvement. District Council officers believe there is scope locally to improve the co-ordination and delivery of care/support services received by residents in the Council's sheltered housing schemes. Consequently, it is felt that the mechanism provided by the LSA initiative can be used to develop and agree a framework for achieving this.
- ii) IT support and development
- 3.7 Coupled with i) above, there is considerable scope to provide and develop IT linkages between the Council's sheltered housing schemes, the County Council, health and other support/care agencies, with a view to improving co-ordination and communication. Such developments would also offer the potential to improve the access by sheltered housing residents to other services and facilities e.g. libraries, shopping, etc. Again, the LSA framework would provide the opportunity to consider and agree how this could best be progressed, together with appropriate outcomes.
- iii) Gardening for the Elderly
- 3.8 The District Council, along with the County Council and the Primary Care Trust, already support a Handyman scheme in the District. However, it is apparent that there is a demand for this to be extended into other areas, particularly gardening, if only at the very least to recommend persons/contractors who may be suitable to carry out such works.
- 3.9 Gardening is an area which is emerging both nationally and locally as an area of concern amongst the elderly and, given the District's population and housing mix, is an issue which will undoubtedly grow in importance. Again, the LSA initiative provides the opportunity to see

whether the existing handyman initiative can be extended in this way at little or minimum cost.

iv) Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

- 3.10 At the present time this process is administered by the District Council who process approximately 20 – 30 grant applications per year. Many of the referrals come from Essex County Council Social Services and many of the applicants are elderly.
- 3.11 Applications have to be assessed by the County Council's occupational therapist team and within Rochford, the scheme is supported on the Council's behalf by Springboard Housing Association, who provide scheme design, building and contractual support and advice to the majority of applicants. Whilst relatively small in terms of volume, the current process can be lengthy involving a number of stages, agencies and personnel. For the applicant, the process can be confusing and frustrating, with a number of potential time delays. The LSA framework offers the opportunity to look at the process afresh with a view to rationalising the responsibilities around the process and the stages involved.

Youth Services

- 3.12 The District has a partnership arrangement with Youth Services over the management of 57 South Street, Rochford, and Rochford Members are involved in Services Youth Local Strategy Group. Nonetheless, the level of engagement by Youth Services in key local District Council initiatives e.g. Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, Summer Playschemes, etc. is piecemeal and often dependent on the individuals involved.
- 3.13 With a new Crime & Disorder Strategy in place and with the District Council's Sports Development and Arts Officers now working with a range of young people and youth groups, the LSA framework would provide the opportunity to progress and agree on a Service Level Agreement with the County in terms of Youth Service provision and involvement locally.

Highways

- 3.14 There are a number of highway matters which it is felt would benefit from being examined within the context of an LSA framework. These are as follows:-
- 3.15 In a development context, it is felt that there would be benefits locally from the County adopting a 'development team' approach, similar to that already employed by the District, in terms of responding to large

scale and/or controversial planning applications. Rather than receive separate and often unrelated responses from a variety of County services to a particular proposal, there would be considerable benefit if a corporate response was received. Additionally, there would be benefits to the planning process if such an approach was used not just in the context of planning applications, but also in respect of Section 106 Agreements and the adoption process.

- 3.16 It is considered that all 3 areas would benefit from a Service Level Agreement with the County. Similarly, Service Level Agreements would be useful with the County in terms of the maintenance of highway trees, out of hours queries on highway matters and responding to fly-tipping issues.
- 3.17 It is also considered that the LSA framework should be used to ensure the County support and deliver on the National Land Information Systems (NLIS) initiative, in respect of land charge searches; otherwise the standard of service provided by the District under the NLIS scheme will suffer.
- 3.18 Given the issues which have emerged in relation to the town centre enhancement schemes and over local bus provision and subsidy, it is felt that there would be benefit in looking to provide mechanisms within any LSA framework to increase accountability, responsiveness and communication links on these matters.
- 3.19 On relatively minor matters such as 'brown signs', the sponsorship of roundabouts and verges, etc., it is considered that more responsibility for such functions should be passed to the District, together with the appropriate resources, to operate within an agreed framework. Again, this could be examined within the context of an LSA.
- 3.20 Finally, on highway matters, it is considered that negotiations should take place under the LSA initiative with a view to securing greater local freedom in connection with local highway funding. As a relatively small Authority, it is recognised that the District would not wish to take on the whole highways function. Nonetheless, the amount over which District Members currently have any discretion/responsibility is relatively small, at just over £70,000. If greater freedom for the use of the discretionary local highways budget was permitted, this would allow the Authority to utilise its funding allocation in accordance with local concerns and priorities.

Other matters

- 3.21 Given its size and resource base, the County Council offers the opportunity through economies of scale and/or through the employment of specialist professional/technical staff to provide the District Council with either potential savings or access to advice and guidance which otherwise the District might have difficulty in sourcing. The County also offers the Authority the opportunity to help in terms of building up the District Council's own capacity/expertise in certain areas. The emerging LSA framework offers the opportunity to examine a 'menu' of options which might be available to the District Council. Examples of specific areas which have been identified where there might be mutual benefit to both the County and District in working more closely together include recruitment and training, e-procurement, specialist IT, legal and technical advice and guidance.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 At this point in time, the only resource implications relate to Member and Senior Officer time.
- 4.2 Before any potential agreement is finalised, the Council would need to consider any potential resource implications for the Authority.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Whilst not required by statute, it is clear that much of the recent local government legislation encourages partnership working and innovation between the tiers.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To agree that the areas outlined in this report, or others if so specified, should be submitted to the County Council as the basis of this District's submission under the Local Service Agreement Initiative.

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