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## ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL – THE GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Members' views on the attached paper, which has been circulated by the County Council for consultation purposes.

### 2 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 The County Council has been considering the range of partnerships that it is involved in and how the various arrangements are working. In this context, the County has circulated the attached paper, seeking views from as many partnership organisations as possible on the issues raised, and in particular on the key issues raised in paragraph 1.5. The County's paper is attached as an Appendix.

### 3 OFFICER COMMENTS

- 3.1 With the increasing emphasis being placed on partnership working, the opportunity to consider the issues surrounding this topic are to be welcomed. In relation to the specific points raised in para. 1.5 of the Appendix, Officer comments on the issues in the order that they are listed as follows:–

- i. There are different reasons for the establishment of particular partnership arrangements and there needs to be clear objectives in each case, together with timescales for action and a regular review of whether the partnership is still required.

The requirements and ethos behind partnership working need to be disseminated throughout the organisations involved. There are many examples of where partnership is talked about and agreed at one level and yet at another level decisions and actions take place which seemingly contradict this.

- ii. It is accepted that there has been a growth in the number of partnerships over the years and if anything, with the emphasis now placed on partnership working, there is a danger that the number could grow still further. It is important that opportunities are taken for rationalisation and the emergence of the Community Planning process provides an ideal opportunity to achieve this.

- iii. It is accepted that 'one-size' will not fit all partnerships. It is felt that there should be a presumption towards basing partnerships on district council areas, or amalgamations of these.

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- iv. It is felt that it is for the County Council to decide how best to give greater focus to County Members' 'locality' responsibilities. That said, there could be the problem of adding to public confusion as to "who does what" if the County Council did decide to set up Area Committees mirroring District boundaries.
  - v. It is felt that there would be little benefit in the establishment of a separate Essex L.G.A. In addition to the Association of Essex Authorities (A.E.A.). Such an approach would be likely to send out negative signals to those non-local government partners within the A.E.A. at a time when we are being encouraged by Central Government to adopt a more "joined-up" approach.
  - vi. There has already been some training given by the A.E.A. in this area and more is planned.
- 3.2 In addition to the above, it is felt that the District Council should emphasise to the County Council the importance of recognising a 'bottom up' as well as 'top down' approach to this issue and the need to be adaptable and flexible in response to individual Districts and localities' requests. The introduction of new (and differing) political structures across the County, together with the demands placed upon the various bodies by the growing strategic agenda, together with a growing emphasis on performance delivery measures by all the agencies involved, means that the County Council should not attempt to be overtly prescriptive on this issue.

#### **4 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The resolution of Crime & Disorder issues and the development of a new strategy for the District will involve considerable partnership working.

#### **5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The resolution of a number of planning, waste and Local Agenda 21 issues will involve partnership working.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Nothing specific as a result of this particular paper.

#### **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 A number of Central Government initiatives around partnership working have a legislative basis, e.g. Crime & Disorder, Community Planning.

#### **8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Parish/Town Councils will need to be involved in a number of the partnership initiatives.

**9 RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That subject to Members' consideration and comments, the Officer comments outlined above form the basis of this Council's response to the County Council on this matter.



Paul Warren

Chief Executive

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**Background Papers:**

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## AGENDA ITEM.....

Executive Board

Date: 2 November 2000


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## THE GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS

Report by Cabinet Member for Community Regeneration and Economic Development

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Enquiries to Andrew Hudson, Assistant Chief Executive  
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### 1. Purpose of Report

The attached detailed paper gives the Board the basis for a discussion on partnership working across the County Council. It looks at our partnerships very broadly, and in that context includes an assessment of the Liberal Democrat motion to the July Council about area committees, which we need to respond to for the Council meeting on 5 December. The paper is complex, but the opening section sets out the key issues.

### 2. Recommendations

It is in the nature of partnership that the County Council cannot take decisions on its own. We therefore propose that, following the discussion at Council on 5 December, this paper should form the basis for consultation with partners. On a lot of issues, the paper is therefore looking for a general steer as a basis for wider discussion, rather than a decision. There does need to be a decision on the report back to Council on the Liberal Democrat motion.

Overall, I suggest that the recommendations to Council should be that:

- The attached paper, subject to any changes from the Board, should be put forward as a basis for consultation with partners.
- The broad approach to partnerships should be the present "horses for courses" approach, with some rationalisation where possible.
- Any moves towards area committees, perhaps to provide some kind of forum for local members to express their views and concerns on any matters affecting their locality, should build on existing partnerships and should not give those committees executive powers. The structure would need to be light touch, avoiding fresh bureaucracy. This possibility should be considered further as part of the evaluation of the pilot political arrangements.

# THE GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 Working in partnership has been an established way of working in many parts of the Council for some years. Since 1997, the pace has intensified, as central government, in particular, has demanded that a large number of services are delivered explicitly by partnership arrangements, often by statute or as a condition of getting funding. The scale and importance of these arrangements raise questions about how we organise ourselves as a County Council, how we relate to other authorities and private sector bodies, and how we manage and prepare for this mode of working.
- 1.2 This paper is designed to take stock of the way partnership working is developing, and to set out some ideas for future developments. It is in the nature of partnership working that the County Council will not be able to give effect to any proposals by itself, so an early step will be discussion with partners. The Essex Chief Executives' Association will be reviewing partnerships early in the New Year, possibly with reference on to the Association of Essex Authorities, and it is hoped that this paper will be a useful input to those discussions.
- 1.3 This paper covers:
  - a. Scope (section 2);
  - b. Background (section 3);
  - c. Objectives for successful partnership working (section 4);
  - d. Assessment of how well the present system works (section 5);
  - e. Options for change, including the case for area committees (section 6);
  - f. Implications for training and development (section 7);
  - g. Conclusions and next steps (section 8).
- 1.4 Section 6 addresses in some detail the related question of whether the County Council should set up area committees of some sort. A group of Liberal Democrat members put a motion to Council in July calling for this to be considered, with a view to these committees scrutinising the local impact of decisions, enhancing local partnership working and "making decisions with a purely local as opposed to County-wide or strategic impact". Annex A sets out the motion in full: it does not specify the area that a committee would cover, and although partnership working is mentioned as one of the aims, it is not the sole or even main focus of such committees as proposed. This paper is also designed to provide a basis for members to consider the substantive response to that motion.
- 1.5 The key issues emerging from the paper are:
  - the objectives of the partnership need to be clear: is the partnership for communicating information, or for discussion, or for executive

and operational purposes, or for policy planning, or for any combination of these;

- the present network of partnerships has grown "like Topsy" and some sort of framework looks desirable, including some rationalisation of existing partnerships – we know some districts are thinking along these lines;
- however, one size will never fit all partnerships, and a "horses for courses" approach looks right;
- within the County Council, the ways of giving a greater focus for members' locality responsibilities needs to be looked at as part of the evaluation of the Modernising pilot, though any moves towards area committees should be light touch and not involve executive powers;
- across the county, there is a case for supplementing the Association of Essex Authorities (AEA) as a multi-agency partnership with a county-level Local Government Association, to boost the common focus and strength of local government as such, not vis-à-vis the other AEA partners but vis-à-vis creeping Government centralisation;
- more attention should be given to training and development, of both officers and members, for partnership working.

## **2. SCOPE OF THIS PAPER**

- 2.1 This paper is not seeking to cover the governance and management arrangements of everything the Council does in some sort of partnership. The range is far too wide, and many bilateral arrangements are most effectively managed in the normal way. The focus here is on arrangements which have strategic or special significance, typically because they involve a number of bodies, usually including more than one directorate within the County Council.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Partnerships exist because they are often the only effective way of dealing with increasingly complex public needs.
- 3.2 Much of the impetus for more partnership working since 1997 has come from central government. There are some major themes in its approach:
- a) a focus on the needs of the citizen, which will span organisational boundaries;
  - b) an eagerness to tackle public policy problems, such as crime and disorder, that require a coherent effort from several agencies;

- c) a perception that friction and poor communications between organisations has got in the way of effective service delivery in the past; and
- d) successful examples from around the country which have impressed Ministers.

Similar factors have prompted the County Council and other Essex authorities to develop further partnerships of their own.

### Types of partnership

- 3.3 The first step in taking stock of the partnership framework is to identify the different types of partnership the County Council has. These can be broken down in a number of ways:

- by geographical coverage:
- by subject matter and focus - they can be categorised as global partnerships, or functional partnerships (see below);
- by role - are they for exchange of information, or for discussion, or to take executive decisions?

The summary diagram at Annex B sets out some of these partnerships, according to the geographical coverage, and to the subject matter.

- 3.4 The geographical coverage of partnerships varies considerably. The diagram simplifies the breakdown somewhat into four categories:

- pan-Essex, sometimes existing Essex, sometimes old;
- multi-district, where the four EEP divisions are gaining currency;
- district-based, though primary care groups and trusts are not fully coterminous with districts;
- sub-district partnerships, such as Local Action Zones.

- 3.5 On subject matter, global partnerships take an overview of the whole range of community needs and wishes. They deal with strategic issues of co-ordination and simplification through setting priorities and rectifying overlaps and omissions.

- At the broadest, regional, level, there is the East of England Local Government conference and the East of England Assembly.
- Within Essex, there is the Association of Essex Authorities (AEA). The purpose of the AEA is to be a focus for discussing and promoting the best use of resources by working together in partnership for the benefit of the people of Essex. It does not have the power to make decisions which bind all or any of the member organisations which are:

Essex County Council	representation	3
2 Unitary Councils (each)		2
12 District and Borough Councils (each)		1
Essex Association of Local Councils		2
Essex Police Authority		1
Essex Fire Authority		1
North Essex Health Authority		1
South Essex Health Authority		1

The County Council is represented on the AEA by the three Group Leaders or their nominated substitutes.

- There are joint boards with both Health Authorities, without district representation at present.
- With districts, there are formal Links committees in a few cases. Basildon District Council continues to argue that its Links Committee should be a joint committee with decision-taking powers. With other districts, discussions take place on a more ad hoc basis. All, at present, have no executive powers.

3.6 Functional partnerships deal with specific issues, either addressing the needs of a particular client group, or an individual policy issue.

3.7 To give some examples, in the field of social policy, the following partnerships have been created as a result of central government initiatives:

- Early Years & Child Care Partnership
- Essex Drug Action Team
- Connexions
- Regeneration partnerships under SRB funding
- Youth Offending Teams
- Much greater impetus towards partnership with Health, through the Health Improvement Programme process, and the constitution of Primary Care Groups
- Crime & Disorder Partnerships with districts
- Education Action Zones (which we have built on through the Local Action Zones)
- Supporting People.

3.8 In economic policy, the institutional structure has been changed by the creation of Regional Development Agencies, with certain direct functions and a wider general remit to encourage successful economic development. The Essex Economic Partnership (EEP) was formed in 1998, and has divided the county into four areas for focussing economic development activity. The extension of the Thames Gateway – one of the four EEP areas - will also require us to formalise existing co-operation.



- 3.9 The third dimension, of role, also varies. Some partnership bodies are wholly for information and discussion purposes, such as the Links Committees. Some set strategic objectives for services which are implemented by others whereas others again, such as Crime and Disorder partnerships, have important delivery functions vested in the partnership by legislation.
- 3.10 The situation will continue to change, as new partnerships are created, whether because of new legislation or local initiatives. So it would be unrealistic to try to establish a structure for all time. Any attempt at rationalisation could only achieve a net rationalisation, and for the future, the most valuable thing could be to try to establish some agreed principles or framework against which future proposals could be assessed.
- 3.11 One important factor in addressing all these questions is the new statutory duty of community planning. This duty will apply equally to the county and district councils in Essex. Each authority, in close consultation with a wide range of partners and the public, will have to prepare a strategy for the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area. This task will require working within global partnerships, going beyond the public authorities, both at county level, and at district level. The Government is pressing for something similar at neighbourhood level, to supervise neighbourhood renewal, where our Local Action Zones may be relevant.
- 3.12 To summarise, there are a large and growing number of partnerships, with a range of functions, coverage, and purposes. This growth has been very largely unplanned. Partnership work is taking an increasing amount of time and attention, for officers and members, and the accountability arrangements are not always clear. A review is timely, to look at issues of accountability, co-ordination, rationalisation, and management arrangements.

#### 4. OBJECTIVES FOR SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 4.1 The following are suggested as objectives for successful partnership working:
- Clarity of purpose – what are the vision and aims of the partnership?
  - Clarity of role – is it executive or for discussion, and are the frequency of meetings appropriate?
  - Clear accountability, for staff to the appropriate management and members/governance bodies, and for them to the public
  - Efficiency, so that time is not wasted, and effort is not duplicated
  - Effectiveness in service delivery, so that the whole is more than the sum of the parts
  - The right strategic/local balance, so that the partnership keeps its broad goals in view, while understanding the different local

dimensions: this balance will obviously vary from partnership to partnership.

## 5. ASSESSMENT OF HOW WELL THE PRESENT SYSTEM WORKS

- 5.1 This section gives an overview of how well the present system is working, against these objectives. It does not attempt a detailed analysis of how each partnership is working.
- 5.2 On clarity of purpose and role, the position for most bodies is clear to the members of the body, but probably not to a wider audience.
- 5.3 On accountability, there is one clear pan-Essex body, in the AEA supported by the Essex Chief Executives' Association, but this does not have executive functions and has little or no public profile. And aspects of the system are ad hoc, eg a few districts have Links Committees, but most do not. There was a joint health board for North Essex well before the one for South Essex. Arguably, a weakness is that, for a number of partnerships, accountability is fragmented, back to the parent authorities. So if the crime and disorder situation is not improving in a particular district, the public will not be clear who to complain to. In some cases, eg the Youth Offending Teams, there is no formal accountability to elected members. The net result is that partnership activities overall probably get less Member scrutiny than their importance warrants.
- 5.4 On efficiency, for the global partnerships, the system is fairly lean: the AEA meets five times a year, and the Links committees 2-4 times each, though these are bodies without executive powers so may not need to meet often. In other cases, some of the community safety-related partnerships, for example, seem to involve a lot of the same people in similar configurations. There is an increasing risk of duplication as partnership working grows. And in other areas, such as local transport panels, the work is time-consuming.
- 5.5 On effectiveness, for many of the new partnerships, it is really too early to make an assessment. The crime and disorder partnerships have bedded in well, and have been helpful. The Health joint boards are also playing an increasingly useful role.
- 5.6 Finally, the strategic-local balance needs to be constantly monitored. Within the County Council, members have expressed concerns that local views may not be adequately heard, as represented, for instance, in the Lib Dem motion about area committees.
- 5.7 Putting this together, the following points emerge.
- There are a wide range of current partnerships, for a range of purposes. It is right that there are a variety: given the variety of roles and areas covered, one size will never fit all. The present "horses for courses" approach looks best.

- However, the present structure has developed piecemeal, and it is worth exploring whether some framework could be put in place, within the overall "horses for courses" approach, whether to rationalise existing partnerships, or to provide a context for new ones, or both.
- There is a case for some rationalisation, to promote the integration of partnership working, so there are fewer wasteful overlaps, no serious omissions and a bigger impact through collaboration.
- For all partnerships, clarity of purpose needs to be established at the start, and the approach and frequency of meetings should follow accordingly.
- Within the County Council, the concerns about local involvement will need to be addressed in some way.

## 6. OPTIONS FOR CHANGE, INCLUDING AREA COMMITTEES

### 6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The options for change can be grouped under a number of headings:

- A broad framework for the types of partnerships (section 6.2)
- Scope for rationalisation (section 6.3)
- Area committees, and the role of members in dealing with local issues (section 6.4)
- Members' strategic role (section 6.5)
- Delivery on the ground (section 6.6).

### 6.2 A broad framework for the types of partnerships

6.2.1 If an overall "horses for courses" approach is agreed, the issue is whether the number of "horses" and "courses" can be put into some kind of framework.

6.2.2 The diagram at Annex B groups the partnerships into four geographical categories. There are some pan-Essex partnerships, some multi-district, some district based, and some at a sub-district level. These could be sub-divided: for instance, the health boards and the EEP areas are both multi-district, but cover different sub-divisions of the county. But the starting point for a framework could be to say that, wherever possible, new partnerships should stick to geographical divisions that are already in place for any related work, rather than set up new ones. This approach has worked well for the EEP and the Structure Plan, where there is now a match in the choice of multi-district groupings.

6.2.3 Another simple step forward would be to say that before any new partnership is created, there should be a careful look to see if the functions could be handled by an existing partnership, perhaps with some change of membership. This is already happening, for example, with the Thames Gateway South Essex, where a new partnership has

been created, but the roles of existing partnerships eg the EEP have been tailored to match in the process.

### 6.3 Scope for rationalisation

6.3.1 The objectives of rationalisation would be partly strategic and partly practical. At one level, it would be about making decisions about priorities and resource allocation to partnerships easier, both for the County Council and probably for others. At a more operational level, it would be about:

- reducing the time wasted on similar but unco-ordinated meetings
- not having to provide the same information on multiple occasions
- making it easier to put funding bids together
- sharing ideas about possible projects or service improvements

6.3.2 Some of the practical benefits could be achieved by creating an electronic system for information exchange for all those agencies active in public service. This would provide a non-directive co-ordinating mechanism. For example, all agencies could use an interactive database over the internet, in which they would post and read details of programmes and projects. This would be a practical tool for agencies to identify overlaps and omissions, learn from others' experience, and work together more closely in future. Consideration is being actively given with the TEC to the development of such a database as a county resource, which might attract Invest to Save Budget funding from Government.

6.3.3 It might also be worth looking at organising partnerships into clearer policy streams.

- It would be possible to stream partnerships either by policy theme (eg, community safety) or by client group (eg, young people – note the emerging Connexions Service) or by some combination of these
- Policy theme streams might, for example, be: community safety; health; culture; physical environment; economic development; social regeneration; learning; local democracy. However, some issues, such as transportation, have impacts on several streams
- Within the community safety stream, for example, we might seek to align the County Council's partnership working on Crime and Disorder, Drug Action Team, Youth Offending Team, Domestic Violence Panels and Racial Incident Panels.

6.3.4 Within a stream, there are several steps that could be taken, in consultation with partners. These include:

- Where much the same issues are being discussed from only slightly different angles by much the same group of people, organise meetings of the different partnerships on the same day at the same place. This will help to prevent wasteful journeys etc and promote opportunities for rationalising work. This is already done by the

County Crime and Disorder Group and the Youth Offending Steering Group.

- Take this a step further by creating a joint secretariat for all meetings so clustered. This should help to identify further opportunities for integrating the work. Such secretariats could also play a key role in ensuring that information on the partnership stream's work is properly reported to all who need to know.

6.3.5 There is a good case for reviewing most or all partnerships on a regular basis, to ensure they are still needed, and that their aims and structure remain appropriate.

6.3.6 Ultimately, Public Service Agreements could offer greater flexibility to determine partnership structures locally. In return for good performance against stretching targets for community well-being, PSAs offer the possibility of relaxing statutory requirements on structures and planning. Thus, purely by way of example, if we had a successful PSA and could show that it would be better to merge our Drug Action and Youth Offending Teams, or to rationalise the arrangements in some other way, we could apply to Government for permission to do this.

6.4 Area Committees and the role of members in dealing with local issues

6.4.1 An area committee would oversee County Council business in its area, including partnership activity – the case for area committees does not depend on the governance of partnership working. Such committees would presumably replace Links committees where they currently exist. Important decisions would have to be taken about the functions and powers, including geographical coverage – they would not have to be one per district – membership and budgets.

6.4.2 The functions and powers must be the basic decision. The Liberal Democrat motion proposed that the committees should have "some or all of the following functions:

- Scrutinising the local impact of decisions made by the Executive Board;
- Enhancing partnership working at local level;
- Making decisions with a purely local as opposed to County-wide or strategic impact."

(The full text is at Annex A.)

6.4.3 The relevant legislative framework is comprehensive but also complex. Under the new arrangements and "executive" will be able to:-

- delegate functions and budgets to area committees;
- delegate functions and budgets to joint committees with other authorities;
- delegate functions and budgets to another Council.

However, if the "executive" delegates the discharge of the function it will nevertheless retain the responsibility and accountability. Subject to limited exceptions the only voting members of such area committees must be councillors.

6.4.4 For "non-executive functions" (ie those functions that may not be exercised by the executive) eg development control and licensing, the legislative framework prior to the passing of the Local Government Act 2000 will continue to apply. This framework provides that:-

- with limited exceptions area committees which include non-councillor voting members cannot formally take decisions in respect of Council functions;
- area committees need not be politically balanced;
- they must cover an area not larger than  $\frac{2}{5}$ ths of the authority in terms of area or population;
- they cannot include members from electoral divisions outside their area.

6.4.5 There is also a third possibility which is to combine a delegation of executive and non-executive functions to an area committee. However, where there is such a combination the executive and the Council must ensure that accountability for the different types of function remain clear – it must be clear who is responsible for which functions and therefore who must be held to account. One suggestion that has been made to try to achieve this clarity is that agendas should clearly differentiate between executive and non-executive business.

6.4.6 Overall, there could be a number of approaches: decision-making powers over local issues, delegated by the Executive, with or without a delegated budget; a scrutiny function, parallel to the Select Committee structure; a consultative forum, covering either specified functions, or the whole of the Council's business; and some sort of half-way house, whereby Cabinet Members might ask area committees to play an important advisory role on particular issues, either on a continuing basis or on occasional issues. From the policy viewpoint, delegating budget authority would add to the complexity of the budget arrangements.

6.4.7 On geographical coverage, most discussion assumes that area committees would cover district council areas. That has a clear logic, and is also the basis on which some County Council services are organised. But as the analysis in section 3 of this paper shows, a number of issues are better handled on a pan-Essex or multi-district level, and community planning is likely to involve working at sub-district level as well. The legislation however provides that "area committees" cannot cover more than 40% of the authority's area.

6.4.8 The membership should again follow the functions, subject to the limitations imposed by the legislation summarised above.

6.4.9 Overall, the arguments in favour of area committees seem to be as follows:

- they would provide a specific forum for members to raise local issues;
- they would enable members to make locally-based links between different types of activity, particularly where done in partnership;
- the needs of an area are likely to be holistic, the same as the needs of a citizen;
- they would help the County Council understand the needs of localities.

6.4.10 There are the following arguments against:

- they would complicate the structure and blur responsibility: if they had decision-making powers, they would cut across the role of the Executive, and diffuse and lengthen the decision-making process; if not, they would complicate the scrutiny system, and risk being a talking shop – this was certainly the experience of many of the Links committees;
- the different political make-up would also add to the complexity: certain area committees, on a district basis, would always be dominated by one party or other, whereas control of the County Council has changed five times in five years;
- as the “horses for courses” approach brings out, certain citizens’ needs, certain kinds of issue, and the economic delivery of certain services do not make for a single structure: some require a pan-Essex view, some supra-district arrangements, some district level, and others sub-district. To fit all into a common single design would be simplistic ;
- the existing Links committees have not proved attractive to many County Council members, though some districts would certainly argue that that is because they lack executive powers;
- time spent by members and officers on area committee work would not be available for other work eg developing the role of the select committees. But if enough time were not spent on this work, the potential benefits will not be realised;
- there are already some opportunities for area members to raise local issues under the new pilot political arrangements: any member can ask for an issue to be put on a Select Committee agenda; and eight members, from any parties, can require a decision of the Executive Board to be referred to a select committee and/or to Full Council.

6.4.11 Overall, giving County Council members a greater locality focus for their work was one of the objectives of the pilot system for modernising local government, and the mechanisms may need to be strengthened. That will be an important part of the evaluation of the present pilot arrangements. But the case for area committees as such does not look consistent with the overall "horses for courses" approach to partnership working and much else the County Council does: one single structure, however defined, would not be appropriate for much of the business.

6.4.12 One possibility would be to have forums in localities at which local members, district councillors, and others could raise issues with Cabinet Members.

## 6.5 The strategic role of members

6.5.1 At the pan-Essex level a case may be made for creating a Local Government Association for Essex which would better represent the voice of local government in the County. An LGA for Essex would be constituted in the same way as the LGA nationally. The membership would, therefore, reflect accurately both the political balance and the relative size of the constituent authorities.

6.5.2 An LGA for Essex would be designed to supplement the AEA, rather than to replace it. The LGA would be the voice of local government as such, vis-à-vis quangos and creeping centralisation. It would also link directly with the existing national and regional LGA structures, and so give Essex a clear route for influencing decisions and policy at those levels. The AEA would continue as the wider partnership body, and could provide the embryo for the Local Strategic Partnership which will be important for community planning. In practical terms, the Essex LGA and the AEA could meet back to back.

## 6.6 Delivery on the ground

6.6.1 One further important issue is how to improve the integration of delivery on the ground. The Local Action Zones, built on the Education Action Zones, in East Basildon and Clacton/Harwich, are designed to provide a focus for learning about that. These got under way in April and it is still too early to draw out definitive lessons. However, several key themes are emerging already:

- The importance of engaging local people more in choosing local priorities and shaping public services, and of a dialogue among local agencies and residents. This must obviously include local members.
- Creating a broadly agreed and measurable set of community well-being objectives towards which all agencies can work.



- Developing an "action-net" through which local agencies can share information and ideas and develop project proposals and funding bids.
- Using the opportunity of Best Value reviews to explore whether further capacity can be freed by the local authorities to support local projects
- The potential value of multi-disciplinary local teams with the time and skills to address urgent social issues, eg, children at risk of social exclusion.

The links between County Hall and the responsibilities and authority of locally based officers, and between county, district, and other officers, will need to be kept under review. What is clear is that a highly directive and heavily planned approach will not work, because of the range of agencies involved. What is needed is almost a kind of brokering arrangement.

## **7. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 7.1 Whatever the structural decisions, there is a clear need to make sure our objectives, performance management, training, and recruitment reflect new ways of working.
- 7.2 Working in partnership is clearly identified as one of the Essex Competencies and therefore should become an essential part of performance management for all officers involved in partnerships. It should also be a key element in the County Council's Training and Development programmes for both Members and officers. There are a number of ways this can be achieved:
  - The County Council's broad objectives for partnership working should be included in all induction and general management training
  - Specific training courses for both officers and members should be developed in particular areas of partnership working
  - The Association of Essex Authorities should be recommended to sponsor a programme of development events focusing on joint working in specific partnerships in Essex. The unique benefit of this approach would be the bringing together of Members and officers from all partner organisations in the County.
- 7.3 One possible further step would be to identify a number of broad principles which should form the foundation of any partnership activity. There are a number of models around, but an Essex list should clearly be worked up between partners and not by one body alone. Any such

list could feature in the County Council's Performance Management and Training and Development processes.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

8.1 As summarised at the start, the main points in the paper are:

- the objectives of any partnership need to be clear: is the partnership for communicating information, or for discussion, or for executive and operational purposes, or for policy planning, or for any combination of these;
- the present network of partnerships has grown "like Topsy" and some sort of framework looks desirable, including some rationalisation of existing partnerships – we know some districts are *thinking along these lines*;
- however, one size will never fit all partnerships, and a "horses for courses" approach looks right;
- within the County Council, the ways of giving a greater focus for members' locality responsibilities needs to be looked at as part of the evaluation of the Modernising pilot, though any move towards area committees should be light touch and not involve executive powers;
- across the county, there is a case for supplementing the Association of Essex Authorities (AEA) as a multi-agency partnership with a county-level Local Government Association, to boost the common focus and strength of local government as such, not vis-à-vis the other AEA partners but vis-à-vis creeping Government centralisation;
- more attention should be given to training and development, of both officers and members, for partnership working.

8.2 This paper is designed for discussion at the County's Executive Board on 7 November, and as background for a Full Council item on 5 December. There will then need to be discussion with partners: the paper may, for instance, be useful for the Essex Chief Executives' Association meeting on 4 January

8.3 Following consultation, it will be important to distil an action plan.

# ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

## MEETING 18 JULY 2000

### Motions and Questions

#### AGENDA ITEM 3

#### MOTION (Standing Order 8)

- (1, To be moved by Councillor S.J. Robinson, pursuant to a notice of motion signed by him, seconded by Councillor K. Jones and supported by Councillors G.E.E. Allen, Mrs.J.E. Beard, R.H. Boyd, Mrs.A. Enkel and Mrs.P.L. Pascoe

This Council notes:

- i) that this Council is one of the largest authorities in England by size and by population;
- ii) that under the new structures decision making is concentrated in the hands of eight individual members who may not know every area of Essex;
- iii) that the size and complexity of Essex and the remoteness of the decision-making process from the individuals and areas of Essex affected have been acknowledged by the Executive Board as an issue;
- iv) that there are already local panels and forums that allow education, social services and transportation issues to be discussed by members but that these meet in private, generally act as advisory bodies only and, with the exception of the local transportation panels, do not involve the County Council's partners;
- v) that the Local Government Bill as currently drafted provides for area-based committees to have the power to take some executive decisions.

This Council believes:

- i) that many of the decisions that people care about most are essentially local in nature;
- ii) that the ability of the County Council to respond to local concerns and act in partnership with district, borough and parish councils and with other local partners is compromised by the lack of adequate forums in which to discuss local concerns and decisions and consequently the County Council risks appearing remote from the people it serves;

- iii) that the new structures are in danger of making this situation worse unless adequate attention is given to strengthening the constituency and local role of members thus enhancing the role of members and partners in local decision making.

Council therefore resolves to consider the introduction of area committees with some, or all of, the following functions:

- \* scrutinising the local impact of decisions made by the Executive Board;
- \* enhancing partnership working at area level;
- \* making decisions with a purely local as opposed to Countywide or strategic impact.

(This motion will stand referred to the Executive Board for consideration and report to the Council.)

# THE DIFFERENT PARTNERSHIPS

