

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	19 June 2017
Title:	'Working Better Together'- Next Steps In Developing Hampshire County Council's Relationships with Parish and Town Councils
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of the recent engagement Hampshire County Council has undertaken with parish and town councils (PTCs) building upon the key themes that emerged from the September 2016 workshops;
- Propose joint initiatives, working with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) and PTCs, to address some of the key feedback from the workshops together with recent discussions.
- Consider opportunities to provide support for the development and capacity building of PTCs who wish to contribute actively to a locality focused approach

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. The county of Hampshire is served by 263 parish and town councils¹ (PTCs) which operate across much of Hampshire and fulfil an important function in addition to those of the county and district/borough councils. This was recognised in the last Cabinet report on Local Government Review (14 November 2016) when Cabinet Members expressed their clear support for the three-tier system. Members wished to see better locality working regardless of any outcome arising from the devolution debate.
- 2.2. PTCs vary considerably in size, capacity and capability and represent populations varying from less than 250, up to over 41,000². PTCs work

¹ Comprising 224 Parish Councils, 16 Town Councils and 23 Parish Meetings

² Andover Town Council represents a population of around 41,400

closely within their communities providing crucial networks, local knowledge, community resources and resilience. These councils already provide and maintain a variety of local services including: commons and open spaces; community transport schemes; burial grounds; leisure and sports facilities; rights of way; public toilets; allotments; bus shelters; play areas and play equipment; and recreation grounds.

- 2.3. The County Council has supported PTCs over many years through an annual grant to HALC; currently £63,000 for the year 2017/18, to support its running costs. Members may wish to consider negotiating a longer term 3 year relationship with HALC to provide them with the confidence to continue to support Hampshire County Council in its devolution and localism objectives. This core funding is complemented by a series of wider project and activity specific grant opportunities, linked to the delivery of County Council services or priorities, and which are made available to local communities and organisations across the county.
- 2.4. It is recognised that many PTCs also have close relationships with Borough and District authorities when it comes to locality working. While the proposals set out in this report are focused upon Hampshire County Council services, and our close working relationship with PTCs, the role of districts and boroughs is acknowledged. PTCs have relationships with both tiers of local government and where feasible, and providing demonstrable public value, joined up approaches across all three tiers of activity can be considered.

3. Serving Hampshire Consultation

- 3.1. Last Autumn's Serving Hampshire Consultation, while separate to the engagement with PTCs, did have a specific question relating to residents' views on the future role of PTCs. From the representative telephone survey undertaken by IPSOS Mori, three in four residents (74%) thought PTCs should play a greater role in delivering public services in future.
- 3.2. The following is an extract from the full IPSOS Mori report and relates to views on local services:

“The deliberative workshops showed the importance of retaining a sense of the ‘local’ if future services are to be ‘scaled-up’ and provided at a wider unitary council level. For workshop participants, it was essential that local accountability and the ability to understand local needs across such a diverse county are not lost – town and parish councils could be seen to have a part to play here.”
- 3.3. More detailed feedback from the Serving Hampshire Consultation was reported to Cabinet on 14 November as part of the report 'Further Update on Local Government Review'.³

³ Serving Hampshire Consultation link www.hants.gov.uk/servinghampshire

4. Engagement with Parish and Town Councils

- 4.1. Separately to the *Serving Hampshire* consultation – but linked to its focus upon the importance of delivering more services at a very local level – all parish and town councils in Hampshire were invited to attend a series of workshops during September 2016. These took place in Alton, Winchester, Ringwood, Chandler’s Ford and Andover. The sessions were chaired by the Leader or a Senior Cabinet Member, and the Chief Executives of both the County Council and HALC contributed to the sessions. Senior County Council Officers provided presentations that focused on ‘locality working’ and ‘deeper devolution’ and feedback was secured by a series of facilitated table top discussions. The purpose of the workshops was to explore how the County Council and parish and town councils can best work together in the future to give parish and town councils a greater voice.
- 4.2. The workshops were attended by over 230 delegates, representing 121 PTCs. The delegates’ views on ‘locality working’ and the potential for ‘deeper devolution’ (i.e. devolving services to parish level) were sought.
- 4.3. The broad themes emerging from the discussions with parish and town councils were as follows:
 - a) no over-riding preference for any particular model of local government;
 - b) no ‘one size fits all’ in any approach to towns and parishes – many attendees emphasised the difference in scale and resources of PTCs;
 - c) willingness to take on greater responsibilities, particularly among town and large parish councils, balanced by caution over capacity, resources and funding among smaller parishes;
 - d) some concern about the size of a potential Hampshire unitary authority, but equally, recognition of the benefits of a less complex relationship with local government and services being delivered at a lower level;
 - e) potential for smaller parishes to increasingly work together as ‘clusters’, as many currently do with the Parish Lengthsman scheme;
 - f) PTCs were generally well disposed towards the County Council and valued the relationship.
- 4.4. It is noted that the Council has continued its work to enhance our quality of place, by way of an example the following have been progressed in the intervening period since the workshops in September 2016;
 - a) extension of the Parish Lengthsman Scheme to include duties on the Rights of Way network (e.g. managing vegetation, installing waymarks and fingerposts), supported by Rural Delivery funding. All PTCs signed up to the scheme (140 for 2017/18) are therefore expected to perform duties on both Highways and Rights of Way according to parish priorities.
 - b) introduction of three area based Countryside Access Community Engagement Rangers, to strengthen how we respond to local needs and work with others to manage the access network. As part of this, Rural

Delivery funding was used to arrange a series of six workshops across the county, attended by representatives of over 70 PTCs.

- c) introduction of a consolidated grants programme, combining four existing Hampshire County Council grant schemes currently available to rural communities. PTCs will be among the potential applicants to benefit from the 'Rural Communities Fund' which will fund projects supporting three specific themes (rural retailers and community enterprises, community-led flood alleviation, countryside access), as well as general projects or initiatives supporting the scheme priorities, 'to build community resilience and encourage self-help'.
- d) targeted discussions were held with two PTCs to establish the community value of their local countryside sites and the level of interest in assisting with their management. Whilst the handover of sites to the PTCs was not found to be an option, other opportunities were identified, including working with PTCs to establish volunteer groups.

4.5. In April 2017, Hampshire County Council hosted a follow up Round Table discussion between senior County Councillors and HALC elected representatives. The purpose of this meeting was to review current initiatives and open up discussion on any further future opportunities to respond jointly and locally to the financial and service delivery challenges faced by all authorities. The key messages emerging were:

- a) strong affirmation that one size does not fit all when it comes to PTCs
- b) endorsement of current HCC schemes & initiatives such as the Parish lengthsmen and village agents
- c) broad collective agreement on developing a tiered approach linking greater opportunities for local delivery with demonstrable capacity and capability within PTCs, alongside potential support from HCC to develop that capacity.
- d) an opportunity to work with HALC to promote training, accreditation, and the power of competency in support of PTCs including the potential clustering of professional clerk resources
- e) recognition of the need to collectively improve communication and engagement through new and improved IT channels
- f) recognition of the challenge for PTCs to raise more locally generated resources to match locally articulated priorities and aspirations in the most cost effective and democratic manner.

5. Improved Locality Working - Next Steps

5.1. There is a clear opportunity for the County Council to build on the many examples of good practice and positive working relationships that exist with PTCs. This could focus upon testing a new approach that would develop the

Council's relationship with them and their levels of influence related to locally important priorities.

- 5.2. Acknowledging the diversity of Hampshire's PTC and that one size does not fit all, it is proposed to develop and, where feasible, test a tiered approach to enable PTCs who wish to, to increase their involvement in local service delivery either individually or within clusters. It is recognised that PTCs provide a strong foundation of representation to their local communities and it is proposed to develop a framework to allow those PTCs who wish to, to develop enhanced or advanced local offers.
- 5.3. Working with HALC, a tiered approach could support PTCs to increase their capability. Training support could be targeted to those PTCs wishing to build their capacity, demonstrate enhanced competence, and deliver a strong local offer. Appropriate grant and technical support could be targeted at those PTCs able to demonstrate enhanced capability to help them in assuming direct delivery of locally important services. These may be delivered through their own powers, delegation, or in some cases commissioning, depending upon the activity involved.
- 5.4. It is anticipated that the majority of PTC may wish to maintain their current position. However, working with those who may wish to do more, it may be possible to work with HALC to develop and test a tiered approach in developing a sliding scale of increased local involvement in service delivery. This would be linked to demonstrable commitment and capability and would be balanced by appropriate albeit tapering support from HCC in the form of professional resources, equipment, and possible pump-priming funding. Such support and the outcomes generated would require relatively simple governance which would remain proportionate to the scale of undertaking involved.
- 5.5. HALC have indicated an active willingness to support such an approach and the next step would be to scope this out prior to assessing the type and amount of potential resources that may be available and needed to support it. Member endorsement is sought to develop that work with HALC prior to a further report later in 2017.

6. Supporting PTCs that wish to do more

- 6.1. It is recognised that developing the capacity and capability of PTCs who choose to do more may require a combination of time, training support, equipment and potentially short-term investment in resources and infrastructure. In response to this it is proposed to utilise existing grant programmes and projects to support such change. This will be aimed at pump-priming and match funding initiatives rather than solely funding current service delivery.
- 6.2. Working with HALC it is proposed to prioritise support for match funded or pump-priming grants to help those PTCs willing to participate in, or contribute to, more effective locality working.
- 6.3. Any support given will be geared to the capacity and capability of the participating PTCs with a gearing towards training and capacity building for

those developing their roles, while project and service delivery support may feature more strongly for more established organisations.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 7.1. Endorse the approach to 'Working Better Together' and support the proposed direction of travel to develop a closer working relationship with parish and town councils.
- 7.2. Support Parish and Town Councils to strengthen locality working and to take on greater roles and responsibility, where they choose to do so, through the use of existing grant programmes and the partnership approach with HALC.
- 7.3. Approve the development of a joint initiative with HALC to develop a locality focused approach and receive more detailed proposals for implementation through a further report to the Executive Member for Policy and Resources later in 2017.
- 7.4. Support a 3 year grant negotiation with HALC to enable them to provide full and ongoing support for the devolution and locality working agenda in partnership with Hampshire County Council.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	Yes
Maximising well-being:	Yes
Enhancing our quality of place:	Yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Further update on Local Government Review	7925	14 November 2016
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;

Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;

Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;

Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;

Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

The initiative is expected to have a positive impact for all Hampshire residents; in addition to this the following groups with protected characteristics are expected to be impacted:

- Age & Disability low positive impact expected as the initiative would be expected to increase local accessibility of services.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

N/A

3. Climate Change:

How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

N/A

How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

N/A