

REPORT TO SSP PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT GROUP

PAPER G

SUBJECT: Future of the Suffolk Speaks Partnership

Date of SSP Performance Management Group meeting for discussion: 21 November 2008

Approximate time to allow for discussion: 10 minutes

KEY ISSUES:

The Suffolk Speaks partnership was established in 1999 to encourage a joined up approach to consultation across Suffolk. The current contract with the partnership's preferred supplier is due to conclude in June 2009. Local Government Reorganisation is also likely to impact on its future direction. This impending natural 'cross-roads' of the Suffolk Speaks partnership provides an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the Suffolk Strategic Partnership and consider the potential benefits this might bring now and in the future.

WHAT ARE THE PMG BEING REQUESTED TO DO? e.g. make a decision, recommend, consider options etc.

- 1) That the Suffolk Speaks Partnership is formally recognised as part of the new SSP/LAA governance arrangements.
- 2) That the current Suffolk Speaks members continue to manage its statutory/required work and pool funds to cover this as previously (In effect a commitment for 2009 only awaiting LGR outcome).
- 3) That the SSP draw on the expertise of the Suffolk Speaks Partnership and commissions (funds) work accordingly to achieve SCS/LAA outcomes, particularly in 2009 when the Place Survey will not take place and consider how it might support this financially.
- 4) That the Suffolk Speaks partnership starts to effectively pool its knowledge base in a more consistent and accessible way.

ARE THERE RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS TO THE PMG?

None.

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Background

The Suffolk Speaks partnership was established in 1999. Led by Suffolk County Council, its original remit was to encourage a joined up approach to consultation across Suffolk. For some years, a citizen's panel approach was the methodology for consultation, with MORI being the preferred supplier.

In 2006, Opinion Research Services (ORS) took over the contract, using a range of techniques to consult with communities across Suffolk. In recent years the primary focus of the partnership has been to undertake the required annual budget surveys to inform organisations budget planning processes and from 2008, also the bi-annual Place Survey.

Membership

Membership of the Suffolk Speaks Partnerships includes six of the seven district/borough councils, Suffolk County Council and the Police Authority. The Suffolk Primary Care Trust (PCT) has also recently expressed an interest in joining the partnership.

Each of the 6 district/borough councils and the Police Authority makes an equal financial contribution totalling 70% of the overall cost of the consultation activity. Suffolk County council provides the remaining 30%. The pooling of resources has allowed economies of scale to be realised that would not be available to individual organisations.

Activity

Over the last three years the group has undertaken a number of consultation projects. These include:

- Equalities Focus groups (2008) - exploring the effects of rural isolation in the county and differences due to gender.
- Hard to Reach Focus Groups (2007) - speaking to young adults, single parents and migrant worker groups.
- Various approaches to statutory Budget Consultation (2006–2008) - telephone surveys, written questionnaires, and focus groups.
- Current statutory Place Survey (2008) – bi-annual survey which provides data for the National Indicator Set and two Suffolk LAA2 targets.

Future Arrangements

The current contract with ORS (the partnership's preferred supplier) is due to conclude in June 2009. ORS has recently completed this years' budget consultation and is currently undertaking the Place Survey which is likely to be the last piece of work conducted under the existing contract. This year's budget planning consultation work cost the partnership £55,000. For 2009, it is likely that the partnership will purchase 'one-off' services from a provider to undertake this work (As the next place survey isn't until 2010) and once the outcome of LGR is known, pursue a longer term contract post 2010.

In view of this natural end point in the current contract the partnership needs to consider its future direction, including:

- a) Interim arrangements to undertake required budget consultations for 2009 (assuming LGR is in place by 2010). Is there a financial commitment from local authorities and the Police Authority¹ to undertake this activity collectively or individually?
- b) Appetite to undertake one off, non-statutory consultations to inform effective service delivery and improvements-being pro-active in consulting with specific communities of interest, specific places and on specific topics (as the partnership has in the past).
- c) How the partnership can be more inclusive to a wider range of partner organisations-particularly the voluntary and community sector and meet the new Duty to Involve from 2009.
- d) How we can make optimum use of consultation results and consultation 'experts' on this partnership, make them accessible to partners and use data to inform organisational activity and improvements in service delivery.

Suffolk Strategic Partnership Relationship

The Suffolk Speaks Partnership was originally set up as a 'consultation arm' of the Suffolk Strategic Partnership, using its logo as branding and infrequently reporting consultation findings where appropriate. In 2005 the group revised its membership (to what it is now) and reporting relationships have been directed more at local LSP level.

One of the many reasons why the Suffolk Strategic Partnership/Local Area Agreement recently reviewed its governance arrangements was to create a more coherent approach to partnership working in the county, bringing effective partnerships that often sat outside of the SSP umbrella within it.

The impending natural 'cross-roads' of the Suffolk Speaks partnership provides an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the SSP and consider the potential benefits this might bring:

- a) Provide a single, countywide consultation resource for the SSP to support the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement outcomes. The Suffolk Speaks partnership would provide expert consultation advice to the SSP and commission work on its behalf (particularly in 2009, a non Place Survey year) but funding would need to be sourced.
- b) Provide strong strategic direction for the partnership and encourage the participation of a wider range of partner organisations which would benefit from this collective approach-including data sharing.

Recommendations

1. That the Suffolk Speaks Partnership is formally recognised as part of the new SSP/LAA governance arrangements.

¹ Police Authority will need to agree this through their own internal mechanism

2. That the current Suffolk Speaks members continue to manage its statutory/required work and pool funds to cover this as previously (In effect a commitment for 2009 only awaiting LGR outcome).
3. That the SSP draw on the expertise of the Suffolk Speaks Partnership and commissions (funds) work accordingly to achieve SCS/LAA outcomes, particularly in 2009 when the Place Survey will not take place.
4. That the Suffolk Speaks partnership starts to effectively pool its knowledge base in a more consistent and accessible way.