

**LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL – 28<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2010**

Agenda Item 9(i)

**LEADER: Cllr Graham Butland****LEADER PORTFOLIO: Overall Vision and Strategic Direction**

Portfolio covers:-

- Strategic Partnerships – National, Regional, County and District
- External Relationships (including PR and reputation)
- Local Strategic Partnership
- Corporate Governance

**REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 10<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2010 AND ENDING 16<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2010****1. Local Strategic Partnership**

The LSP Executive met on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> June. The following items were the main items considered by the Executive.

**Young People 'Not in Education, Employment or Training'**

Russell Everard, Braintree District Council, presented the briefing paper on the progress made by the LSP's Economic Development and Transportation Partnership (ED&TP) to addressing the current levels of young people 'Not in Education, Training or Employment' (NEET) and educational achievement in the District's schools.

The ED&TP had established a sub group in April 2010 which has been tasked with identifying the scale of the current problem and short and medium term actions which could help reduce the NEETs level. A key issue identified was the range of courses, vocational apprenticeships and foundation learning available to young people, which could cause confusion without a clear path, support and signposting for young people. The group were looking at a number of options to address this, including a list or table of options for young people after leaving school which could be widely promoted.

Mike Murray, Ramsey College, informed members that the group were considering the barriers that exist to data sharing between organisations supporting young people. The schools were looking at how young people who do not engage well within their school careers, could be identified and supported earlier to help them from becoming NEET when they left school. Young people are being asked to agree to data sharing between the key support organisations, to enable the schools to be updated on NEET young people in the Autumn after they have left school with contact then being made and support offered.

It was felt that education grades were improving and would continue to do so

with the new academies, improved College and with better communication between the schools and support organisations.

Discussion followed on the new College at Braintree, vocational courses and apprenticeships and the Essex County Council NEET project in Tendring. This project is being rolled out and will be delivered in the Braintree District along with three other high NEET districts. It was clarified that the educational achievement figures referred to the District's schools and not to the young people resident in the District.

#### Performance Reward Grant (PRG) Under Spends

Jo Petchey presented the briefing paper on the potential Performance Reward Grant (PRG) under spend for the Preventing Homelessness project and the Community Transport element of the Village Agents project. Two options were proposed for the use of the under spend:

- Option 1 – to retain the under spend for the use of the existing projects.
- Option 2 – to reallocate the under spend to one or more of the four other PRG projects.

Members considered the two options and discussion followed on the possibility of the continuation of the Village Agents project past the end of the PRG funding period of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. It was noted that the project was being reviewed and that the decision on continuation would be known by the Autumn.

Richard Puleston informed members that unspent PRG funds would remain and be used within the County, but that he doubted that the Essex Partnership would recall PRG under spends from District LSP's.

Members agreed to consider option 2 for the reallocation of both the projects PRG under spend through a bidding process by the other four PRG projects. These projects would be invited to submit bids explaining how they would use additional PRG funding and the extra value and outcomes this would achieve. The projects would then have three weeks to submit their bids which would then be circulated to the Executive Group members for comment, with a decision taken on the reallocation by mid-July.

## **2. East of England LGA (EELGA)**

The Management Committee of EELGA met on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> June. The Chairman, Robert Gordon Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, has provided the following summary of the committee's deliberations.

"We reviewed the plan to strengthen EELGA's work (but not increase its cost!) through creating networks of portfolio-holders. Some of these already exist (eg: Regional Transport Forum, Regional Waste Forum and networks of Adult Care and Children's Care folk) but they are not all tied into EELGA (or, previously, EERA). The Assembly on 2 July will be asked to agree a pattern of Networks which will cover all our work. The intention is that the Networks will not generally meet in person, but virtually, by e-mail, etc. There will be no obligation to take part but, hopefully, colleagues will find the network of help in their work. The Networks will then feed their view into the Assembly or to the national LGA and others, to improve our ability to lobby on behalf of our councils.

We reflected on the future options for economic development. While we do not yet have a specific announcement by government, it seems clear that EEDA's days are numbered. They are already facing significant in-year cuts in funding and expect worse. It seems that the government is likely to issue a paper before the Summer setting out their decisions and the expectations around the new Local Enterprise Partnerships. Once we have that clarity, we will know what functions (and funding for them) will fall to local government and, from that, will be able to take a view on geographical scale for LEPs. The fact that we dislike EEDA, as a quango, does not automatically mean that we should dismiss the work it has been doing and the funding streams and programmes it has administered. My fear is that the East of England (and South East) will be very badly hit by the inevitable cuts and it is important that we should have the means of making our case against that of other regions and the proposed city regions.

Arising from discussion at Management Committee, I have suggested to EEDA that local government should promote a Transition Board to oversee the transition from EEDA to LEPs and to be able to lobby for our economy in the meantime. This would include representatives of EELGA, business and EEDA. We have to give further consideration to the governance and supporting arrangements but, if the EEDA board endorses this idea when it meets on 23 June, it would be a strong signal that they accept the baton is passing to local government.

As to EELGA's own finances and staff, you will recall that all the staff inherited from EERA have now been put on notice of redundancy. Following lobbying, government has agreed to extend the Leaders' Board grant for 'up to' a further three months to allow the reduction in staff in an orderly way. The proposed new structure and staffing implications will come to the Assembly on 2 July which will allow us to set the direction for our future work. Management Committee remains conscious that councils expect that subscriptions can be cut in future years - over and above the 25% cut we agreed this year.

Inter-regional Forum. For some years, representatives of the East of England, London and the South-East have met together to discuss issues of common concern. I gather these processes have not been very constructive as London has wanted its own way. Nevertheless, when we met on Friday, it was agreed to continue the arrangements but with a sharper focus. As the only three regions who are net contributors to UK plc, we clearly have some clout if we can get our act together.

I am pleased to say that Bob Neill, Parliamentary Under Secretary at CLG has agreed to attend the Assembly meeting on 2 July, in Hertford, from 10.30am to 11am.

Things are moving fairly quickly at the moment and I shall keep you posted."

#### European & International Forum

Robert Gordon has asked me to lead the EELGA members on this forum and I will co-chair it with Marco Cereste of EEDA.

### **3. Secretary of State's Call for Local Transparency**

The Secretary of State for CLG has written to all Council Leaders calling on them to make arrangements for greater transparency by local authorities. I believe that Braintree District Council is already amongst the most open of

local authorities but I have asked all portfolio holders to consider where even more transparency can be introduced.

Other correspondence recently received from the Department of Communities and Local Government include:

**Reducing the burdens** – indicating the abolition of CAA and the Standards Board regime – as well as seeking views on any other burdens on local government.

**Reduction in grants to local government** – this has only just been received and the first indications are the loss of the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and Local Authorities Business Growth Incentive.

#### **Abolition of Regional Strategies**

**Public expenditure and review of spending approvals** – informing local authorities that any spending commitments prior to the emergency budget need to be carefully considered.

**The coalition:** Our Programme of Government

#### **4. Town Centres Redevelopment**

**Braintree:** The brief for the potential developers has been amended to reflect the Council's accommodation strategy. The current timetable until the award of the contract is set out below:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Actual or Planned Date</b>
Invitation to submit detailed solutions issued	June 2010
Meetings with Council officers	30 <sup>th</sup> June and 1 <sup>st</sup> July
Date for return of detailed solutions	13 <sup>th</sup> August 2010
Close of competitive dialogue and final tenders sought	August 2010
Public consultation	September 2010
Preferred bidder selected	October 2010
Contract award	November 2010

\* dates for later stages may be subject to amendment.

**Halstead:** We are close to exchanging contracts with a selected purchaser for the land east of the High Street.

**Witham:** We are still attempting to secure a town centre site in Witham and are in discussion with potential development partners. The specific town centre site has not yet been put on the market.

**FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:**

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