

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 5TH NOVEMBER 2008

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT 2007

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to ask the Commission to consider how it wishes to respond to the request from the Council to establish a Scrutiny Panel to develop a detailed proposal for consideration by the Cabinet on how best the County can be involved in achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Communities Act.

Background

2. The County Council at its meeting on 24th September resolved as follows:-
 - "(a) *That this Council:*
 - (i) *welcomes the Sustainable Communities Act and the establishment of the principle that 'local people know best what needs to be done';*
 - (ii) *notes the cross party support for the measure in the House of Commons;*
 - (iii) *views the Act as an opportunity to further the empowerment of local communities in seeking local reforms regarding economic, social and environmental issues;*
 - (iv) *appreciates the need to be fully committed to the Act to ensure that the residents of Leicestershire have a chance to have their say on local services;*
 - (b) *That this Council therefore:*
 - (i) *requests the Cabinet to agree to 'opt in' to the Act;*
 - (ii) *requests the Scrutiny Commission to establish a 5 member Scrutiny Panel to develop a detailed proposal for consideration by the Cabinet on how best the County can be involved in achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Communities Act;*

- (iii) *requests any such Panel to develop proposals for a clear relationship with district councils to ensure that local people are given direct representation in the ideas taken forward to the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Secretary of State;*
- (iv) *requests the Government to release the local spending plans as soon as possible."*

Sustainable Communities Act 2007

3. The Sustainable Communities Act became law in October 2007. It provides a statutory framework for councils and community organisations to put forward proposals for decentralisation and reconfiguration of public services, and changes to the pattern of public spending, which would contribute to sustainability. The main provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act are:
 - The Secretary of State must make arrangements to publish local spending reports, statements showing the scope of public spending by all bodies exercising public functions in the area.
 - Local proposals from councils can be put forward to the Secretary of State, which will improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area, including the participation in civic and political activity.
 - This can include proposals to transfer functions from one organisation to another.
 - Councils should develop proposals through wider community consultation, using some kind of panel of local people.
 - In developing proposals, councils should have regard to a range of sustainability issues such as local production of goods, local food, transport, energy use, and other.
 - The local proposals should be considered and short-listed by a 'selector' representing the interests of local government, before being put to the Secretary of State for a response.
 - The Secretary of State should publish an action plan in response to this, and should report annually to parliament on progress made as a result of this Act.
4. The procedure for making proposals by Councils and for consideration of these proposals is dependant upon regulations which have yet to be made.

Local Government Information Unit – Seminar

5. The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) is arranging a seminar for authorities the aims of which are:-
 - To provide insight about the ambitions of the Act to deliver local sustainability;
 - To understand the requirements of the Act and how this fits with initiatives from other Government papers;
 - To share ideas for getting broad community involvement.
6. The seminar is to be held on 2nd December and it is suggested that each Group should nominate one member (who would subsequently serve on the Panel) to attend the seminar. The members attending the seminar would then be asked to meet with officers to scope the remit of the Panel and develop a project plan to respond to the request of the Council.

Resource Implications

7. The cost of sending three members to the LGIU seminar is £450 plus travelling expenses which will be met from the Members Allowances Budget.

Recommendations

8. The Commission is asked to agree that each Group should nominate a member to attend the LGIU Seminar and that the members attending be asked to determine the remit and project plan for the review.

Background Papers

9. DCLG Guide to the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 – issued February 2008

Circulation under the Sensitive Issues Procedure

10. None

Impact Assessments

11. The provisions of the Act may offer the opportunity to address a range of issues including equalities, crime and disorder and the environment.

Officer to contact

Mr M. I. Seedat
Tel 0116 305 6037
mseedat@leics.gov.uk