

## Agenda Item 7

**Communities Committee**

**24 June 2009**

**SCA09**



## Sustainable Communities Act

### Summary

The Sustainable Communities Act seeks to promote the sustainability of local communities by inviting councils and communities to put forward proposals which will contribute to the sustainability and wellbeing of local areas.

The Council has sought to generate proposals through community engagement with a deadline for community groups to submit proposals by 22 June. The proposals put forward are to be prioritised by our residents' panel in early July.

Under the new committee arrangements, the prioritised proposals would normally be considered by this Committee. However, because the timetable for the generation and prioritisation of proposals was established some time ago and does not tie in with the date of this meeting, it is not possible for this to happen this year.

The prioritised proposals will, therefore, be considered by the Executive Board on 15 July with a recommendation for approval by the Council on 29 July. This will allow the proposals to be submitted to the Local Government Association by the national deadline of 31 July.

Members of the Committee are welcome to attend the Executive Board meeting on 15 July 2009 to participate in discussion of the prioritised proposals.

### Recommendation

**That the Committee notes that proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act this year will be considered by the Executive Board on 15 July.**

#### a) Reasons for Recommendation

On 15 April 2009 the Council agreed that proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act should be submitted to the Local Government Association by 31 July 2009. Through community engagement, proposals have been generated and are to be prioritised early next month. Under the new committee arrangements, the prioritised proposals would normally be considered by this Committee. However, because the timetable for the generation and prioritisation of proposals was established some time ago and does not tie in with the date of this meeting, it is not possible for this to happen this year.

#### b) Alternative Options

Councils do not have a legal duty to take part in the Act, but members chose to get involved because it was an opportunity for the Council and local communities to drive the action and assistance that central government can provide in promoting thriving, sustainable communities.

**c) Risk Considerations**

None.

**d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations**

**Positive Impact Overall**

Affordable Homes.

Thriving Economy.

Safe Environment.

Clean Environment.

Green Environment.

Recycling.

Young People.

Excellent Customer Service.

Inspirational Council.

Meeting our crime and disorder duties.

Meeting our Diversity and Equality duties.

**e) Date for Review of Decision**

An invitation to submit proposals under the Act is expected to be issued on an annual basis. In future, the proposals developed within the District will be considered by this Committee.

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**1 Main Body of the Report**

**1. What is the Sustainable Communities Act?**

The Sustainable Communities Act received Royal Assent on 23 October 2007. The aim of the Act is to promote the sustainability of local communities.

The Bill was supported through Parliament and all of the main English political parties. It is the result of a five year campaign led by a coalition of organisations under the banner 'Local Works'. 'Local Works' name 90 national supporting organisations reflecting a very wide constituency.

The Sustainable Communities Act aims to promote the sustainability of local communities. It begins from the principle that local people know best what needs to be done to promote the sustainability of their area, but that sometimes they need central government to act to enable them to do so. The Act is intended to divert power and funding from central government to councils and local people to help them manage community issues at a local level and change things for the better.

The scope of the Act is very broad, covering economic, social and environmental issues. It does not limit the type of action that could be put forward, provided the action is within that broad scope. It is for local people to decide what they think needs to be done to promote the sustainability of their area. The Act required us to ask residents and groups in East Devon for proposals about what government could change to make communities more sustainable in East Devon, and put these proposals to local people for them to prioritise.

Councils do not have a legal duty to take part in the act, but members chose to get involved.

**2. How we sought proposals**

Anyone could suggest ideas and proposals. However, government expected most proposals to come from community or voluntary groups, local branches of national organisations, parish and town councils, neighbourhood forums, residents and tenants associations.

In May we sent out information (letters, leaflets and proposals forms) inviting proposals for the Sustainable Communities Act. The information was sent out to Town and Parish Councils, many voluntary and community

groups, East Devon Local Strategic Partnership members, the local media, Elected Members and staff. The information was also put onto the Council's website alongside an on-line proposal submission form.

When the proposals were submitted officers considered whether they were valid proposals. According to government all proposals had to meet three criteria:

- They must improve the 'sustainability' of the local community. 'Sustainability' is defined in very broad terms, and can cover anything to improve the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area, or promote participation in civic or political activity. The act aims to encourage a broad range of ideas and not dictate the scope of proposals.
- Proposals must require action from central government, such as a change in legislation, a transfer of responsibilities from one public body to another, a new national policy or a change or strengthening of an existing policy.
- Proposals must be based within, or of specific relevance to, local communities.

### **3. How the proposals will be prioritised**

The Sustainable Communities Act guidance states that a panel of local people is required to consider the merits of proposals and decide upon priorities between different proposals.

The valid proposals will, therefore, be presented to the Speak Now! residents panel at a special event in Honiton at the beginning of July. Speak Now! is a group of about 200 residents from all round the District, and any resident can join at any time. The panel members will be asked to vote for the proposals which they feel would most improve communities within East Devon and increase their sustainability.

The proposals that they prioritise will be presented to the Executive Board on 15 July with a recommendation for approval by the Council on 29 July so that they are submitted to the Local Government Association (LGA) by the national deadline of 31 July.

Members of the Committee are invited to attend the Executive Board meeting on 15 July to examine the prioritised proposals under consideration.

### **4. What happens next?**

The final proposals from the Council will be sent to the LGA by 31 July 2009 for them to make the decisions on which proposals will go forward to the next stage.

The proposals from the LGA will be sent to the Secretary of State for final decisions to be made. The Act requires him to co-operate with the LGA 'and try to reach agreement' on proposals. The Secretary of State also has to publish reasons for decisions, to publish an action plan on how proposals will be implemented, and report to Parliament each year on progress being made under the Act.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal observations.

### **Financial Implications**

### **Background Papers**

The Government has published guidance on the Act, for more information visit:



<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/sustainablecommunitiesact>

The Local Government Association has published guidance at:

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelId=1293641>

Local Works is a coalition of over 90 national organisations and is campaigning to promote the use of the Sustainable Communities Act. Their website is: [www.localworks.org](http://www.localworks.org)

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Jamie Buckley Ext 2769  
Engagement and Funding Officer

Communities Committee  
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