

Present: Chris Lau (chair); Keith Smith; Chris Hunt; Matthew Pearce

Meeting decisions:

1	<p>The vision:</p> <p>Well run, sustainable and accountable geographical communities and communities of interest where all people are supported, empowered and well connected to influence and shape the place where they live, work and play.</p>
2	<p>Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information • Promote and disseminate methods of connecting with others • Strong, informed and effective partnerships that lead by example • Improving levels of engagement to reach as wider audience as possible
3	<p>Delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear strategies and plans which show linkage and connection • Defining the role of elected councillors as champions of their communities • Community interest to be paramount • Devolved budgets to the local communities • Promote Social Capital

Discussion notes:

<p>Following introductions it was agreed the Terms of Reference would be the agenda</p>
<p>Clarification was sought on the purpose of the LAA, the SSP strategy and if other documents and policies such as the 50 Promises produced by the Borough Council, evidenced linkage and joined-up thinking. It was agreed that in the main they did, although since the LAA had been agreed much work was continuing within the Council and partners to align forward plans and strategies.</p>
<p>Concern that the 50 Promises did not reflect any ambitions for Swindon as a community, and that as the local media were overly keen to report on the promises, the concept of community was being missed out.</p>
<p>It is a sad reflection that 15 years ago, Swindon was seen as a leading Council in the country for community empowerment and engagement, today we are failing in this area. It's a challenge for us to improve this in the future.</p>
<p>Community had not been a statutory responsibility of local government in the past, unlike Education or Social Services - although the new local government white paper promises to change this.</p>
<p>Discussion followed on the history of the promises and that they were visionary statements proposed by the political administration of the Council. They were delivered as a check list for the electorate to monitor the recovery of the Council.</p>

<p>It was also agreed that plans for the local police, primary care trust, learning skills council and other agencies supporting the voluntary and community sectors should also show evidence of a united vision for Swindon both now and into the future.</p>
<p>Concept behind the phrase well-run is the whole community should work effectively through supporting, advising and delivering services. Similar to the effective running of a piece of machinery because it is well oiled. It is not about focusing on specific service provision.</p>
<p>So is Swindon running effectively, and who should be running it? Is it the community that drives the machine or the strategies? We are effective at putting forward strategies, business programmes and initiatives. But then who and how do individuals and groups access this information?</p>
<p>We can expect groups to be well run, but we cannot demand it of them. To ensure groups are well run, efficient auditing and monitoring processes must be in place.</p>
<p>Voluntary, and indeed all sectors are unable to work well if they are on their own and left to their own devices. It is imperative that support mechanisms are in place.</p>
<p>Reviewing notes from the late 2006 SSP conference, there are missing words such as support, empowerment and accountability. In the past services that have failed to achieve their aims have used the lack of support provision from the Borough Council as the reason for blame. There is little accountability for some sector agencies or departments to support themselves or to enable them to stand on their own two feet. Is this not also about voluntary organisations being accountable for the grants they receive from the Borough?</p>
<p>Local communities need to be empowered to bring about change for their local public. An example of the Highworth Community Partnership pulling a strategy together for the town which will be widely consulted on and presented to the Town Council and three Borough Councillors for the area. A group of willing and enthusiastic individuals have been pulled together to write the plan with an identified nine key areas for delivery</p>
<p>There is a desire to see elected borough councillors taking up their community role and being champions for their own localities. Good practice would point to empowered councillors in partnership with their communities to manage devolved budgets to invest in the provision of services for their area.</p>
<p>As we plan for Swindon to be a well-run place, we need to take into account that some communities are estranged from the decision making process for a variety of reasons such as lack of confidence to raise their voices, or English not being their first language, or feeling isolated ... We need to find ways of aiding these individuals and communities of interest including new migrant populations to integrate into the mainstream community. Otherwise we will have communities within communities setting themselves up.</p>
<p>It is key to distinguish between a community of interest and geographical community enabling all groups to have a voice to bring about change. Where there is no current structure or process through which communities can engage this will be addressed</p>