

**Note of Wealden Local Strategic Partnership meeting 13th May 2009,
Uckfield Civic Centre.**

Present:

Ian Chisnall – Chair, Churches Together in Sussex
Richard Allum - Sussex Police
David Chaffey – Downland HA
Adam Chugg - Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services
Nigel Cusack - East Sussex Fire and Rescue
Cllr Pam Doodes – Leader, WDC
Tracey Evans - Downland HA
Kathy Fordham – NFU Representative
Cllr Linda Francis – Willingdon & Jevington Parish Councillor
Cllr Roy Galley – WDC Councillor
Teresa Gittins – Action in Rural Sussex, Director of Policy
Jeff Hart – Freedom Leisure, Managing Director
Joanna Hodgson – Environment Agency
Alison Horan - East Sussex County Council
Cllr William King - Maresfield Parish Council
Charles Lant – WDC, Chief Executive
Miriam Miklaszewska - SpeakUp Countywide Forum
Sue Shoemith - South Downs CVS
Richard Watson - PCT
Cllr Chantal Wilson – WDC Councillor

In Attendance

Gill Cameron-Waller – WDC, Policy and Partnership Manager
Alex White – WDC, Policy Officer
Duncan Morrison - WDC, Senior Planning Officer
Marina Brigginsshaw - WDC, Senior Planning Officer

Apologies:

Julia Pope - Sussex Police
Lisa Compton – PCT
Mark Rist - East Sussex Fire and Rescue
Peter Minshull - Highways Agency
Marie Tomblin – Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services
Cllr Di Phillips - WDC Councillor
Martin Small – South Downs Joint Committee
Ken Stevens – Federation of Small Businesses
Cllr David White – WDC Councillor
Debbie Matthews - South Downs CVS

1. Welcome and Introductions

David Chaffey explained that as a result of internal reorganisation at Downland his role had changed and he would no longer be the representative on the LSP Board. He introduced Tracey Evans who would be taking over this position. On behalf of the LSP Ian Chisnall thanked David for all his work as a member of the Board.

Kathy Fordham said that she would be taking up a position with Wealden District Council and would no longer be able to be a member of the LSP Board. She will arrange for a replacement NFU representative. Ian thanked Kathy for her work with the Partnership.

Neil Honnor has moved on from his role as Wealden Commander - his replacement is Julia Pope who sent her apologies for being unable to attend this meeting, but was represented by Richard Allum. On behalf of the Board Ian has written to Neil thanking him for his contribution to the work of the LSP.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

Transport - see item 3 below.

Economic situation - see item 4 below.

3. Review of themed meetings

Ian Chisnall said it was clear that the discussion on transport at the last meeting had not worked as well as hoped. The discussion had been constrained by the time spent on other agenda items which had meant members, and those attending from East Sussex County Council, had not been able to fully debate the issues. It is clearly difficult to debate 'big issues' within a two hour Board meeting and perhaps members could prepare a list of questions/topics in advance to help focus discussions at future themed meetings. Ian and Pam will also consider the format for future themed meetings. In the meantime members should let Gill Cameron-Waller or Alex White know of any issues relating to transport that they wish to pursue.

4. Economic situation in Wealden

Charlie Lant updated members on the continuing impact of the recession in Wealden. Data was limited in some areas and is often subject to a time lag; in particular information on house prices appeared counter-intuitive. 'Official' figures relate to 2008 and show house prices in Wealden still rising, while more recent anecdotal evidence shows an annual fall of 5.8%. Overall, data shows that the recession is having a considerable impact in Wealden. The number of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance rose to 1,689 in March 2009, this is 2.1% of the District's working age population.

Pam Doodes emphasised that the Council is continuing to monitor the overall situation and to provide appropriate help where needed. The intention was not to duplicate what others are doing but to signpost people to the right point of help. She explained that the Council is taking steps to ensure that particular pressure points in its housing and benefits services are adequately staffed to meet their increasing workloads and maintain high quality frontline services for customers.

Pam also explained that the Council is trying to brighten up high streets especially where business premises have been left empty. A pilot scheme is underway in Crowborough which has had some success but is facing difficulties with absentee landlords who have little interest in the issue. She asked that if partners have any ideas or suggestions, or know of any contacts who will be able to assist that they let the Council know. Chantal Wilson also asked that partners think creatively about how they might improve the public face of their own buildings - small changes can make a big difference to the appearance of the public realm.

Sue Shoemith said there had been a recent meeting of the Wealden Network. Feedback indicated that members had seen no great impact of the recession as yet though there were early signs - increases in the number of volunteers, older volunteers claiming expenses as their income falls. Adam Chugg added that the meeting had reinforced the messages given by Charlie Lant. Different voluntary organisations are seeing different impacts depending upon the nature of their services: Citizens Advice are seeing the biggest impact as people turn to them for help and advice. EAVS are starting to pull together a database to analyse issues across the county and they will share this with partners in due course.

The Board recognised that there will be an issue over the position of school leavers and university graduates in the autumn if job opportunities remain limited. It will be important to try and provide help and advice and, if possible for partners, to take advantage of any Government funding for apprenticeships - a scheme has been announced but details remain unclear.

5. Wealden District Council Transformation Programme

Pam Doodes set out the steps the Council is taking to tackle a budget deficit from 2010 onwards. She explained that the Council already had an ongoing programme of continuous improvement that has made significant efficiency savings over the last few years. But the impact of the recession, and the likely future pressure on public sector finances meant that further savings were required to prevent a potential budget shortfall of £1.3m in 2010/11. To address this, and to meet its duty to local taxpayers, the Council has set in train a transformation programme that will examine each service the Council provides to see if the service can be delivered differently and more efficiently. The intention is to cut the cost but not the level of services and to transform the culture of the Council. At this stage the information is just to keep

partners informed though any suggestions on how to do things differently would be welcome. It is clear that, given the state of national public finances, radical changes to the nature of local government may well be required. Other public sector organisations will be facing similar pressures - the PCT is already embarking on the same process, Richard Watson suggested that Charlie Lant write to their Chief Executive outlining the Council's approach.

Ian Chisnall suggested that this was an opportunity for partners to find innovative solutions and break down artificial barriers to ways of doing business, most especially with regard to the role of the voluntary sector in service delivery.

6. Identifying deprivation in Wealden

Gill Cameron-Waller pointed out that recent Board discussions, for example on transport issues, and the work completed to develop the Sustainable Community Strategy had highlighted the fact that there is a lack of data to identify areas of deprivation, and consequently need, within Wealden. She suggested the Board consider a project that will establish what data is available, identify the instances of deprivation and highlight where services need to be targeted. She had had early discussion with Airs and a project on these lines seems feasible. She suggested that she work up a detailed proposal and involve partners in the project design. This was agreed; partners suggested that a focus on areas of deprivation can perhaps muddy the issue - a focus on need rather than location would perhaps be fruitful. Richard Watson and David Chaffey offered help from PCT and Downland respectively. William King suggested engagement with primary schools may also be useful as they are often close to this issue.

Action: Gill Cameron-Waller

7. Local Development Framework (LDF)

Duncan Morrison gave a presentation on the recently published South East Plan, updating members on key issues and changes since earlier drafts of the Plan. A copy of the presentation is available from Alex White.

Marina Briggshaw set out the current options that are being considered for the Core Strategy and that will form the basis of the public consultation due to take place later in the summer. It is likely that there will be 6 options relating to housing and 4 relating to employment. The employment options had not been part of the workshop held in February for members of the Board, and some of the housing options had been changed since then as a result of workshop discussions and further consideration by the Council's LDF committee.

Roy Galley explained that the consultation document was being prepared in light of comments made at the LDF committee on 28 April. A firm timetable

for consultation had yet to be finalised but consultation would be later in the summer. It will be at least a six week period of public consultation. The LSPs input would be crucial.

Ian Chisnall suggested that consultation based on 10 options may be difficult to manage and possibly offer too much choice to the public. He also raised concerns that the distribution pattern based on affordable housing had been dropped. Roy explained that affordable housing was integral to each option: the distribution pattern had been based on old housing surveys and the current housing register. As such the LDF committee had felt that distribution option did not reflect an appropriate pattern for the future. On the extent of choice, Roy recognised the tension but stressed that there were real choices to be made on housing distribution patterns and it was important to seek the public's view. Although there are 10 options there are common themes running through a number of them: the consultation document itself and the consultation exercise would be able to highlight such themes to clarify the issues for the general public.

8. Access to Broadband

Gill Cameron-Waller highlighted the importance of broadband access, particularly for rural areas. Rolling out of 'next generation' is likely to be dependent upon profitability for service providers. OpenReach - a key provider - is keen to stimulate demand and a representative is planning to give a presentation at the LSP event on 27 May. The LDF will be important in setting the future policy framework.

9. AOB

Miriam Miklaszewska informed members about the forthcoming 'SpeakUp' event on 15 June. This has been arranged through East Sussex Strategic Partnership with funding from PtP to focus on the voluntary sector and LSPs. Further information is available through Alex White.

Richard Watson confirmed that partners had received the letter from PCTs about swine flu. Pam Doodles also confirmed that the Council had implemented its pandemic plan. Information will continue to be circulated to members as necessary.

Teresa Gittins reminded members about the 'Heart of the Village' campaign. Airs have set up an online petition on the Number 10 website (www.number10.gov.uk). Teresa asked members to sign up to the petition.

6. Next meeting

Ian Chisnall again expressed his gratitude to Kathy Fordham and David Chaffey for their work as part of the Board, and thanked Duncan Morrison and Marina Brigginsshaw for their presentations.

The next meeting of the LSP will be at **2pm on Tuesday 14th July 2009** at **Heathfield Community Centre.**

LSP meetings and special events 2009

Board meetings

Date	Venue	Topic/Focus
14 July, 2pm	Heathfield Community Centre	Rural issues
16 September, 2pm	Herstmonceux Village Hall	To be confirmed
10 November, 2pm	Uckfield Civic Centre	Review of year

Special events

Date	Venue	Topic/Focus
27 May	Deans Place, Alfriston	Housing
29 September	TBC	TBC
24 November	TBC	TBC

East Sussex Strategic Partnership events

Date	Venue	Topic/Focus
15 June	Magnet Centre, St Leonards, Hastings	Voluntary Sector and LSPs
24 June	Battle Memorial Hall, Battle	Climate Change