

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 24th Jan 2017

Lead Member / Officer: Hugh Evans – Leader
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Title: **Community plans in the new Council**

1. What is the report about?

The report describes a new model of community planning for the Council.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The Council currently supports community planning in a number of different ways, including through Denbighshire's Town and Area Plans (TAPs). The situation will be different in the new Council however, with changes in the funding available to communities, changes in the relevant legislation and changes in the aspirations of the Council. The focus here is on TAPs, but the proposed model has wider application.

3. What are the Recommendations?

1. That Town & Area Plans for each MAG area in the Council are no longer required.
2. That the new system of Community planning described in the report is adopted

4. Report details

The Town & Area Plans we have developed in DCC have done a reasonable job of describing what communities are trying to achieve. However, they have not always been able to present a strategic vision for an area, often focusing on small scale schemes. They have also tended to be 'owned' by Member Area Groups rather than the community as a whole. So although the TAPS have produced some positive outcomes, they have not achieved as much as was originally hoped. This was reflected in a report to Cabinet in 2015, which recommended a new approach.

As a result, and following a rigorous prioritisation process lead by the Town Champions group, the TAPS have been used to identify a suite of projects utilising the remainder of the original community capital funding. This funding will have been fully allocated by the end of April 2017. It is worth noting that the many of the most successful project ideas came directly from local communities, rather than the TAP process.

Under current Council policy, there will be no further DCC capital funding for TAP projects after April 2017. It is timely therefore, to review the model of Town and Area planning that we have in Denbighshire and think about what will be needed by the new administration. It is an area where we can prepare the ground for them so that they can focus on the new five year corporate plan.

Clearly, some things have changed since the plans were first developed.

- The original TAPs had a big focus on the economy, but Economic and Business Development are now working on a business development plan that will cover all of Denbighshire's Towns in future;
- As a Council we're starting to think more about how we engage with communities and what will bring us closer to them. This has also emerged as a strong thread in the County Conversation.
- Recent Welsh Government legislation, like the new Planning Act (Wales) and the Well Being of Future Generations Act, encourages us to adopt new approaches to local planning; ones that are less formal and more focused on developing community resilience.

To respond to these changes, DCC should focus on 'enabling and facilitating' community planning rather than leading it, so that as a Council we respond to community initiatives rather than prompt them. This would be a significant change to existing practice, because at the moment, the Council is generally both the initiator and the 'owner' of community plans, including the TAPS.

Instead of this 'one size fits all' approach, DCC should only offer specific support to communities that wish to develop local plans or projects of their own. There would be no blanket expectation that all areas are equally involved. Some communities may take advantage of what is available, others may not. It is an approach that would work for existing MAG areas, but it would also work for smaller (or larger) communities too. It will also make the most of the resources we have available in a situation where any funding available to support community projects is likely to come from outside the Council through grants, rather than from DCC directly.

The core of this arrangement is to make a 'toolkit' available to local communities to help them develop their own community plans. This would consist of:

- Place Profiles of Denbighshire's communities;
- Technical planning advice/support;
- Governance advice/support to help establish and constitute community groups;
- Advice on available grants and developing business cases;
- Advice on engagement and techniques to work with local communities.
- Housing & neighbourhood advice and support to DCC's tenants

The information in this toolkit will be freely available on the DCC website, and possibly as a publication. A degree of officer advice and assistance will also be available, depending on what is required, from staff in Business Improvement & Modernisation, Planning & Public Protection, Community Support Services and from Housing. Offering advice and assistance as a central contact, including signposting to other services, will be the key role for the Community Projects Officer in BIM, who will have greater capacity when the current round of TAP projects are complete.

As an approach, this is in tune with the intention of all the relevant legislation and also aligns with the Council's aspirations to increase resilience in DCC's local communities. The Social Services model hierarchy of 'Information, Advice and Assistance' (IAA) is an appropriate description of this approach.

Consultation with Members and officers on this idea over the last few months has raised some important issues about ownership and proportionality, so there are some considerations to add. Firstly, it is important to stress that the information on the Council's website will be freely available for anyone to use. Secondly, DVSC will continue to be a key provider of information and support to community initiatives too, as they do now, and there will be clear signposting from DCC. However, where the support of DCC officers seems to be relevant and useful, then a couple of caveats must apply:

- To address the issue of community ownership, it is important that before officer time and resources are invested in an idea or project, we must be sure that there is a sufficient degree of consensus/support for it. For projects or plans to qualify for formal assistance from the Council, they should have a letter of support from their local Member or MAG.
- DCC would not provide support to any plan or proposal that does not comply with relevant legislation; conflicts with the objectives of the Council or which it does not consider an efficient use of public resources.
- There is a concern that some of our more disadvantaged communities may lack the social capital to make the most of the resources that would be available in this new approach. We must ensure therefore that special consideration be given to how we support such communities, and this might need to include supporting community groups experiencing governance issues.

Apart from the ability to attract grant funding, or to build community support around a local project or enterprise, there are other benefits to supporting community capacity in this way. One of the provisions in the new Planning Act (Wales), is that communities can influence local planning guidance through developing community plans ('Place Plans' in the legislation). These community plans can be used to set out more detailed thematic or site specific guidance to supplement policies and proposals in the Local Development Plan. Community plans can also help to inform the development or review of the LDP and could be developed in parallel or after adoption of the LDP. It is quite conceivable that a developing community plan may wish to influence the LDP as well as support the development of a local enterprise.

Community Plans that are intended to influence local planning will need to meet more formal criteria though, as might be expected. They will need to be prepared in consultation with local communities, businesses, and other interested consultees. All views will have to be taken into account and any changes made documented before the plan is finalised. If the plan had implications for planning guidance in the local area they would then be approved by the Council and formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, provided it is in conformity with the LDP. Such plans would then be a material planning consideration when deciding planning applications.

Advice on all aspects of community planning, including formal plans under the Planning Act, will be available on the Council's website and if appropriate, from relevant officers through the proposed community planning toolkit approach.

If we adopt this approach to community planning, we'll no longer need formal TAPS tied to MAG areas in the future – instead local plans will be made and owned by local

people. These plans can be small or large, they can relate to whole towns or single villages, above all, they can be responsive to local community ambition. In the new Council from May 2017, we can move away from the Council-led and bureaucratic TAPs to a much more flexible system of helping communities develop their own plans by *enabling* rather than *providing*.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The Council has a long term goal to engage effectively with its communities; the proposed model will support this. In addition, the proposal will allow the Council to meet the requirements of new legislation and potentially influence the way that legislation is implemented.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

There are no immediate costs identified for any Service. Any proposed action will be covered by the reallocation of existing resources.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-Being Impact Assessment undertaken on the decision?

Overall this proposal is positive in a number of key areas, but particularly so in terms of community cohesion, resilience and prosperity. There is a need to ensure that our more disadvantaged communities have extra support to enable them to make the most of these new opportunities if required.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The Town Champions Group and Lead Member have considered the idea and given it their support. The proposal has been discussed at MAG groups and at SLT.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

As council funding is likely to continue to reduce in the medium term, whether in cash or real terms, it is important that community projects can be supported or facilitated without direct council funding. Any financial allocations from the council would have to be made from within existing resources and considered as part of a future budget process.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a reputational and regulatory risk for the Council if we fail to meet the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Planning (Wales) Act.

11. Power to make the Decision

A Cabinet decision is required to change the Council's policy on Town and Area Plans.