



Committee and Date

Council

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Item

9

Public

## LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEES

**Responsible Officer** Gill Jones

e-mail: Gill.jones@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 252344

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report is a summary and reflection on Local Joint Committees (LJCs) and their contribution to locality working over the past four years of the Council's administration.
- 1.2 LJCs were a key component of the Shropshire Unitary Council business case, and were intended to be the means by which local communities and parish and town councils could have regular dialogue with Shropshire Council on a local and strategic basis – also providing opportunities for joined up governance between the different tiers of local government. They particularly offered a unique opportunity for local representatives of Shropshire Council and the relevant Town and Parish Councils in a local area to meet in public to address matters of common interest or concern.
- 1.3 Whilst the breadth of community engagement achieved by LJCs has been limited, (on average attracting 30 – 50 attendees per meeting) they have achieved a growing following and recognition, and those who do attend clearly view the LJC as a valuable vehicle for raising local issues, and getting responses from the Council and local partners about local concerns. LJCs have also been received very positively by a wide range of partners for whom the LJCs provide the most effective means they have of reaching a wider audience than they can otherwise achieve.
- 1.4 The total amount of funding available for distribution by LJCs to address local priorities over the last four years has been £3.08 million. This has enabled the support of over 2,200 community based projects, valued in excess of £14.4 million across Shropshire. There have been a number of collaborations between LJCs to support area-wide initiatives, and a growing understanding of the potential for the LJCs or similar local partnership body to act as a commissioner of local services and activities – with a number of examples particularly in relation to young people's activities.
- 1.5 The LJCs have also provided a useful and valued forum for parish and town councils to share best practice, and also to explore opportunities for collaboration and joined up working both with Shropshire Council and with neighbouring Town and Parish

Councils. There is now an opportunity to build on these established working relationships, as the Council moves to a model of local commissioning, where there is a common understanding of the needs of places/neighbourhoods, and the potential to include a range of community stakeholders and decision makers in a model of local governance which can build on the success of the LJC's, as well as learning from their shortcomings.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To note the impact and evolution of Local Joint Committees in developing locality working over the last four years, and to use progress made to date to inform a review of their potential development and role in the light of Shropshire Council's move to locality commissioning.
- 2.2 To endorse the contribution made by Local Joint Committees in developing a foundation for close working relationships and collaboration between Shropshire Council and Parish and Town Councils across Shropshire.
- 2.3 To note the significant contribution made by LJC funds in generating community activity and investment in local projects

## **REPORT**

### **3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

- 3.1 In determining these recommendations the Council has considered reputational risk and the course of action proposed minimises this risk.
- 3.2 The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- 3.3 The proposals under consideration will improve the levels of locality based and community driven activity in Shropshire. Comments made in this report include those received as a result of consulting with stakeholders

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 This report is a summary and reflection on Local Joint Committees and their contribution to locality working over the past four years of the Council's administration.
- 4.2 Local Joint Committees were introduced with the advent of the unitary Council in 2009, having been prototyped in four areas during 2008, with the main intention of providing a vehicle for working at a local level – they were a key component of the Shropshire Unitary Council business case. At the formation of the unitary council, there was a large amount of concern in communities about the potential for the new Shropshire Council to be too remote from the diverse range of communities it serves. Local Joint Committees were therefore intended to be the means by which

local communities and parish and town councils could have regular dialogue with Shropshire Council on a local and strategic basis – also providing opportunities for joined up governance between the different tiers of local government.

- 4.3 As a vehicle for local engagement, LJCs have tended to attract some local and quite regular community attendees but, not surprisingly, the profile of attendees is what would be expected at a public meeting – as a rule, but with some notable exceptions, they do not attract a wide mix of residents. However, those who do attend clearly view the LJC as a valuable vehicle for raising local issues, and getting responses from the Council and local partners about local concerns. LJCs have also been received very positively by a wide range of partners who have increasingly used the LJCs to gather views, and communicate out – the Police via the PACT arrangements, Fire, Ambulance Service, PCT, NHS Trust, Severn Trent Water, etc. Some of these partners have actively sought to be regularly involved in LJCs, as for them they provide the most effective means they have of reaching a wider audience than they could otherwise achieve.
- 4.4 LJCs have also provided a platform on which Shropshire Councillors have been able to shape and profile their role as community leaders.
- 4.5 Whilst it cannot be assumed that Local Joint Committees could be the only or even main means of engagement and joint working at a local level, they can be viewed as part of a mix of engagement methods, relevant in any geographic area. They have provided a constant in rapidly changing times in the County, and as a result have established a growing following and recognition in local communities as a forum for the raising, discussion and addressing of matters of importance in localities. They particularly offer a unique opportunity for local representatives of Shropshire Council and the relevant Town and Parish Councils in a local area to meet in public to address matters of common interest or concern, and there is the potential to expand this to include other key stakeholders/decision makers in a community. Their role for example in raising awareness in communities of the SAMDev process and Place Planning has been significant.
- 4.6 LJCs were also intended to provide a means by which local communities could scrutinise Shropshire Council services – this is probably the one aspect of their operation that has not worked as anticipated – there has been no direct link from LJCs in to the Council’s Scrutiny programme. However, there have been a number of occasions where Councillors have been made aware of concerns via the LJCs, and have therefore raised matters for Scrutiny, although there has been no automatic feedback from the Scrutiny function back to the local community which might have raised the concern in the first place.
- 4.7 An evaluation of the first 12 months of Local Joint Committees was presented at an LJC Summit held in April 2010. The findings from this evaluation led to some changes in LJC boundaries to reflect better the communities they served, and also some streamlining of the administration and funding arrangements – details are contained in reports to Council in July 2010, December 2010 and June 2011.
- 4.8 Key findings from the 2010 LJC evaluation were that:

- approximately 98% of parish and town councils participated in the LJC, with approximately 80% of parish/town councillors, and 84% of Shropshire Councillors attending any one particular meeting
- Attendance ranged across the County from 660 to 958 per round of meetings. The majority of those attending felt they were able to raise matters of importance to them
- LJCs were less used to commission or enhance local services, but more to provide funding for local community projects
- They enabled local priorities to be articulated
- They act as a channel through which to raise community issues and priorities
- They provide a means of engaging with local communities
- They have resulted in improved relationships between Shropshire Council and Town/Parish Councils
- There is improved partnership working at a local level

4.9 These findings still hold good – however, attendance appears to have increased, with many LJCs reporting attendance of 30 – 50 per meeting – and significantly in excess of this when a particularly contentious issue is being discussed, or when particular efforts are made to encourage community contributions to local discussions (eg SAMDev, power lines, and the Shrewsbury-wide LJC Forum).

4.10 There has also been some increase in the use of LJCs to commission activity by community groups. For example, in Oswestry, the local Arts and Sports Associations have been commissioned through a local collaboration between several LJCs to deliver arts and sporting activities across their areas. There are also many examples of Councillors working with community groups (especially young people) to identify needs locally, and then present those to the Local Joint Committee, leading then to the funding of particular activities by community organisations to meet those needs. Particular examples include work in the St Oswald and Longden Ford and Rea Valley LJCs.

4.11 Since April 2011, LJCs have been fully managed by the Community Action Team, with support from Democratic Services, as part of their day to day work in localities with local Members.

## **5 LJC funding**

5.1 For the first two years of their operation, LJCs received an annual budget of £1 million, which was allocated across the LJCs using a formula based on population and rurality. This was reduced to £500k + £40k community arts funding per annum in 2011/12 and 2012/13. The total amount of funding therefore available for distribution by LJCs to address local priorities over the last four years has been £3 million, supplemented by an additional £80k community arts funding over the last two years (Para 5.3). At the time of writing this report, figures for 2012/13 were still being finalised. However, the situation to date can be reported as follows:

	LJC funding	Total community contribution	Total value of projects supported
2009/10	£843,650	£2,560,414	£3,387,064
2010/11	£1,057,874	£2,310,873	£3,368,747
2011/12	£684,472	3,893,432	£4,577,904
2012/13 (to date)	£428,081	2,687,056	£3,115,137
<b>TOTALS OVER FOUR YEARS (to date)</b>	<b>£3,014,077</b>	<b>£11,451,775</b>	<b>£14,448,852</b>

5.2 This funding has provided significant investment in local communities – details of the many projects funded (over 2,200) are included in Appendix A – local communities have been extremely supportive and appreciative of the difference the funds have made. The relatively simple application process has also been helpful and valuable in introducing new groups to external funding opportunities, providing ‘seed corn funding’ for fledgling ideas which can then be developed with the support of the Community Action Team and others.

## 6. The Future?

6.1 Whilst there has been no further formal evaluation of the Local Joint Committees to inform this report, the summary below reflects the on-going dialogue between local Members, Area Commissioners, the Community Action Team, service providers, parish and town councils, statutory partners and local community organisations and representatives. Reference is not made to individual LJCs, as there are many similarities in the comments which have been received, and therefore, whilst each LJC operates in a slightly different way to reflect local arrangements and styles, there are many factors which are common to them all:

6.2 The LJCs have supported a significant number of community led projects over the last four years, from village hall refurbishments, to play schemes, to litter bins, to young people’s facilities, arts and cultural celebrations, and so on. However, LJCs have become increasingly reluctant to grant repeat funding applications, as they have developed clarity about the priorities in their areas, and as they try to encourage communities to be less reliant on public funding and grants. This reflects a greater understanding of the potential for the LJC or similar local partnership body to act as a commissioner of local services and activities.

6.3 There is now much more emphasis on seeding new initiatives, tackling strategic issues as well as still supporting smaller community groups and projects. There is also an increasingly clear focus on Place Plans, particularly in the rural areas, with a greater emphasis on prioritising needs through evidence identified in community led plans. The sharing of information between parishes has led to a significant increase in the number of areas deciding to undertake a community led plan, with those areas which have undertaken them, recognising and sharing their value with those which are less confident about the needs and priorities of their communities.

- 6.5 The LJC's have also provided a useful and valued forum for parish and town councils to share best practice, and also to explore opportunities for collaboration and joined up working. In particular, the LJC planning meetings have proved to be an essential element of the LJC – parish councillors feel more comfortable talking freely at these meetings and this has been extremely valuable both for Councillors, and those officers developing relationships and networks in the community. Participation of town and parish councils in the planning meetings has facilitated a more confident involvement at the public meetings, and the planning meetings generate a significant amount of networking and exchange of ideas and problems, as well as helping to build consensus.
- 6.6 There is now an opportunity to build on these established working relationships as the Council moves to a model of local commissioning. Whilst LJC boundaries will not match identified locality boundaries in every instance, they have demonstrated over the last four years that in the majority of cases they do reflect communities of place – there is for example little variation between LJC and Place Plan boundaries. There is also a common understanding of the needs of these places/neighbourhoods by the locally elected representatives, who are members of a particular LJC. The challenge now is to continue to make the model relevant, and to consider how to include other key stakeholders and decision makers in a model of local governance which can build on the success of the LJC's, as well as learning from their shortcomings.

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<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b>
<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Gwilym Butler</b>
<b>Local Member All</b>
<b>Appendices Appendix A – List of all LJC funded projects 2009-2013</b>