

Urban Parishing (090416/CAB010)

To: Cabinet
16 April 2009

Main Portfolio Area: Leader of the Council

Author of report: Sheila Wheeler

Classification: Non-Exempt

Ward: All Wards

Executive Summary

As its meeting of 2 December, Cabinet considered a report from the Corporate Services Select relating to Urban Parishing. It was agreed that the Chief Executive would submit a further report to Cabinet on how to take forward the recommendations of the select committee. This report outlines proposed next steps.

Corporate Priorities

Urban parishing would potentially support the Council's priority of improving the confidence of its communities.

Report status

For noting.

Route to Implementation/Timetable:

The report proposes that the recommendations of the select committee will be integrated into the programme for the Council's delivery unit. Further reports will be brought back in due course.

Report of Chief Executive Continued

Background/Introduction

1. The Council's Corporate Services Select Committee has conducted a review of urban parishing following referral from Cabinet. The Select Committee considered the legal process for establishing a parish council, the advantages and disadvantages of parish councils, special expenses and the role of the current Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum as the current representatives for the urban communities of Tunbridge Wells.
2. The review concluded that there were advantages to be derived from urban parishing but it was also apparent there was not an appetite for urban parishing across the whole of the urban area. Cabinet accepted the recommendations that:
 - Cabinet publicise the new forms of local Councils and emphasise benefits in hope of prompting "Community" or "Neighbourhood" Council applications via petitions;
 - Cabinet identify appropriate support for community Groups, elected councillors and individuals who wish to create parish councils; and
 - Cabinet liaise with the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum to review their role as representatives of the urban area to see if this is effective and make improvements as appropriate.
3. It was also agreed that the Chief Executive would report back on progress with the recommendations. The matter has now been discussed at the Council's Management Board who concluded that there were insufficient staff resources to take forward the proposals at the current time. It was therefore proposed that the recommendations should be integrated into the programme of the Council's Delivery Unit (which will shortly be established) and that the support alluded to in recommendation '2' should be considered as part of future staff restructures. A further report will be brought back to Cabinet in due course.

Cross cutting issues

Legal

4. The legal implications of urban parishing were addressed in the report from the Select Committee.

Finance and other resources, including ICT

5. Any financial resources will be identified by the Delivery Unit Manager and brought back to Cabinet at a future meeting.

Staffing

6. The recommendations will be scoped by the Delivery Unit and any staffing implications reported back to Cabinet. In addition, consideration will be given to how the Council can support community groups as part of any future restructures.

Value for money

7. Details of financial consequences and value for money were provided in the Select Committee report.

Risk Management

8. There is a risk that the creation of a new parish council will have an impact on council tax across the remaining urban area because of special expenses.

Equalities

9. If a community governance review is conducted then the Council will have to ensure that all groups and individuals within the area under review have the opportunity to be involved.

Safer & Stronger Communities

10. The Committee considered that creating parish councils in urban areas would allow scope for local communities to take control of local services and give them a democratically elected accountable voice.

Health and Well-Being

11. The powers of parish councils extend to some areas that could have an impact on health and well-being such as open space, allotments and public conveniences.

Environment / Sustainability

12. The powers of parish councils extend to some areas that could have an impact on the environment such as open space and allotments.

Human Rights Act

13. No implications.

Communication and Consultation

14. The Select Committee did not have the resources to carry out wide-scale community consultation across the urban area on whether they wished to be parished, but did consult the town forum as representatives of the urban area.

Conclusion

15. Progress on taking forward the select committee's recommendations will be integrated into the programme of the Delivery Unit and further reports will be brought back in due course.

Recommendation - That Cabinet note the progress update.

Reason for recommendation:

The Delivery Unit is considered to be the best way to take forward the recommendations of the Select Committee.

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Sheila Wheeler
Chief Executive

Background Papers: Report from the Corporate Services Select Committee and minutes from the Cabinet meeting of 2 December (CAB124/08)