

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting9th July 2009

1. Title of Item/Report

Sustainable Communities Act

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to information provided for members on the Sustainable Communities Act, summarising consultation activity that had taken place to date and proposing recommendations for submitting proposals of intent to the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Sustainable Communities Act has cross party support and received Royal Assent on 23rd October 2007 with the aim of promoting the sustainability of local communities. Key to the act is the opportunity for local authorities to ask central government for permission to take action in their area which they are currently unable to do. This could include the delegation of functions from national or local bodies and agencies to the local authority and is designed, in part, to support the Council in delivering its power of well-being duty from the 2000 Local Government Act. The scope of the act covers social, economic and environmental issues and as such there is wide scope as to what could be proposed. Ideas generated by localities will be fed through a selector (confirmed as the LGA) who will prepare a shortlist for submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Local authorities have been invited by the Secretary of State to make proposals they consider would improve the sustainability of local communities. These proposals must be within the confines of the act, but there is some flexibility in what an authority sees as necessary to promote the sustainability of its area. Approval for proposals will be granted through a process of negotiation between the Secretary of State and the Selector Panel who will act as champion and advocate for the proposals.

In order to ensure that any potential proposals are in line with Council policy and have included consultation with the community, a number of activities have been undertaken with a view to develop proposals. These include:

- Presentation at Members Policy Seminar
- Consultation with Area and thematic partnerships of the LSP
- Special meeting of SRCGA community reference group
- Consideration of recommendations from recent scrutiny reviews
- Presentation to Parish Council Liaison Forum

A full list of suggestions arising from these activities are shown below:

- Having stronger powers to deal with the problems associated with alcohol misuse
- Speeding up the processes for and have stronger powers around regenerating derelict land and buildings
- Public transport, particularly bus services, being strictly regulated and that local authorities should act as the regulator in their areas
- Having greater freedoms locally around the definition of green and brownfield sites
- Having stronger powers around preventing demolition of properties and preventing householders selling land to build new homes in back gardens
- Allowing local authorities and their communities greater say in criminal justice, particularly sentencing and community payback
- Acquiring additional powers around dispersal orders
- Ensuring all planning decisions are made locally
- Ensuring appropriate political representation on Police Authorities

Nationally, 117 authorities have indicated to date they are considering putting proposals forward, although none have actually submitted in advance of the 31st July deadline and at this stage details of what these areas are considering remain limited. Reviews through existing networks have identified the following examples of suggestions from consultations undertaken elsewhere:

- Supporting local post offices to avoid closure
- Supporting development of small scale renewable energy initiatives
- Stopping plastic packaging
- Enforcing minimal lighting of offices and public buildings out of hours
- Increased powers to deal with pavement parking
- Retention of revenue from business rates to be spent on local priorities
- Retention of landfill credits to reinvest in local priorities

If this Council was to make a proposal, it would need to be submitted to the LGA by 31st July 2009. A copy of the assessment criteria to be used by the Selector Panel was submitted. With regard to the suggestions

coming forward from this Council's consultation in the community, none of the suggestions put forward through the consultation have been subject to the challenge of meeting the requirements of the Act yet. Whilst some of the suggestions reflect areas of concern to local communities they do not meet one of the fundamental requirements of the Act i.e. Councils do not already have the power to act. The proposals would however be developed by a working group of officers from relevant service areas and partners who will challenge whether they meet the requirement of the Act. It is proposed that the Chief Executive will then, in conjunction with the Group Leaders and Portfolio Holder for Access and Communities, approve any submission to LGA in advance of the July 31st deadline.

RESOLVED that:-

- i The report be noted.
- ii Cabinet approve the further work necessary to develop any potential proposals to ensure they comply with the requirements of the Act .
- iii Cabinet delegate final approval of proposals to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Group Leaders and Portfolio Holder for Access and Communities.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To maximise the opportunities presented by the Sustainable Communities Act and support the council in meeting its aim

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By Midnight, Friday, 17th July 2009

Proper Officer
14 July 2009