

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Agenda Item:</b>
<b>Meeting Date</b>	16 May 2012
<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Borough strategy</b>
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	Council Leader
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Head of Service</b>	Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Classification</b>	Open
<b>Forward Plan</b>	N/A
<b>Recommendation</b>	1. That Council <b>endorses</b> the Swale Locality Board's updated borough strategy.

## 1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the Swale Locality Board's updated borough strategy, *Realising our Ambitions for Swale*, and asks Council to endorse it as a component of SBC's own policy framework. The borough strategy was formerly known as the 'sustainable community strategy'.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 A requirement on principal local authorities to prepare a strategy for 'promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of [the] area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom' was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. In the ensuing few years, this strategy, usually known as a 'sustainable community strategy', became a key element in the national drive to encourage local authorities to work more seamlessly with other local agencies from the public and other sectors.
- 2.2 When the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act introduced a requirement for local strategic partnerships (LSPs) to negotiate local area agreements (LAAs) in 2007, sustainable community strategies became the highest level document in partnerships' shared policy frameworks, setting out the long-term vision to whose realisation the targets in the LAA were expected to contribute in the medium term.
- 2.3 The new government elected in May 2010 moved quickly to dismantle much of the previous administration's centralised control mechanisms over local authorities, including abolition of the regional Government Offices and rescinding the requirement for LAAs. At this stage, although statutory guidance on sustainable community strategies has been revoked, the duty to prepare and

periodically to update a strategy remains on the statute books, although it is expected to be rescinded in due course.

- 2.4 Within Kent, the new approach from Westminster facilitated the development of the locality board model of collaboration between the county and district councils. In Swale, the Locality Board has also taken over the functions of the former Swale Partnership, which was the uppermost, political, tier of the Swale LSP, but the two lower tiers have remained largely unchanged. These are the chief officer tier, known as the Public Services Board, and the five more operationally-focused thematic partnerships which sit below it.
- 2.5 This means that the Swale Locality Board has something of a twofold role, firstly in overseeing services controlled by KCC and SBC in the borough, and secondly in providing democratic legitimacy to the work of the Public Services Board and the thematic partnerships. The sustainable community strategy, with its emphasis on partnership working across the whole range of contributing organisations, is currently more focused on this second role, but as a 'working document' it is possible that over time it will take on the function of an overarching statement of the Locality Board's objectives with regard also to KCC and SBC services which are generally not delivered in this type of partnership, such as education, transport, and social care.
- 2.6 In addition to being pro-tem a legal requirement, the sustainable community strategy remains useful as a means both of articulating the understanding of local needs shared between all the agencies represented at some level of the Locality Board architecture, and also of holding those agencies to account for their part in responding to those needs. This is through regular performance reporting by the thematic partnerships to the Public Services Board and, at less frequent intervals, to the Locality Board itself.
- 2.7 Swale's current sustainable community strategy, *Ambitions for Swale*, was adopted by the Swale Partnership (as was) and endorsed by Full Council in 2009. In addition to the changes to the wider context outlined above, the financial circumstances of many public- and voluntary-sector organisations have also changed radically since then, and this is therefore an opportune time for the whole partnership to update its strategy. As a result of the imminent demise of the somewhat opaque term 'sustainable community strategy', the Locality Board and Public Services Board have also agreed to refer to the document as the 'borough strategy' for the future.

### **3 Proposal**

- 3.1 Although much has changed since 2009, much remains the same. Many of the challenges which were identified as facing Swale when the original strategy was written remain valid today. The vision set out in the strategy is by nature a long-term one, and one that will continue to require sustained focus and strong partnership working across the Locality Board architecture to bring to fruition.

Nonetheless, there have been some significant achievements since 2009, including some key pieces of vital infrastructure, and being much further along the road to a regenerated town centre for Sittingbourne.

- 3.2 Still, there is some way to go. The updated document presented to Council here sets out the joint priorities that local agencies working in partnership will concentrate on between now and 2031, along with the key actions they will jointly take to ensure progress against these priorities up to 2015. It also sets out the contribution partners in Swale will make to the Vision for Kent, the overarching set of countywide ambitions developed by the Kent Forum. As with the 2009 strategy, this updated version represents both a long-term vision for the borough and a roadmap of partnership priorities and joint activities for the medium term.
- 3.3 The updated strategy is structured around the five thematic partnerships which sit under the Swale Public Services Board. While there is a strategic role for the Locality Board in setting out an overall vision and direction based on the evidence of local need, it is appropriate for those agencies which work together at the frontline to determine the actions they will take together that best help to realise that vision within their own specialist areas of focus.
- 3.4 Council is **recommended** to give its endorsement to the updated borough strategy as a component of SBC's own policy framework.

## **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 The Local Government Act 2000 obliges the council to prepare and update a strategy of this nature, although there is little prescription about the format or how frequently updates should occur. This obligation remains on the statute books, and there is thus no lawful alternative option to preparing a strategy.
- 4.2 Given that we already have a strategy in place, there is no legal obligation for us to update it at this juncture. However, all the partners represented within the Locality Board architecture are of the view that the changes to the policy context and financial situation outlined in this report, as well as the progress which has been made towards realising the partners' vision for Swale since 2009, render this an opportune moment to reassess our shared ambitions and update the strategy.

## **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 Many of the organisations with whom the council most naturally consults on new policies are themselves represented within the Locality Board architecture and so have contributed directly to the development of the strategy. This includes elected members from both KCC and SBC on the Locality Board, strategic partners such as Kent Police and Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT on the Public Services Board, and a high number of other local agencies from a range of sectors on the thematic partnerships.

- 5.2 Much of the external consultation has been undertaken in tandem with that on the council's new corporate plan. This was supported through a dedicated page on the website which made the full draft text of the borough strategy available and sought views on the appropriateness of both the long-term priorities and the medium-term actions. In addition, the SBC policy team wrote to all Swale parish councils and a number of groups felt to be broadly representative of people with protected characteristics under equalities legislation, seeking views on the draft strategy.
- 5.3 Some useful feedback was received, a large majority of it generally positive but unspecific. This was especially true of the representative groups for people with protected equalities characteristics, which at any rate provided reassurance that the draft strategy contained nothing which might inadvertently have disadvantaged any such group of residents. A number of more specific responses were also received, which have been discussed with lead officers and/or chairs of the thematic partnerships, and amendments made to the relevant chapter where appropriate. The SBC policy team is currently in the process of responding individually to all consultees who submitted an opinion, thanking them for their contribution and responding to points made on a case-by-case basis.
- 5.4 The community impact assessment at Appendix II provides a summary of some of the consultation which has been undertaken.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	<p>The two most important differences between the borough strategy and the corporate plan are that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the corporate plan is an internal council document whereas the borough strategy belongs to the wider Locality Board partnership; and</li> <li>(ii) the borough strategy is a longer-term visioning document than the medium-term corporate plan.</li> </ul> <p>Nevertheless, as the two overarching strategies which will inform all council activity over the coming three years, the two documents sit together at the top of the council's policy framework and clearly need to relate to each other. All of the priorities and actions set out in the borough strategy are aligned to one or more of the draft priorities in the new corporate plan, with all five of the theme partnerships' chapters in the strategy relating to the 'embracing localism' priority, and the chapters of the Local Children's Trust Board and the Swale Economy and Regeneration Partnership relating to the 'open for business' and 'healthy environment' priorities. A table of these relationships is set out in the corporate plan, while the borough strategy provides a table of how its</p>

	priorities relate to those of the countywide Vision for Kent.
Financial, Resource and Property	One of the advantages of the Locality Board model is that it facilitates the alignment of budgets among local agencies, and the borough strategy provides the outline policy framework to support this. This budgetary alignment is likely to become a more fundamental part of the Board's work over the coming few years. In terms of the council's own commitments, these are only summarised in the strategy and elucidated more fully in the corporate plan and lower-level strategies and plans. There are no direct property implications.
Legal and Statutory	The requirement on principal local authorities to prepare and periodically update a sustainable community strategy was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 and has not to date been repealed. As part of the council's policy framework, the revised strategy needs to be adopted by Full Council.
Crime and Disorder	The Safer and Stronger thematic partnership has its own chapter of the strategy, setting out its long-term priorities to create safer communities, enable stronger communities and develop targeted responses for individual communities and local issues.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	In addition to the risk of non-compliance with the Local Government Act 2000, a lack of an up-to-date strategy for partnership working in the borough on which all partners of the Locality Board architecture are agreed would jeopardise the cohesiveness of the partnership in the short term, and could lead to a breakdown of important working relationships in the longer term. There are no direct health and safety implications.
Equality and Diversity	A number of groups broadly representative of those with protected characteristics under equalities legislation have been consulted on the strategy. A community impact assessment of the strategy is set out at Appendix II.
Sustainability	One of the purposes of the sustainable community strategy in statutory terms is to contribute to the 'sustainable development of the United Kingdom'. In practice, by providing all the partners on the Locality Board architecture with a shared long-term vision and the elements of a joint work programme for the medium term, the strategy makes a considerable contribution to sustainability in its widest sense, whether economic, environmental or social. The strategy includes individual chapters on the work of the Environment and Liveability, Health and Housing, and Economy and Regeneration thematic partnerships.

## **7 Appendices**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: *Realising our Ambitions for Swale*: Updated borough strategy 2012-2031.
- Appendix II: Community impact assessment.

## **8 Background Papers**

- Swale in 2011 – [http://issuu.com/swale-council/docs/key\\_data\\_for\\_swale](http://issuu.com/swale-council/docs/key_data_for_swale).