Rugby Local Strategic Partnership and Financial Inclusion

The LSP brings together a range of partners, which is both its purpose and its strength. Both the Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health are now fully engaged with the LSP.

The LSP has three roles:

- Identify issues affecting residents of the Borough
- Build links between partners and other organisations to reduce duplication and encourage smarter working
- Only undertake activity where two or more organisations are involved

Our biggest piece of work, of course, has been the new Regeneration Strategy.

Rugby is in a much better position than many areas across the country, but that can bring its own challenges. We are at a critical time in Rugby as we are the fastest growing town in the West Midlands, with high employment and low unemployment.

This means that a lot of people want to move here, and housing, health, roads and all of our other services are under pressure and are likely to face increasing difficulties in the future.

We have a perfect storm brewing for this winter with higher fuel bills and a predicted cold winter. Despite our high employment rates there are still people facing financial and other difficulties. We have gone through welfare reform, and now Rugby is to be a pilot for Universal Credit.

For the past few years the Regeneration Strategy has guided the work of the LSP, and has been an underpinning principle of all the work undertaken by Rugby Borough Council.

A lot of work has been done to build relationships with the voluntary and community sector, and particularly with the community associations in our priority areas.

The LSP has issued a leaflet (also available electronically and circulated via email) giving details of agencies, organisations and services that can assist those in financial difficulty or can offer support to help people live healthier and more affordable lives. This has been circulated widely through partners, including doctors' surgeries and children's centres.

The Regeneration Strategy has also underpinned the Borough Council’s grants system. It has helped us to maintain the grants, and has helped the grants panel by informing clear criteria by which to judge the applications.

It is now time to look again at the strategy, and we have identified key themes, which sit under the umbrella of "Welfare Reform". This working title has been used as everyone understands what it means.
The key themes for the strategy are:

- Financial Inclusion - or Affording to Live
- Employment and Training
- Lifestyle Management

The new Regeneration Strategy will be going to the LSP Board in December and will then move forward for adoption by Rugby Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council and the other partners.

A key part of the development of the new strategy has been engagement with other organisations and with members of the public. We have achieved this by inviting organisations such as BRANCAB; the Credit Union; RBC Housing, Benefits and other teams; WCC teams covering a number of disciplines, and others to attend LSP meetings so that we can get an understanding of what the issues actually are, and how the LSP partners can offer support or other help. We also have very strong links with the voluntary and community sector through WCAVA, and through the Stronger Communities Partnership.

One of the main engagement mechanisms for engagement is the annual Compact/Partnership event that is held with WCAVA, and this year was on Friday 8th November. This year the event took a workshop format with two sessions.

The questions were:

**Affordable Living:**

- Assuming that handing out money is not an option, and that the Food Bank covers emergency basic nutrition, what could be done to help people to eat better on a budget?
- Where would you go for advice and help on financial budgeting? What else should be made available?
- What inexpensive measures can people do individually or in groups to reduce the cost of living?

**Employment:**

- Volunteering is now seen as a valid route to work-readiness. Can groups make their volunteering opportunities into structured programmes? For instance could they have a defined programme where people take on and learn different roles over a period of time?
- Should volunteering be recorded to show what activities have been undertaken? If so, how could this be achieved to produce something that employers could assess?
• Could organisations produce case studies to show how volunteering benefits the individual as well as the organisation? Is so, would you be prepared to be a case study?
• How can people with skills, experience and time (such as those who are retired) be encouraged to help people who are seeking work?

**Welfare Reform:**

• Discretionary Awards: We are under budget, How can we identify additional cases to support, whilst not rewarding those who are not engaging with welfare reform?
• Universal Credit: How do we support organisations which could support Universal Credit delivery move to funding based on payment by results?
• Impact of Welfare Reform changes: What evidence / information do you have which shows how customers are responding to the challenges created by the introduction of Welfare Reform changes?

A wealth of information was collected and this is being evaluated and will be used to inform the new Regeneration Strategy and also in the development of the action plans.

Looking forward, we will be revisiting the structure of the LSP to ensure that it is in the best place to deliver the new Regeneration Strategy and we are investigating setting up a Financial Inclusion Partnership specifically for Rugby, which will bring in a broad range of organisations. This is subject to approval by the LSP Board in December.