

Stronger Communities:

58. Oxfordshire is a good place in which to work and live. However some communities are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain local facilities and the availability of affordable housing for local people is a significant problem. Community self help has also declined as the pace of life has intensified. There is a decline in interest in local democracy which in part is connected with these factors.

59. We intend to address these concerns in several ways:

- **Neighbourhood services** – Proposals for neighbourhood policing and local children’s centres are examples of action to bring services closer to local people. Action to improve the accessibility of services and information is being planned over the medium to long term. Technological advances will allow us to make major improvements in public services.
- **Strengthening the Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure** – In Oxfordshire the VCS has a critical role to play in delivering the aims of the LAA, both by contributing to work under the different blocks and in strengthening community life through increased participation of volunteers and successful involvement of so-called ‘hard to reach’ groups. The key infrastructure organisations and key statutory agencies have commissioned research (the OVID project, which is the local manifestation of the Home Office programme ‘Change Up’) to identify a way forward that fits 21st Century needs. This project is now concluding and during 2006 it will be possible to develop an action plan to help strengthen the VCS sector.

The Public Service Board will review progress and agree next steps in 2006/07.

- **Rural strategy** – The Defra Rural Social & Community Programme (RSCP) will be implemented under the guidance of a Rural Forum to be set up in 2006/07. As part of the RSCP programme, a Rural Strategy will be developed during 2006/07. This will address issues of sustainability and the rural economy.
- **Volunteering** – We want to encourage more people to volunteer to support local organisations and communities. The County Council, South Oxfordshire District and the City Council have committed to the piloting of staff volunteering schemes to encourage staff to volunteer. The Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action are supporting this initiative through their Volunteer Centre Oxfordshire. The OVID action plan will contain proposals to improve access to information and advice about volunteering opportunities across the county.
- **Involving** – Partners already have extensive mechanisms for consulting and involving local people. However, we need to do more to involve ‘hard to reach’ groups and especially young people. One area where we need to strengthen commitment to encouraging participation is around community and cultural activity, particularly in relation to excluded groups. Working with voluntary and community organisations we plan to improve our processes for engaging hard to reach groups, to share best practice and to co-ordinate our activities.

60. The **non-stretch targets** are:

Outcomes	Indicators	Targets	Funding Streams contributing to Outcome
To empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and	Percentage of citizens who feel well informed about local affairs (Library of Local Performance	To be set when baseline established (Jan 07), using Best Value General Survey to be carried	

Outcomes	Indicators	Targets	Funding Streams contributing to Outcome
the delivery of services	<p>Indicators LIB184)</p> <p>Proportion of direct consultation carried out during the year that is in accordance with principles of good practice (Library of Local Performance Indicators LIB181)</p>	<p>out in Autumn 06.</p> <p>All county council employees responsible for undertaking consultation are trained to use the Consultation Tracker (a web based system that logs all consultations and requests assurance that principles of good practice have been followed) by March 2007.</p>	
To increase the effective participation of children and young people and ensure that it is well coordinated	<p>Increase number of young people consulted about services.</p> <p>Increase number of young people participating in democratic decision-making processes.</p>	<p>Increase number of young people consulted about services from 3,000 to 5,000 per year by 2009.</p> <p>Increase number of young people participating in democratic decision-making processes (Sounding Boards, Trusts, Youth Fora) from 350 in 2005 to 700 per year by 2009.</p>	<p>Children's Fund Connexions Positive Activities for Young People Youth Service District Councils Excellence Cluster Standards Fund Children's Fund YOT Source Workers Voluntary Youth Services Russell Commission</p>

61. The lead officer for this block is Stephen Capaldi, Oxfordshire County Council.