

# Sheffield Sustainable Communities Panel – information for applicants

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The City Council wants Sheffield to be a place where local people are in the driving seat, and where residents and communities have a say over the services and decisions that affect them. The Sheffield Sustainable Communities Panel is one of the ways in which Sheffield people can get involved.

## What is the Sheffield Sustainable Communities Panel?

The Sheffield Sustainable Communities Panel was established in December 2008 as a representative group of people to consider ideas which Sheffield could put forward to central government using the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. The Sustainable Communities Act allows councils to work together with local people to develop ideas for changes which central government could make to improve life in communities around England and Wales.

The Panel has met six times since and has considered 32 ideas and chosen four to be submitted to central government through the Local Government Association. The four proposals put forward to government were:

- § Delegating responsibility and funding for the Sheffield post office network to Sheffield;
- § Allowing councils to help communities to use vacant land which is not likely to be developed in the near future for food growing and other greenspace;
- § Allowing asylum seekers to work in the UK to enable them to lift themselves out of poverty and to contribute more to the community;
- § Setting up an Adult Learning and Skills Trust for Sheffield with greater powers to identify and commission the skills and learning courses needed for Sheffield.

The Local Government Association is currently drawing up a shortlist and in the next year central government will make a decision as to whether it will implement any of the ideas. More information can be found on the Council's website at

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<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/sheffield-sustainable-communities-debate/sustainable-communities-act>.

## What does the Sustainable Communities Panel do?

At present we do not know when government will call for a further round of applications under the Sustainable Communities Act. However, elected members (councillors) and officers of the Council are also keen to continue to work with citizens and those who work in Sheffield and to continue the Panel as a consultation body.

Until another round of the Sustainable Communities Act is announced, the Panel will:

- Be a body of people who council officers (and potentially other public sector organisations) can consult with in the early stages of planning how we will deal with issues such as the environment and Sheffield's ageing population.
- Be a body which may be consulted when strategies and policies are issued for formal consultation
- Feed into the Council's response to government consultations where time allows.

The Panel will be one of a number of ways in which the Council engages Sheffield people in the development of its work. It will not have decision-making powers, and council officers and elected members will not be bound by its views.

When a new round of the Sustainable Communities Act is announced, the Panel will again start to consider ideas to be put forward to Central Government.

## What are Panel members asked to do?

Panel members are asked to commit to attend meetings regularly over the course of a year (starting in February) and to read any papers beforehand. Meetings will usually be every two months, although they may be monthly in the run up to submitting ideas to government (Panel members will not be expected to attend every meeting, but we hope that they will be able to attend 50%).

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Each meeting will last for approximately two hours, with half an hour available before for the Panel to discuss issues without Council officers or elected members being present. Most meetings will involve a mix of presentations and discussion with the whole Panel, and discussion in smaller groups. Most importantly, panel members should be willing to contribute to the informal discussions in the meetings, and to give all other Panel members the opportunity to contribute their own views. Individuals are not asked to represent the views of any particular group of people.

If applicants need assistance to carry out these roles then support will be given, including expenses to attend meetings.

## Who can apply to be on the Panel?

Anyone who lives, works or studies in the City of Sheffield boundaries can apply to be on the panel. This includes those who are not eligible to vote in Sheffield, including those who are under the age of 18. We aim to achieve equality of access, so please let us know if you have any access requirements. As we are required by legislation to take into account the diversity of Sheffield in creating the Panel, we include some questions about your background. You do not have to answer any question if you prefer not to, but doing so will help us to meet our legal duty.

## Why should you apply?

The Panel will have the opportunity to influence Council policy, and hopefully to develop more ideas to put forward to Central Government.

The application form asks you to tell us something about why you want to be involved and what you think you can bring to the Panel – this does not mean that we are looking for people who have any particular knowledge or skills or who have necessarily been involved in Council or other community organisation. What is most important is that applicants are interested in helping us to make Sheffield a better place to live and work. It will also be important that the Panel works well together, with everyone feeling comfortable to offer their views and experiences in a supportive environment where the diversity of Sheffield's people is respected.

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Applicants who are already actively involved in community organisations will be welcome, but we are also very keen to have Panel members who have never or rarely been involved in community or council activities before.

## How do I apply to be on the Panel?

Please complete an application form and return it to the address on the form by midnight on 18 December 2009. If you need assistance completing the application form, or want any further information, please contact Victoria Penman on 0114 2735417 or Laurie Brennan on 0114 2735199.

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