

# Portmore 2020 - a partnership for strategic planning in Jamaica

At first look, the sound of the beat of the Jamaican drums does not have anything obviously in common with the sight of deer roaming around Cannock Chase. But the partners in this collaboration - Cannock Chase District Council (CCDC) based in Southern Staffordshire in England and Portmore Municipal Council (PMC) based in Jamaica – have found many common goals and issues on which to base an extensive sharing of knowledge and expertise.



▲ Project partners displaying some of the promotional materials from the property tax awareness raising campaign

Strategic planning and capacity building was agreed as the focus of the partnership between the two authorities. As the partnership began some two years after the Good Practice Scheme Programme launch, the initial project ideas were scaled down to focus on two key areas where the two councils could work together in a practical way: property tax collection and compliance, and developing municipal strategic priorities. This has enabled a more dedicated project delivery

**As a result, PMC has:**

- Outlined an ambitious programme for change in its Strategic Priorities providing the vision and priorities for PMC for the next three to five years
- Increased its property tax compliance rates with the resulting increase in income enabling better service provision for its community
- Built the capacity of the core delivery team at PMC, increasing their technical knowledge and confidence.

The staff involved in the project from CCDC have also found significant benefits for their own development and learning in working with this council in a very different area, but facing many of the same challenges and issues.

Cannock Chase District Council & Portmore Municipal Council officers working in partnership



The PMC was formed in 2003 and so is a relatively new council which faces significant technical and resource challenges with a growing and expectant population. Its mission statement is “to provide the citizens of Portmore with the highest quality of modern and efficient municipal services, working in partnership with the community and all stakeholders to promote a high standard of living, sustainable development and sound environmental management with equity for all”.

Partners have taken part in a series of exchange visits in both England and Jamaica including a planning mission, the refinement of project proposals and areas of joint working (including sharing of experience) and follow on activities including marketing campaigns and identification of strategic objectives. Establishing precise and succinct strategic priorities for Portmore provided a useful focus for the work of the partnership.

**“Together we are making a difference and helping Portmore to be the city of the future by 2020”**

Every landowner in Jamaica pays Property Tax. The tax is calculated on the unimproved value of the land and not on what has been built upon it. The income from Property Tax helps to pay for and improve services for the citizens of Portmore, including street lighting, waste collections, road maintenance and ‘better neighbourhood’ and beautification projects.

Through visits, joint working and sharing of information, the Jamaican Property Tax system was compared to the UK Council Tax system and collection methods. CCDC shared information on how the UK system

operates and in particular how CCDC manages its administration and collection. This enabled PMC to develop recommendations for improvement to their Property Tax administration and collection system.

There were two main strands to the work:

- What improvements could be made in tax collection, given that the Jamaica Inland Revenue has overall responsibility for collecting the tax?
- What could be done to raise citizens’ awareness of the tax and improve compliance?

## Raising awareness

Unlike in the UK, in Jamaica the Inland Revenue Department is responsible for the collection of the Property Tax and much of the legislation governing its collection lies outside the control of local authorities. Although significant progress has been made through local government reform, more needs to be done to develop appropriate administrative arrangements and a legal framework to enable local councils to assume primary responsibility for the management of key revenue sources such as the Property Tax.

Nevertheless, the project team was able to identify a number of ways in which Portmore could have greater involvement in the process by working with the various government agencies and departments, thereby taking a more proactive role in the collection of Property Tax.

As of 1st January 2008, the Government of Jamaica has announced, the total amount of property tax collected will go to parish councils to pay for local improvements.

## Increasing awareness

As well as sharing working procedures and practices a further focus has been the planning, design and

implementation of a citizen awareness campaign around Property Tax compliance. The two councils worked together on a new marketing and publicity campaign comprising:

- New and more efficient Property Tax procedures to increase collection rates and compliance;
- New information leaflets on Property Tax and the new procedures for Portmore;
- A mobile campaign - taking the Property Tax message out to the citizens of Portmore;
- Advertising, merchandising and public relations activities;
- A billboard campaign on the main arterial route into Portmore with messages outlining the main principles of the Property Tax campaign.

## Strategic priorities

The two councils carried out detailed work to determine the strategic and operational objectives for PMC. Developing skills to connect social and economic priorities to assist with delivery of major projects has been fundamental.

The first target was to come up with a set of strategic priorities for the next three to five years. A Strategic Priorities/Contextual document was developed to provide background and focus for priorities for the Council, in particular the strategic operating plan for 2006-09.

The strategic goals that were developed set an ambitious programme of change for PMC. They include improving services, better public access through a one-stop-shop and website, encouraging economic development, community support and better neighbourhoods.

Cannock Chase District Council >  
 Members meet Portmore  
 Municipal Council officers  
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 courtesy of the Cannock and  
 Rugeley Mercury)



Summary of the new **Portmore Strategic Goals:**

### Delivering High Quality Services

- PMC will be a leader in the provision of excellent and innovative services and will exceed citizens' expectations.
- Construction of a new Municipal Complex and One Stop Shop for public services and development of a new website.
- PMC to work with the community and investors.
- Generating income through Property Tax to ensure the delivery of better services.

### Expanding the Business Base

- Promoting economic development and attracting more businesses to Portmore.
- The construction of a Small Business Complex.
- Establishing tourism.
- Securing a university for Portmore.

### Creating a United Community

- Building a caring and integrated community.
- Providing better healthcare, bringing a new state of the art hospital.
- Preparing at risk young people for the job market through special skills training programmes.

### Managing our Environment

- Creation of a Sustainable Development Plan.
- A new community park of national significance.
- Expanding the Beautification and Better Neighbourhood Programme.

## Spreading the message

Once this ambitious plan had been developed both councils felt it was important to tell the public about them.

A supporting marketing and promotions campaign about the strategic priorities was therefore the next step. The marketing and promotional expertise of both partners were brought together to develop a marketing and promotion strategy. Staff from CCDC also gave advice and technical input on how to plan and manage the promotional campaigns.

The first publicity was a promotional leaflet which set out the key messages to promote the objectives and extend the awareness of the council's direction and was widely circulated to the citizens of PMC. The team then planned a wider marketing drive to develop the municipal brand and ensure that a consistent and positive image and message was conveyed.

This involved developing strap lines and key headlines to encapsulate the objectives of the Municipal Council. Thus "2020 - Portmore city of the future", "Our municipality ... our responsibility" and "Together we're making a difference" were born. The branding has strengthened local development and themes are being applied across the work of the Council.

The wider promotional and marketing campaign included:

- New information leaflets on PMC's strategic priorities;
- New display boards conveying the key services provided by the Council;
- New billboard signs and artwork to be displayed on the main arterial route into Portmore outlining the strategic priorities.

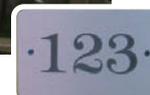
## Cedar Grove pilot

A pilot project was supported to bring together both elements of the work undertaken on Property Tax and Strategic Priorities and address the problem of property referencing and street numbering. A target community was chosen for this pilot - Cedar Grove as it had poor numbering and there were problems in not being able to issue Property Tax notices systematically.

The pilot developed a new mapping, referencing and house numbering system for Cedar Grove. This references individual properties back to government collection databases and will mean that 100% of Property Tax notices can be issued effectively. Once an evaluation has been completed the council will be able to roll out this good practice to other areas.

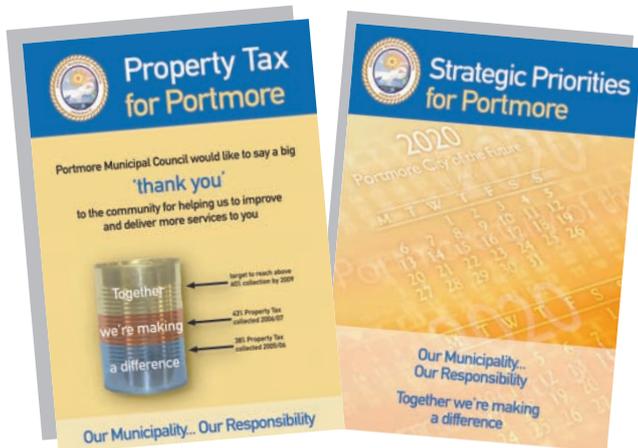


< Cedar Grove before



Cedar Grove >  
after





## Overall project benefits

- Predicted increases in the levels of Property Tax compliance through raising awareness with the local community of how financial contributions are resulting in better services for all citizens.
- The setting of Strategic Priorities has focused officers of PMC and given direction to the delivery of services for the future prosperity of the municipality.
- The sharing of best practice and exchanging of skills and knowledge has increased the capacity and skills of the staff at PMC to be better prepared to face the challenges and deliver more effective and better services to their citizens.

Like other partnerships working through the Good Practice Scheme, the people working on the project found that there were additional benefits to those planned.

For instance the relationships developed during the exchange visits have created future spin offs such as potential linkages with the private sector; from small interventions like brokering and facilitating key agency meetings, progress has been significant in terms of assisting and creating more positive and long term working relationships.

While the local property tax campaign in Portmore was in operation, a national campaign was launched which has complemented the local campaign. Changes in the retention and use of revenue associated with Property Tax collection has meant that Jamaican local authorities now have a real sense of commitment to Property Tax collection.

## Follow up

The partnership is continuing work to publish an evaluation newsletter which will be distributed to the citizens in Portmore to assess their awareness of the project and what impact it has made to their community and lives. Monitoring will continue in various forms particularly around compliance rates and issuing of Property Tax notices in Cedar Grove.

The two councils have identified a number of follow-up future partnership projects including:

- Master planning and visionary work to help capitalise on the potential tourism opportunities the coastline has to offer. The creation of a vision for Port Henderson will enable investors and stakeholders to use the major development opportunity potential and in time establish itself as a tourist destination, which will subsequently attract significant additional tourist spend into Portmore.
- The rolling out the Cedar Grove numbering project to other areas of the municipality.
- Development of the strategic plan around the construction of new municipal council offices and making this happen in a way that represents the needs of the citizens of Portmore.

The project is part of the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme, which has been managed by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, over the past nine years. Local authorities have been working together on a range of practical activities aimed at improving the quality, and impact on people's lives, of local government services in South Africa, India, Ghana and Jamaica.