

To be included in the Partner Updates

Parish Council visits

Early in 2011, Cllr Mayes (Chairman of the Area Board) and Richard Rogers (Community Area Manager) wrote to all the Parish Councils in the community area, offering to meet with them. The purpose was to simply spend some time talking, listening and sharing. The hope was that through doing this, we could develop an improved relationship and that the Area Board could better understand and address the needs of the rural parishes

10 of the 18 Parish Councils accepted the offer and generally all who attended found it to be a very useful time. This was particularly true when we met as a smaller group which allowed for open discussion to take place in an informal setting. There were some specific individual concerns that Parish Councils had and we are working with them so that they can be addressed. There were also some key generic messages that arose from the conversation. These were:

1. *The status of Parish Councils at an Area Board meeting*

As a result, at Area Board meetings, the Chairman will ask Parish Councils for comments before asking others who have attended. There is a table reserved for Parish Council reps, but they must make it clear when they are speaking on behalf of their Parish Council and when they are speaking as an individual

2. *A reminder that not only are rural Parish Councils different to the Town Council, but they are often very different to each other. There is a whole spectrum of differing expectations*

As a result we agreed that we agreed that whilst we can't tailor everything for each Parish, we will be more conscious of these differences particularly in our communication with them. We will also look to hold a future Area Board meeting that is specifically aimed at rural Parish Councils.

3. *Parish Councils were often trying to tackle similar issues, some of which the Area Board could help with.*

As a result we will actively encourage joint parish working and promote the role of the Parish Forum as a way for Parish Councils to share common concerns, best practice and work together. Examples include work with young people, ASB and allotment provision.

4. *Communication needed to be better regarding concerns, actions and issues*

As a result we recognised that Parish Councils do not always have time to read the information and minutes that we produce. We will therefore aim to contact Parish Councils directly and frequently to ensure that they are kept informed on issues that they have raised. We are also encouraging everyone, but especially Parish Council clerks and members to join the Community Area Network so that they can receive all mailings directly. Parish Councils were also encouraged to be pro-active and ask for any information they are after before they become frustrated. It was recognised that given the number of different tasks to be undertaken, it is easy for some to slip off the radar.

5. *It is difficult to cope with the high volume of consultation and information and to know what is important and what isn't*

As a result, the Area Board will work with Wiltshire Council and its partners to help them improve their communication. In particular, it was recognised that consultation that is really about information needs to be labelled that way, any communication produced should be easy to understand, and local short summaries of consultation documents should be produced wherever possible.

6. *There was a lack of understanding of how the various bodies worked together and their roles. These included the Area Board, Community Area Partnerships, Parish Forum and Wiltshire Assembly*

As a result, the Area Board will produce and circulate a short 1 page easy to read guide. It will also work to strengthen the link between the Area Board and the Wiltshire Assembly that sets the priorities for the County.

7. *Understanding and responding to the localism Bill*

As a result the Area Board ran a special meeting to try and explain the meaning and impact of the proposed Localism Bill. It has also committed itself to supporting the community in producing Neighbourhood plans and in taking forward any new initiatives that the Bill may bring about.

Several Parish Councils asked if we would be willing to come back each year and meet with them again. We think that this could be useful and would be willing to try and meet up where this would be of benefit. If you did not accept the offer to meet but now wish to do so, then please contact Richard Rogers.