

From Pewsey Community Area Partnership to Pewsey Area Board

THE PROBLEM OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND THE NEED FOR HARD COPY

There have been several examples recently where the Local Authority and other agencies have wished to consult the community electronically. When a hard copy of the document has been requested none has been available.

The reason for this is probably an attempt to economise which, although laudable, does not achieve the required result which is to enable the community at large to respond.

The reasons for not being able to access electronic information are fairly obvious but it may help to spell some of them out:

1. A fairly large number of people do not have computers.
2. It is not easy or comfortable to read long, often complicated, documents on screen.
3. The cost of computers, printers and paper may be prohibitive. In any case why should volunteers spend considerable sums of money replicating something someone else wants them to read, however interesting it might be?
4. Quite often the medium the correspondence is sent in is incompatible with the soft ware on the recipient's computer.
5. Colour printing is not always available in the home environment which can invalidate colour keys which are often used in the original.

We often hear the term 'hard to reach' groups and such a category is being formed by those who cannot obtain hard copy of documents they are being asked to comment on. This can surely not be what Local Authority and the public services desire and would be quite contrary to the Compact initiatives.

It is therefore considered essential that those initiating information for consultation also make it available in hard copy which can be acquired on request. This does not, of course, mean that they should not use electronic means, which in the majority of cases will be the medium of choice, but those who cannot accept information in such a way or find it very difficult have an alternative. Best of all would be some method for potential recipients to register their need for hard copy, this would save time requesting each time they become aware of a survey, consultation, etc.

The Area Board provides electronic copies with hard copies sent to parish clerks and available at the meeting. It is felt that this is a good example of adequate provision and economy.

The Area Board is requested to support this proposal and to convey the request with its support to the WCC Cabinet for necessary internal action and onward transmission to other services with a request to comply.

