MARLBOROUGH AREA BOARD
29 May 20112

Area Board Development

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   At the September 2011 Marlborough Area Board meeting it was agreed that the
        Board would focus on a number of improvements, including the following areas:
        - Reducing length of agenda
        - Reducing paperwork
        - Increasing number of local items

1.2   This report looks at the changes that have been made so far under each of
        these three headings. It also looks at the results of a survey of meeting
        attendees and discusses a number of other changes Marlborough Area Board
        might make in order to further improve meetings and increase attendance at
        them.

2.   Statistics from Area Board meetings

2.1   As a way of comparing the three aspects of meetings mentioned above, three
        board meetings were looked at as a "before" sample and three as an "after"
        sample. These were April, June and September 2011then November 2011,
        February and May 2012. The March 2012 meeting was not included in either
        sample as this was an unusual meeting at which only grants were dealt with
        and no other items taken.

2.2   **Reducing length of agenda**: Looking at the "before" sample, there were 28
        main agenda items (not including Apologies, etc) and a total of 53 items on the
        three agendas in question. Looking at the "after" sample of meetings, the
        number of main items had reduced to 23, with 36 items in total being on the
        three agendas. This indicates a reduction in length of agendas which is
        reflected in a corresponding decrease in the time taken by meetings in the
        "after" sample.

2.3   **Reducing paperwork**: This figure includes the number of pages within the agenda
        pack and the number of packs printed by Wiltshire Council and available at
        meetings. Of the "before" sample, in April '11 there were 100pages x 60 copies; in
        June '11 there were 52pages x 60copies and in September '11 there were 54pages
        x 37copies. This means there were 11,118 pages printed for these three meetings.
        Of the "after" sample, in November '11 there are 42pages x 40copies, in February
        '12 there were 98pages x 40copies and in May '12 there were 100pages x 40copies.
        This gives a total of 9,600 pages printed. This is a reduction of around 1,500 pages.

2.4   The number of pages per pack has increased over last 2 meetings as it was thought
        better to provide information in writing within the pack and on the website, rather
        than to spend time providing the information verbally at the meeting. Future
        monitoring of requests for packs may allow the number being printed to be reduced
        further.

2.5 Printed copies have been reduced to save on paperwork by providing 2 full copies of the agenda per table at the meeting, rather than 1 per person. All paperwork can also be viewed on the Council's website. In addition, fewer paper copies are circulated by post which has reduced postage costs. Paper copies are still made available on request.

2.6 **Increasing number of local items**: For the purposes of this exercise it has been defined as items which relate exclusively to the Marlborough Community Area (i.e. not County-wide issues). Community Area Grants have not been included in this figure. It is worth bearing in mind that county-wide items also impact on the area, and efforts are made to ensure that presentations are relevant to the Community Area, as opposed to being generic information provided across the county.

2.7 The table below shows how the percentage of local items has increased from the "before" sample to the "after" one:

Date of meeting	Number of Local items	%age of local items
April 2011	3/11	27%
June 2011	2/10	20%
Sept 2011	3/14	21%
Nov 2011	3/6	50%
Feb 2012	2/7	29%
May 2012	5/10	50%

This shows an increase in the proportion of items on the agenda that are considered to be local.

3. Area Board Satisfaction Survey

3.1 In July 2011, Wiltshire Council's Area Boards Team carried out a survey of all people on the Community Area Networks from all 18 area boards. The results of this survey were analysed for each area board. This showed a number of attributes of the Marlborough Area Board that attendees perceived were doing well and others that needed improvement.

3.2 Attendees of the Marlborough Area Board showed slightly below average satisfaction with the board, with 48% agreeing the area board was working well compared to 52% for Wiltshire overall.

3.3 On balance (total agreeing minus total disagreeing) 61% of Marlborough attendees agreed that the board was making good use of internet-based communications, 55% agreed that Community Area Newsletter was useful and informative and 51% agreed that board meetings are accessible for all.

3.4 Looking at those attributes of the board that attendees agreed with the least, the survey showed 16% agreed that area boards have adequate powers, 16% agreed that Wiltshire Councillors take a leading role in resolving local issues (compared to 36% county-wide) and -4% agreed the area boards are consulting widely with the community. This minus figure comes from 34% of Marlborough attendees agreeing with the statement but 38% disagreeing.

3.5 These points have been discussed by Marlborough Area Board members recently and are actively being work on. The low satisfaction with consultation with communities may be a symptom of the Marlborough area not having an active Community Area Partnership able to carry out wide-reaching consultations on behalf of the area board with a range of different groups from the community area. This is a result that is similar with other community areas without active Community Area Partnerships.

3.6 The survey also asked about a number of features that might encourage people to attend more often. These included "a greater chance to have my say" (44%), "more topics I can make a decision on" (40%) and "meetings to be held at different times of the day" (34%). These have also been discussed by Marlborough Area Board members and possible changes will be discussed below.

4. Comments from Marlborough Area Parish Forum

4.1 The Marlborough Area Board has received a number of comments from the Parish Forum. These are encouraging and also suggest a number of areas where the board might improve.

4.2 Many of the Forum's comments focus on the way board meetings are used by Wiltshire Council departments and others to communicate information, the amount of local debate that is possible at these meetings and the ability to make decisions, both by the Area Board members and by attendees.

5. Proposals for Changes

5.1 It is proposed that Marlborough Area Board develop a number of protocols for those wishing to present to board meetings whereby meetings are used less to simply communicate information to attendees but to meaningfully consult with them. The aim of this will be to give attendees of the meeting a greater opportunity to shape local services.

5.2 Ways to increase this opportunity might be to insist on presenters holding a question and answer session as part of their agenda item in order to stimulate debate on this topic or to insist that as part of their presentation they give the audience at least two options to choose from based on the information that has been provided. This could be facilitated through greater use of the electronic voting handsets or other means.

6. Recommendation

6.1 It is recommended that Marlborough Area Board recognise the findings of the surveys used within this report and begin to develop the protocols discussed at section 5 within this report that will begin to address these findings.