

Report to	Malmesbury Area Board
Date of Meeting	15 September 2010
Title of Report	Parish Council Involvement with Malmesbury Area Board
<p>Purpose of Report</p> <p>To ask Councillors to consider the feedback from two recent 'Tea & Talk' events with town/parish councils within the community area and consider implementing the following recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information about the Community Issues process and how issues are handled is sent to parish councils. 2. That more time is allocated on area board agendas to consider the Issues report and that a group of similar issues e.g. road safety is considered in depth at each meeting. 3. Councillors instigate more round table meetings between partners to resolve community issues. 4. Community issues are forwarded to parish/town councils to gauge whether they are collective/community issues or individual issue more appropriate as ward work for councillors 5. Parish councils be invited to ask their councillors to sign up individually to the CAN to ensure the speedy delivery of Malmesbury Area Board information 6. M&VCAP are encouraged to revitalise their contact with parishes/parish councils 7. M&VCAP are encouraged to re-present their Partner Update for the Area Board, to concentrate on punchy information about their current projects and inviting specific community involvement. 8. The area board consider issues from M&VCAP's parish forum as items for future debate/consideration. 9. The divisional highways team is requested to produce an annual plan for the Malmesbury community area of work to be carried out and provide email alerts to the parish clerk where it conflicts with the monthly plan already circulated to parish councils. 10. The area board consider hosting a special area board to consider a wide range of housing issues relevant to the needs of the Malmesbury community area 11. The area board consider limiting the number of items on future agendas to ensure greater input from attendees. 	

1. Background

- 1.1. The community area is made up from 20 parishes which are served by the Malmesbury Area Board.
- 1.2. Parish and town councils seek to represent the views of their community and as such have an important role to play in the community governance arrangements of Wiltshire Council, playing a valuable role in promoting involvement in local democracy.
- 1.3. During the winter 2009/10 a comprehensive review of the area boards was undertaken, examining the first 6 months of their operation. This involved electronic surveys and a workshop aimed at councillors, parish/town councils, officers, partners and the general public, which was held in Devizes on 8 March 2010. This data was subsequently used to inform a report to Cabinet on 23 March 2010. A copy of this report is available from the Council's website (<http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=3434>)
- 1.4. Key recommendations from the report relating to parishes were as follows:
 - ✓ That parishes be encouraged to form clusters, forums and alliances within (and across) community areas to share knowledge, experience and concerns and to put forward items for consideration by the Area Boards.
 - ✓ That Area Boards communications be sent by email to all parish councillors through the community area network.
 - ✓ Those examples of successful collaborations between parish councils and area boards are promoted to demonstrate the successful outcomes that the new arrangements are delivering.
 - ✓ That Area Boards are expected to meet at a range of urban and rural venues.
 - ✓ That the Area Boards Handbook is revised to set out more clearly the role, rights and responsibilities of parish representatives upon the Area Boards and that this is circulated as a separate information sheet for parish and town councillors.
 - ✓ That Community Area Managers will offer to give presentations and host discussions about the local Area Boards for parish and town councils in the area.
- 1.5. In early summer, following ascertaining which were the best times to hold meetings, parish/town councils were contacted and Chairman, Clerk and Area Board representative invited to attend one of two 'Tea & Talk' events. These were held on the Wiltshire Council web site and hard copies available upon request. The meetings were on the afternoon of 28 June and the evening of 26 July 2010.

Background documents used in the preparation of this Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area Boards in Wiltshire Leaders Review – Cabinet Report 23 March 2010. • Notes from the two meeting with town/parish councils
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2. Main Considerations

- 2.1. Of the 20 parishes invited, Brokenborough, Easton Grey, Leigh, Malmesbury, Minety and Sopworth were unable to attend. Three of these are very small and rely on single individuals to undertake all roles.
- 2.2. An invitation has since been extended to those parishes who did not attend to visit them separately.
- 2.3. These informal events sought to cover the following topics, but allowed digression and sought to accommodate all issues:
 - How are area boards working for you?
 - Communications – including CAN sign up for all parish councillors
 - Would a parish council forum be useful?
 - Relationship with Malmesbury & Villages Community Area Partnership (M&VCAP)
- 2.4. By listening to the views of parishes there is an opportunity to improve not only the experiences of individuals and parish councils but also the Malmesbury area board.

3. Environmental & Community Implications

- 3.1. The devolution of decision making and community governance arrangements complies with the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for Wiltshire 2007-2016.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1. There are no specific Legal implications related to this report.

6. HR Implications

- 6.1. There are no specific HR implications related to this report.

7. Equality and Inclusion Implications

7.1. The decentralisation of decision-making and the new community governance arrangements in Wiltshire are aimed to improved access to the Council, its services and democratic process. These recommendations seek to further improve the situation at a local level.

8. Feedback from Parish Councils

8.1. Community Issues

8.1.1. Officers recommend that:

- Information about the Community Issues process and how issues are handled is sent to parish councils.
- That more time is allocated on area board agendas to consider the Issues report and that a group of similar issues e.g. road safety is considered in depth at each meeting.
- Councillors instigate more round table meetings between partners to resolve community issues.
- Community issues are forwarded to parish/town councils to gauge whether they are collective/community issues or individual issue more appropriate as ward work for councillors.

8.1.2. Not everyone was familiar with the process of how issues were raised by individuals/communities and how they were subsequently dealt with outside and area board meeting with partners and service providers.

8.1.3. It was felt that issues should be given greater importance on the area board agenda with more time allocated to their discussion and the opportunity to hold the council to account, the latter being promised when area boards were first introduced.

8.1.4. Where issues arise from an individual it was suggested that they be first forwarded to the appropriate parish council to ascertain whether it was a collective/community concern or not.

8.1.5. Some parishes were frustrated that some issues took so long to be resolved and that round table discussion away from the area board might help to sort matters out.

8.2. **Community Area Network (CAN)**

8.2.1. Officers recommend that:

- Parish councils be invited to ask their councillors to sign up individually to the CAN to ensure the speedy delivery of Malmesbury Area Board information

8.2.2. The Malmesbury area board Community Area Network (CAN) was discussed including the advantage of all members who had access to the internet to sign up wherever possible. Some parishes explained that they already had an effective electronic means of circulating information while others said many of their members did not use the internet so paper copies of information were still used. Personal details would only used for the CAN and could be removed on request.

8.3. **Malmesbury & Villages Community Area Partnership (M&VCAP)**

8.3.1. Officers recommend that:

- M&VCAP are encouraged to revitalise their contact with parishes/parish councils
- M&VCAP are encouraged to re-present their Partner Update for the Area Board, to concentrate on punchy information about their current projects and inviting specific community involvement.
- The area board consider issues from M&VCAP's parish forum as items for future debate/consideration.

8.3.2. Parishes wanted better communication between the parishes and M&VCAP, whether it was a newsletter, Face book or website. They didn't want to be overloaded with masses of emails, but links to websites was fine. Parish magazines were also an untapped resource and one of the parish councillors subsequently provided M&VCAP with a list of local contacts.

8.3.3. Parishes were concerned about the very small steering group and lack of public meetings. The chairman of M&VCAP was able to explain that two public meetings were planned for the autumn and that the steering group size was not by design but lack of people willing to join and be actively involved.

8.3.4. The relationship between parishes, the area board and M&VCAP was discussed. M&VCAP represented the voluntary sector across the whole of the community area who worked cooperatively with the community partners and the area board to help to consult, facilitate and achieve priority actions within the Community Plan plus those constantly arising from the community.

8.3.5. It was recognised that more could be achieved collectively than working in isolation and the idea of a parish forum being established as a sub-group of M&VCAP was discussed and a councillor expressed willingness to take on the

co-ordination. It was hoped that common issues arising from such a group would carry more weight at the area board and would be likely to engender greater community support/volunteering from within the parishes.

8.4. Parish Council Forums

- 8.4.1. There seemed mileage in a collective parish view to present ideas to either the Area Board or M&VCAP. Many parishes agreed that a forum should be established as a sub-group of M&VCAP (see above M&VCAP recommendation).
- 8.4.2. Some parishes favoured the idea of a divisional cluster, while others felt no advantage in having a collective voice.

8.5. Highways

8.5.1. Officers recommend that:

- The divisional highways team is requested to produce an annual plan for the Malmesbury community area of work to be carried out and provide email alerts to the parish clerk where it conflicts with the monthly plan already circulated to parish councils.

8.5.2. Parish councils felt an annual list of planned highways work would be helpful. Parishes also requested an email alert to the parish clerk to notify when works were to be undertaken, however a timetable is already provided in the monthly parish newsletter.

8.6. Housing

8.6.1. Officers recommend that:

- The area board consider hosting a special area board to consider a wide range of housing issues relevant to the needs of the Malmesbury community area

8.6.2. Concern was expressed about 'choice based lettings' as this had resulted in people from outside the community getting accommodation rather than local people.

8.6.3. The question was asked to whether housing needs surveys being undertaken?

8.6.4. A special area board meeting devoted to housing would be useful, to include input from all local housing providers such as Jephson, Guinness and Westlea.

8.7. Area Board Improvements

8.7.1. Officers recommend that:

- The area board consider limiting the number of items on future agendas to ensure greater input from attendees.

8.7.2. The general feeling was that the area boards were improving all the time and were a good sounding board for issues to be discussed. There was a mixed view about the level of decision making taking place.

8.7.3. There was a general consensus that there was too much on the agenda and they would rather see fewer items with more time to discuss them, which should include more input from the floor and a desire to gather information not just project it. Some wanted to be more involved in influencing budget allocation/prioritisation, while factual information could be provided on an information sheet, rather than via a presentation. A faster turn round of the minutes would be appreciated.

8.7.4. A few felt that 'Malmesbury Area Board' was not an inclusive enough name to reflect the whole community and felt that too many of the matters discussed related to the town only.

8.7.5. Venues for area boards were discussed and parishes requested to forward details of possible new venues, which were difficult to find in a rural area.

9. Conclusions

9.1. The meetings proved a very useful way of informally engaging with the parish councils and gave them an opportunity to share ideas and contribute ideas for improvements.

9.2. It would seem sensible to offer similar meetings next year, when they might be offered through the M&VCAP parish council forum.

The following background papers were used in preparation of this report: 'Tea & Talk' Notes of meeting between town/parish councils and Malmesbury community area manager 28 June 2010' and 'Tea & Talk' Notes of meeting between town/parish councils and Malmesbury community area manager 26 July 2010' and are available on request.

Report Author	Miranda Gilmour, Community Area Manager Tel: 01672 515742 Mobile:07990 505882 E-mail: miranda.gilmour@wiltshire.gov.uk
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