WILTSHIRE COUNCIL **AGENDA ITEM NO. 5 (2)**

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TRANSITION BOARD
8 MAY 2009

AREA BOARD DEVELOPMENT PHASE: FINAL REPORT

Executive Summary

The Area Board development phase drew to a close at the end of March 2009 and the Area Boards Development Team has spent the intervening period evaluating the results of nine months of participative pilots and associated consultation. The project was completed in accordance with the original timescales adopted by the Implementation Executive (IE) and the recommendations set out in this report relate to the constitutional, policy, resource and operational matters necessary to facilitate the establishment of 18 fully empowered and participatory Area Boards for Wiltshire.

Recommendations:

1) That the recommendations set out in this report be adopted and the additional resource requirements be approved;

2) That the Director for Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to draft the Council's constitution in accordance with these decisions for adoption by the new Council in June.

3) That the Director Community Leadership and Governance be authorised to:

   (a) revise the Area Boards Handbook to accommodate the outcome of the evaluation process and the decisions here adopted; and

   (b) ensure that all necessary arrangements are made to implement these recommendations in readiness for the first Area Board meetings in June.

Reason for Proposal

These proposals facilitate the introduction of 18 fully empowered Area Boards and associated community governance arrangements for the new Wiltshire Council. The proposals will underpin the more extensive guidance set out in the Area Boards Handbook.

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AREA BOARD DEVELOPMENT PHASE
FINAL REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The Area Board development phase drew to a close at the end of March 2009 and the Area Boards Development Team has spent the intervening period evaluating the results of nine months of participative pilots and associated consultation. The project was completed in accordance with the original timescales adopted by the Implementation Executive (IE) and the recommendations set out in this report relate to the constitutional, policy and operational matters necessary to facilitate the establishment of 18 fully empowered and participatory Area Boards for Wiltshire.

Background

2. The Area Boards development phase commenced on 1st June 2008 and involved participatory pilots in 13 community areas. Councillors from all three tiers participated actively in the pilots alongside public sector partners – Council services, the Police, Wiltshire NHS and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. Community Area Partnerships were fully engaged from the outset and there was extensive input from the voluntary sector including a very significant contribution from the Wiltshire Forum of Community Area Partnerships. Many, many organisations, individuals and businesses have contributed their time and expertise to the pilot project over the last 10 months. The Area Boards Development Team is very gratefully for these contributions and wishes to thank all participants for their support and enthusiasm.

3. This was a challenging project from the very outset. The area pilots were undertaken during a period of uncertainty and against a backdrop of understandable concerns about the new unitary Wiltshire Council. The project drew together a new seconded team of officers from across the County to develop, explain and test a range of new and innovative approaches with a very wide variety of participants. Timescales were always very tight. In addition, councillors were facing a period of uncertainty about there own futures.

4. Throughout; the project has been closely monitored by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board and the Area Boards Scrutiny Task Group. The positive contribution of the scrutiny members is acknowledged. In addition, councillors and officers from all four District Councils along with partner agencies were actively involved in monitoring the project through the Community Leadership and Governance Reference Group that reported to the CLG Board.

5. During the project a number of matters were agreed by the IE including the role of the Cabinet members, area budgets and funding model for allocating resources, boundaries, meeting dates and staffing resources.

These matters are not included again in this paper.

6. Finally, the work of Professor Gerry Stoker and Dr Corinne Wales from the University of Southampton is also acknowledged - their work has helped to inform this paper.

Main Considerations for the Implementation Executive

7. The evaluation examined 16 separate areas:

- The role of the Chair
- The leadership role of Councillors
- The role of the Community Area Manager
- The operation of the Area Boards Team
- The role of Democratic Services
- Managing Area Board meetings
- Delegated authority
- Working with Community Area Partnerships
- Working with parish and town councils
- Working with frontline services
- Dealing with local Issues and problem solving
- Communications
- Equalities and diversity
- Funding, budgets and grants
- Participation and public involvement
- Community planning

In addition, these new community governance arrangements need to be seen within their wider strategic context particularly the relationship with the Wiltshire Assembly. The remainder of this report sets out a brief summary of the key findings together with the recommendations requiring IE approval. The full evaluation papers are published as background papers and are available to download on the Council's website.

8. **Strategic Context**
Wiltshire's new community governance arrangements are intended to devolve power and influence to communities through the 'top down' delegation of decision making. However, the Area Boards must also influence strategic policy from the 'bottom up.' The pilot project has established two mechanisms to provide this two-way flow of influence:

- *The attendance of Cabinet members at Area Boards on a rotating basis* – this will ensure that communities can 'feed in' concerns about the operation of council policies at local level giving Portfolio Holders a county-wide view of the impact of the policies for which they are responsible. Policies can thus be shaped to better reflect the needs of local people.

- *Wiltshire Assembly and the Local Agreement for Wiltshire (LAW)* – The Area Boards will identify and consider local issues and priorities not all of which can be addressed through local action alone and

many issues will be common to all areas. It is important that this local intelligence is fed up into the consideration of strategic policy and the LAW. This will operate through the Community Leadership and Governance Steering Group and the Public Services Board for Wiltshire (previously the Accountable Bodies Group). Posts have been established within the CLG Service to ensure that these local issues are collected and fed into the system. This 'bottom-up' approach will be complemented by a 'top-down' intelligence-led strategic challenge process. An example of this is the recent Credit Crunch Report produced by George Bright for the Wiltshire Assembly – a strategic report that requires a response from Area Boards and Community Area Partnerships at local level. Area Boards are well placed to respond quickly to these strategic challenges through practical local projects and initiatives.

Together these mechanisms produce a strong unified governance system.

9. **The role of the Chair**

From the feedback and comments received during the pilots, it is clear how important the Chair will be in making the Area Boards a success. The Chairs will receive high levels of support from the Community Area Manager (CAM) and the local Democratic Services Officer (DSO). In return, Chairs will be expected to:

- Act as a spokesperson and advocate for the Board
- Chair meetings in a new informal and deliberative manner
- Liaise with service providers, partners and local groups
- Chair problem solving and consultative meetings
- Review issues and requests for action
- Oversee the work of the CAM and DSO
- Liaise with Chairs from other areas
- Work closely with the CAM and DSO
- Represent the Area at the Wiltshire Assembly
- Represent the Area Board at civic functions and events
- Make themselves available for interview and media relations
- Evaluate their performance in the light of public feedback.

This is a demanding but rewarding role - many of the Chairs remarked how they had enjoyed the new role during the pilots. However, much of the success of the Boards will rest on the shoulders of these individuals and for this reason it is recommended:

RECOMMENDED:

a) Chairs should be elected at the Annual Council meeting (or immediately thereafter) following the election to provide enough time to prepare for the first meetings of the Area Boards.

b) Training for Area Board Chairs and Vice Chairs is essential and should be accepted as an on-going requirement of the role.

c) The regular Area Board Chairs meeting should be retained and used as a way of sharing experience and developing expertise.

10. **The leadership role of Councillors**

It is clear from the pilots that the Area Boards will help members develop a meaningful community leadership role by providing increased opportunities for them to engage directly with local people and local issues. It will place them at the heart of local decision making and give them wider responsibility for securing the wellbeing of the area. Members will have greater power to influence the way local services are provided and will be better placed to respond to issues as they arise in the locality. Elected councillors will have a higher public profile than ever before in Wiltshire. However, councillors will also be under the spotlight as never before and it will be much easier for the public to hold them to account locally for their decisions and actions. The success of the Area Boards will hinge on the active and enthusiastic participation of all local councillors; for this reason it is recommended:

RECOMMENDED:

a) That a simple, focused and convenient training and development programme be developed by the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of Community Governance in consultation with members.

b) To respect the independence of the Community Area Partnership and to avoid conflicts of interest for members, Area Board members should not seek to become Chair of the local Community Area Partnership.

11. **The role of the Community Area Manager (CAM)**

The role of the Community Area Manager (CAM) is another important feature of the new community governance arrangements. The CAM will work very closely with the Chair and members of the Board, but they will also have an important multi-agency remit within the locality. It will be important for CAMs to work across traditional organisational and agency boundaries, developing networks, partnerships and relationships at the local level. They will act as advocates for the area, as facilitators and mediators - helping the Boards to broker agreements by bringing people together to solve local problems. CAMs will also have the following responsibilities (inter alia):

- Organising and supporting the work of the Area Boards with the Chair and Democratic Services Officer (DSO)
- Supporting the Chair and members in their community leadership role

- Working with unitary Councillors, Service Managers, Partner organisations and the community to ensure community priorities are addressed
- Facilitating partner involvement with Front Line Services (FLS) through collaborative relationships and partnership working.
- Developing strong relationships with partner organisations to encourage more joined up working
- Engaging in 1:1 meetings where appropriate with stakeholders to encourage their involvement
- Promoting the Area Boards beyond the Community Area boundaries in order to deal with people's issues that cross neighbouring areas
- Ensuring that the views of those people who are reluctant or unable to attend Board meetings are heard, and supporting participants. Acting as an advocate for groups needing a voice in the area
- Providing advice about funding available and mechanisms to access resources.
- Ensuring publicity/media coverage in conjunction with members of the Communications Team
- Developing, maintaining and managing community databases and the Community Area Network (CAN).
- Producing and distributing the Community Area Newsletter
- Maintain and publish a log of issues referred to the Area Board
- With the support of the Chair, to arrange and facilitate discussions aimed at resolving or clarifying local issues prior to submission to the Area Board. This might involve roundtables, workshops, public meetings, stakeholder briefings, etc.
- To prepare, publish and keep up to date a forward plan for the Area Board.

CAMs will need appropriate organisational support to enable them to be effective in this challenging role, therefore it is recommended:

RECOMMENDED:

a) To foster and strengthen inter-agency and collaborative working at locality level, CAMs should be provided with appropriate orientation training with frontline services and key partners agencies and thereafter maintain close organisational links.

b) That financial, performance and other service data should be collected within the SAP system in such a way that it facilitates comparison and use at Area Board level and is accessible to the CAMs

c) That within the limits of the Data Protection Act, CAMs be given access to corporate databases – such as Merlin, NNDR, Council Tax and Electoral Register - to facilitate the creation of Community Area (communications) Networks within each area.
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12. **The Operation of the Area Boards Team**
The Community Area Managers have been structured into three locality teams, working from Chippenham, Trowbridge and Salisbury. The teams each consist of six community area managers, a team leader, partnership support officer and an administrator.

13. **The Role of Democratic Services**
It was clear from the pilots that Democratic Services officers have a key role to play in providing legal, administrative and member support for the Area Boards. Their role will include maintaining the Forward Plan, booking venues, providing guidance on constitutional and code of conduct issues, publishing agendas, writing minutes, tracking decisions, supporting and training members. Administrative Support Officers from the Democratic Services team will also be available to assist with all aspects of the preparation and facilitation of Area Board meetings.

14. **Managing Area Board meetings**
Area Board meetings are the most visible element of Wiltshire's new community governance arrangements. For this reason, they must be managed in a professional and consistent manner to provide a positive experience for participants. Feedback received during the pilot project clearly shows the importance of managing meetings in an informal, open and inclusive manner to encourage participation. Good publicity, relevant local items and adequate notice of matters to be discussed all help to encourage people to attend and participate. During the pilots, many meetings were let down by poor audio-visual equipment and it is vital that good technical support is available to ensure meetings run smoothly and are truly accessible for all. The importance of good meeting management and planning cannot be underestimated. Meeting in the evening at accessible local venues with light refreshments was preferred by most participants. The public also commented on the importance of being made to feel welcome and kept informed during the meeting. The frequency of meetings is also an important issue - it is important that meetings do not become the sole purpose of the new area governance arrangements and that there is adequate time between meetings to progress issues and engage the wider community.

The public also welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues directly with councillors and partners before decisions were taken. The Pilots have shown that facilitated round-table discussions are popular with both the public and councillors and these new approaches should be encouraged and extended. The following recommendations aim to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across the County based on a new style of open, inclusive and participatory meetings:

RECOMMENDED:

a) Each Area Board shall publish a Forward Plan of forthcoming agenda items that is kept up to date during the year to give members, the public, parishes and the media adequate notice of the issues that are to be considered.

b) An Area Board Coordinating (ABC) Group shall be established in each area comprising (as a minimum) the Chair, CAM and DSO who should meet informally between meetings to progress actions, review issues, prepare and approve agendas and forward plans, liaise with frontline services and to plan meetings.

c) Media support should be provided for each meeting including: press release, newspaper advertisement (as appropriate), poster and direct email to community area network (linked to a social networking style website).

d) For reasons of sustainability, Area Board documents should be circulated electronically as far as possible, recognising that hard copies should also be available at the meeting and for those that need them.

e) An explanatory Area Board leaflet should be produced with a separate slip for each Board with photos and contact details of the local members

f) Light refreshments should be provided before Area Board meetings

g) Area Board meetings should be held in the evening to maximise attendance

h) Area Boards should meet every two months with a maximum of 8 meetings per year.

i) Area Board agendas should be arranged in two parts – community interest items first, followed by routine and 'council' business.

j) Parish councils, partners and the public shall have a right to refer issues for consideration by the Board. A simple procedure should be adopted to ensure that such issues are balanced, based on evidence, costed and include the views of relevant parties.

k) The set–up of meetings should be of an informal inclusive nature, preferring the 'café style' over the formal 'Board Room' style.

l) Area Boards should be free to set up Task and Finish Groups to examine specific issues, drawing in the CAP and partners as appropriate.

m) Area Boards are encouraged to reach decisions by consensus where possible. It is considered that all participants should be involved in the process of consensus-forming, subject to the final approval of the democratically elected unitary representatives. Chairs may use a 'show of hands' to test the strength of a consensus before the elected members confirm (or reject) a proposal.

n) That technical support staff be provided to set up meeting rooms and technical equipment, including room layout, audio systems, projectors, exhibition boards, loop system, handheld voting sets, video, etc. This expertise needs to be drawn from the Media Team and will require an increased capacity which can be utilised by the whole organisation. These staff should be trained in health and safety matters and be available during the meeting in case of any technical hitches.

o) That good quality and robust audio visual and loop systems be procured to include wireless, roving and lapel microphones and such equipment should be used at all future Area Board meetings.

15. **Delegated authority**

Local councillors are held to account by the electorate based on the quality of services provided in the locality and their ability to respond effectively to local concerns and issues. Area Boards will increase the local accountability of elected councillors and it is therefore essential that they are provided with power to influence local services and respond effectively to local issues. This will require delegation of meaningful powers to the Boards. It is considered that the new council's scheme of delegation should be based on a principle of 'subsidiarity' (a decision should be devolved to a level coterminous with its impact). This will also help to free the Cabinet to deal with strategic policy issues. The proposed scheme of delegation to Area Boards will operate concurrently with the Scheme of Delegation to Cabinet Members and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and these will be drafted to reflect the principles set out in this report.

Equitable service standards should be set centrally following consultation with Area Boards and the Boards should concentrate on assessing the local impact of those services. To do this effectively Area Boards will need access to service and performance data at local level.

It is important that Area Boards are consulted on the development of strategic policies to ensure that local priorities and concerns are taken into account. The Boards should also be consulted where significant service changes, reductions or closures are planned within the community area. Attendance of Portfolio Holders at Area Board meetings will greatly strengthen this process and has been welcomed by the pilot Boards. It is considered that Area Boards should not play a direct role in the determination of planning applications. However, they

should be involved in the consideration of planning gain associated with larger developments, pre-application discussions relating to major developments, consideration of planning briefs and the development of Local Development Framework policies.

To enable Area Boards to sort out local problems and concerns, they will need powers, influence and support from the council to deliver. The following recommendations will provide the Boards with the authority to be effective in this role:

RECOMMENDED:

a) The delegation of powers to the Area Board shall be based on the following principle of subsidiarity:

Provided a decision does not:

- have a significant impact outside of the area concerned,
- impact significantly on the overall resources of the council,
- contradict any policy or service standard set by the council
- involve the taking of regulatory or quasi-judicial decisions
- relate to the exercise of functions in respect of any particular person, including any individual member of staff.

it shall fall to be determined by the local Area Board

b) Any key decision or strategic policy proposal of the council that has or is likely to have a significant impact in the local area, shall be first subject of consultation with the Area Board.

c) Councillor 'calls for action' and local petitions shall be referred in the first instance to the appropriate Area Board for consideration and thereafter to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should no local resolution be forthcoming. A joint protocol to be prepared defining the relationship between the Boards and Overview and Scrutiny in this regard.

d) Local service performance data and budget information should be disaggregated to community area level to facilitate local service assessment by the Area Boards.

16. **Working with Community Area Partnerships (CAP)**
CAPs are a less formal confederation of those public services, community groups, voluntary organisations and business that are so important to the wellbeing of our communities. As such, they are central to the Council's new community governance arrangements. The Community Area Partnership Agreement adopted by the Implementation Executive sets out this commitment and the council's obligations, including core funding and support. In return the CAPs will focus on the

delivery of the community plan for the local area and the identification of local priorities and projects. The following recommendations below identify those factors which need to be addressed in order to forge a strong relationship between the Boards and the CAPs:

RECOMMENDED:

a) Wiltshire Council agrees to work with the Wiltshire Forum of Community Area Partnerships (WfCAP) to develop a CAP accreditation and review scheme.

b) Simple annual review criteria should be developed that focus on the requirements of the CAPA and WfCAP minimum operating standards and include a review of the community planning processes. The outcome of this review should inform a development plan for each CAP that the Council, WfCAP and the CAPs will work towards achieving.

c) CAPs should provide an annual report to the Area Board (and its own AGM) setting out its activities and achievements over the year, an account of its expenditure and income and the outcome of the annual review together with measures that are to be taken to address any of the findings.

d) Each Area Board shall appoint a Unitary Councillor to attend CAP meetings. The Unitary Councillors should not become Chair or have a vote at these meetings.

e) Each CAP should be requested to appoint a representative to attend Area Board meetings.

17. **Working with town and parish councils**

Parish councils participated in all pilot areas and have provided valuable input into the process. Many of the concerns raised by town and parish councils have been previously reviewed by the IE as part of its consideration of the report on the boundaries of the Area Boards in March. It is important to restate in this paper the importance of parish and town council involvement - the evidence from the pilot phase suggests that the relationship between the new Wiltshire Council and the local councils will be greatly enhanced through the effective operation of the Area Boards.

However, a relatively small number of local councils have expressed concern that they are not provided with a formal vote at the Area Board meetings. There are several reasons for this:

- Delegating powers to Boards over which elected unitary councillors have no effective control would undermine democracy by blurring accountability for local decisions.

- It would be inappropriate for town and parish councils to have powers to impose decisions for which they are neither legally or electorally accountable.

- It could create opportunities for town and parish councils to impose decisions upon a neighbouring parish against its wishes.

- There would be no reciprocal rights for unitary councillors to vote at town and parish meetings

Notwithstanding this, town and parish councils should be encouraged to play a leading role in the work of the boards and it is recommended:

RECOMMENDED:

a) That each town and parish council be provided with a right of representation at the Area Board at which their unitary councillor is a member.

b) That each parish council is welcome to attend neighbouring Board meetings as appropriate and may address such meetings on issues affecting the parish.

c) That to enable parish and town councils to fully engage with the Area Boards, a forward plan providing adequate notice of issues to be considered by the Board or activities that are planned be published and kept up to date.

d) That parish and town councils be given the right to comment on all items on the agenda of the Area Boards (with the exception of any occasional 'exempt' items).

e) Unitary councillors should be encouraged to attend parish council meetings to develop stronger relationships between the councils.

f) Only Unitary Councillors to have a formal 'vote' on Wiltshire council business at Area Board meetings and the handbook be drafted to incorporate further guidance on how this will operate.

g) The Area Boards should replace existing parish and town council consultative forums – such as budget consultation and parish liaison meetings.

17. **Working with frontline services**
There has been excellent involvement of the public service partners - Police, Fire & Rescue, PCT - during the pilot phase and commitments have been received that this will continue once the Area Boards are established. The Police have restructured neighbourhood policing teams to fit with the new Area Board boundaries. There have been many productive examples of collaborative working that suggest the new

governance arrangements will strengthen the 'one public service' approach – multi-agency input into issue resolution was particularly encouraging. Involvement of council services has been good overall, but varied slightly between services and areas. Some council service staff have expressed reservations about being put into the 'firing line' and some may need additional training and development in this area. This is an important issue; it is essential that the Area Boards develop a positive relationship with their local frontline services, rather than a challenging or antagonistic approach that will make officers more reluctant to attend meetings. It is important that the Council's protocol on member/officer relations is followed at all times. It is recognised that FLS time and resources are already stretched and the new community governance arrangements need to provide extra support rather than additional burdens. With this in mind, it is recommended:

RECOMMENDED:

a) That a simple guide be produced for officers required to attend the Area Board meetings setting out how the meetings operate, what information should be provided, how presentations should be made and how the public and stakeholders will be involved in the discussion.

b) That the Council's protocol on member/officer relationships be used to ensure that FLS and partner officers attending Area Board meetings are treated fairly and not subjected to hostile or aggressive behaviours.

c) That any officer submitting a report to an Area Board for consideration should whenever possible attend in person to present the report and take part in the discussion

d) Community Area Managers should be provided with orientation training provided by FLS departments and other public service agencies.

e) Performance, service budget and research data should be collected by FLS departments in a way that facilitates analysis and comparison at area level.

f) Protocols should be developed for the sharing of data between FLS and public agencies.

g) That the Area Boards and Corporate Research Team work together to agree how statistical profiles, consultation and research will support the new community governance arrangements

18. **Dealing with local Issues and problem solving**
It was clear from the pilots that one of the key roles for the Area Boards will be to identify issues of genuine local concern and to respond quickly

and effectively with practical local action. To be able to do that the Boards must be aware of and fully understand the nature of the issue, the views of stakeholders and how such issues relate to the priorities for the area as set out in the community plan. Too often in the past decisions have been made in response to representations made by the most vocal interests in the community. In the future Area Boards will need to encourage different perspectives and views to be brought into the decision making process and they will need to challenge the community to think about some of the 'hidden' issues in Wiltshire. To facilitate this new deliberative approach, it is recommended:

RECOMMENDED:

a) That a simple form be developed to enable issues to be raised with the Area Board.

b) That a simple flow chart for dealing with issues be developed to ensure a consistent and fair approach across the County.

c) That the Area Boards Coordination Group to play a role in:

- The selection and scoping process
- Round table consultations and problem solving prior to meetings
- Fact finding, consultation and research
- Planning how issues will be considered at the AB meeting

d) That service professionals, stakeholders and those likely to be affected by the decision (including harder to reach groups) have an input prior to consideration of an issue by the Board.

e) These issues papers should be logged and made available online before meetings for consultation and discussion

f) Area Boards should establish Task and Finish groups to examine and report back on complex issues

g) Area Boards should be free to commission research to clarify issues, assess impact of decisions, etc

h) That issues for Area Boards could take the form of challenges set for the community from the Wiltshire Assembly, partner agencies or front line services – e.g. "we have a problem with childhood obesity, what should happen in your area to address this?"

19. **Communications**

It was clear from the pilots that good communication is crucial to the effective working of the Area Boards. A range of methods need to be deployed to successfully engage the widest range of local people,

partners and service providers. Web and email communication was favoured by most participants and is certainly most cost effective and sustainable. However, more traditional forma of publicity such as posters, newsletters and press notices also have an important role. The following recommendations would facilitate effective communication:

RECOMMENDED:

a) That a Community Area Network (communications database) be established in each community area. This will be open to anyone who wants to sign-up for email alerts, be managed jointly by the CAM, DSO and CAP and facilitate communications between all participants on a regular and sustained basis. To facilitate this, the council agrees to make available data from existing corporate databases.

b) That web based information - using email to direct people to online information held on a local website - is the preferred method of communicating with the public and partners, recognising always the needs of those who cannot access electronic sources of information.

c) The e-based network should have agenda, reports, minutes, diary of events, forward work programme, links to local organisations, contacts, feedback mechanisms and provide a medium for moderated discussion forums. The web site and e-based communication network should comply with the Data Protection Act, be easily navigable and be user friendly and kept up to date. The CAN database should afford individuals with an opportunity to opt-out at any time.

d) A high quality design template should be developed for all Area Boards material including posters, agenda, “just a minute” newsletters and reports for both paper and web based material.

20. **Equalities and diversity**

Throughout the pilot phase project managers experimented with variety of ways of engaging with marginalised or under-represented groups with some good results. The most effective approaches involved working closely with those service user groups, agencies, groups and individuals in our communities who are already engaging with minority communities. It is clear that these links need to be strengthened in the future – particularly with equalities organisations and with the Council’s own Equality & Diversity team. The Community Area Managers will undertake an equalities impact assessment of its work area and develop a programme to address any identified weaknesses. It was clear from the pilots that when thinking about equalities the needs other marginalised or excluded groups need to be taken into account – such as those without transport, parents of small children, night workers, etc.

It is an important responsibility of the Community Area Manager and the Chair of the Area Board to promote social inclusion by ensuring that the views of 'harder to reach' groups are brought into the consideration of issues – either directly through participation or through advocates, community leaders or recordings.

21. **Funding, budgets and grants**
The funding arrangements and budgets for Area Boards have previously been approved by the IE. The Community Area Managers have developed a grants scheme to assist Area Boards target funding to priority projects within the area. The following recommendations relate to the Wiltshire Area Grants Scheme:

RECOMMENDED:

a) The Wiltshire Area Grants Scheme be linked to the local community plan produced by the Community Area Partnership (CAP).

b) The CAM should oversee the administration and monitoring of the Area Grants Scheme with advice and support from the Grants Officer and the administration team.

c) In the case of all grant applications the Boards will expect to see match funding (financial or 'in kind') provided by the applicants.

d) That Area Boards be encouraged to develop 'participatory budgeting' approaches where possible.

22. **Participation and public involvement**
Area Board meetings are important because they demonstrate the commitment of the new council to devolve decision making to the locality but they should be viewed as part of a wider community engagement and community building agenda. Area Board meetings work best when they are organised in an inclusive, welcoming and informal style and where they provide opportunities for local people to discuss issues together and with their elected representatives. Participative and consultative processes need to be further joined-up to minimise the risk of consultation overload. The introduction of the Area Boards offers an opportunity to develop new approaches that aim to overcome some of the negative perceptions that exist about local consultation, these will include:

- Developing a range of innovative participation mechanisms including issues books, webcasting, social networks, video diaries, participatory budgeting, deliberative polling, priority trade-off, local juries, random sample polling and cross-county discussions, etc.

- Building capacity, awareness and confidence within the Community to participate in such approaches.

- Assisting councillors to develop a local leadership role, sensitive to diversity and committed to new methods of engagement.

- Develop a simple process by which individuals, organisations and partners can refer matters to the Boards. Following receipt of such issues the CAM should engage with those affected by the matter, including partner agencies, parish councils, local ward members and service managers to provide further input before submission to the Board. A log of all issues dealt with in this way should be published.

- Encourage 'quick win' projects alongside long term schemes, in order to nurture community confidence and demonstrate the benefits of engaging with the Board.

- Ensure that information and communication is accessible to everyone in the Community. (Plain English, translation service, large print etc.)

- Develop a feedback process to ensure that the participants can see that the impact of their involvement – positive or negative.

23. **Community planning**

The IE has previously approved the Community Area Partnership Agreement which sets out a new approach for community planning in Wiltshire. In future, the community will take the lead on developing its own plan setting out local issues, priorities and projects. The CAP will lead on developing the plan and it will be responsible for challenging the Board to respond. There is an acknowledgement however, that Community Planning requires significant resources and that Community Area Partnerships will need support, advice and guidance with this role. The recommendations set out below, set out those measures necessary to ensure that Community Planning is carried out effectively in the future:

RECOMMENDED:

a) There needs to be some consistency of approach to Community Planning across the County. Guidance on this should be produced by a working group made up of representatives of the Council, WfCAP and CAPs

b) CAMs should provide a strategic framework to support the development of community plans e.g. LAA targets, Sustainable Community Strategy, Community Area Profiles and Surveys.

c) The development of the Community Plan should be a 'project' which is eligible for funding from the Area Board

d) The Wiltshire Assembly should have an opportunity to refer issues to CAPs to ensure that key issues are addressed locally across Wiltshire.

e) Area Boards should endorse Community Plans when developed and Community Plans should be used to guide the work and decisions of the Area Boards

Environmental Impact of the Proposal
The decentralisation of decision making and community governance arrangements is in accordance with the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for Wiltshire 2007-2016.

Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal
The decentralisation of decision making and the new community governance arrangements in Wiltshire are aimed to improve access to the Council, its services and the democratic process. These recommendations and the additional arrangements set out in the Area Boards handbook address issues of Equality and Diversity in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

Risk Assessment
This report addresses the project risks set out in the Project initiation Document adopted by the Community Leadership and Governance Steering Group as part of the overarching One Council Programme. In particular it addresses the reputation risk associated with the failure to deliver robust and effective area governance proposals as set out in the unitary bid.

Financial Implications
With the exception of Recommendation 14n and 14o, there are no significant budget implications associated with this report. The IE has previously agreed the funding arrangements for the area governance proposals. It is recommended that the additional staff resource (14n) is identified from the redeployment pool and adjustments made in establishments as appropriate.

Legal Implications
These recommendations have been discussed and agreed with the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Governance Manager. These

Options Considered
A wide range of experimental options were tested during the pilot phase.

Conclusion
The adoption of the recommendations set out in this report will represent a significant step towards achieving the community governance proposals set out in the bid for unitary status.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Schedule of Area Board Meetings 2009/2010
Appendix 2: Schedule of Community Area Managers (at 1/5/09)
Appendix 3: Area Boundary Map