

## **Community Area Partnerships**

### **What is Wiltshire County Council proposing?**

We have described two possible models which are designed to build on the experience of successful Community Area Partnerships in parts of the County and to give local Councillors and partners more control over local services. After reflecting on the points made at the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> May, we strongly favour the model whereby:

- A broadly based Partnership is responsible for identifying the issues of local concern, acting as the focus for local consultation, considering local priorities for action, and
- within the Partnership, a smaller Board of Unitary and Town and Parish Councillors (plus Police, PCT if they agree to participate) is responsible for ensuring that the public services respond effectively to the Partnership's concerns

This model would build on successful experience in particular areas in Wiltshire. It also reflects the proposed relationship at the County level between the Wiltshire Assembly (former, the Strategic Board) and the Wiltshire Public Service Board, a sub-group of the Assembly which will ensure that the public services deliver their part of the Assembly's Local Area Agreement with Government.

### **Membership of Partnerships**

We would propose that all local Unitary Councillors – typically, 5 – in the area would be members of the Community Partnership, plus representatives of local Parish and Town Councils. The Partnerships should also include representatives of the voluntary and business sectors, and local community groups.

We do not wish to suggest changes to the membership of the existing Community Area Partnerships.

### **What resources would be provided?**

The Council would provide administrative support for Community Area Partnerships and Boards. Our Submission assumes that the total administrative budgets of County and District Councils for the purpose of supporting area work would be maintained. We calculate that they represent 15 FTE staff.

The Council would “level up” the development funding for each area to the current highest level among the Districts, of £50,000. The additional cost is included in the calculations in our Submission.

There is no intention to change the pattern of small grants which are currently allocated through some Partnerships.

### **Will services be more responsive to local needs? How much real local flexibility will the Council grant?**

The direction of local government services under these proposals will rest with Unitary and Town and Parish Councillors and, it is proposed, they will also take an overview of other

local public services (Police, Health, etc.). Each local service manager<sup>1</sup> will have extensive devolved responsibility and he/she will discharge that responsibility in accordance with the direction provided by the Board. The only constraints will be the resources available for the relevant service in the area and relevant County standards and policies. (These will vary depending upon the nature of the service, e.g. in social care the Council must apply consistent standards for eligibility, etc.) Local Unitary Councillors will act as the champions for their areas and will be able to argue the case for local priorities when the Council sets its overall annual budget for the County.

### **How will Community Area Partnerships and Area Boards be connected to the Council for Wiltshire?**

It is very important to enable close two-way communication between the Community Area Partnerships and the Council. We propose:

- an annual “State of the Area” debate will inform the Council’s “State of Wiltshire” debate and thereby influence the Council’s Corporate Plan and Wiltshire’s Local Area Agreement
- A member of the Cabinet and a Council Director will act as the first point of contact between each Partnership and the Cabinet and Directors
- Partnerships will have the power to scrutinise policies of the Council (and we hope, other public services) and issue reports, to which the Cabinet will have to respond

### **Would Partnerships be overwhelmed with business? Would they be able to shape their priorities and manage their agendas?**

The Partnership will set its own priorities and set its own agenda. The Chair and Secretariat will plan the meetings so that the Partnership can concentrate on those priorities. The Chair and the Partnership must decide where they want to focus their energies.

### **Will all this constitute extra work for volunteers and Councillors?**

At present, there is duplication. Consultation takes place in various ways in each area. We want to introduce clear arrangements across the County so that everybody knows where important local issues are discussed and determined. That will be a better use of everyone’s time.

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Footnote 1:

Local managers would attend meetings of the Board when necessary to cover services such as the following:

- Street scene
- Roads & traffic management
- Library
- Youth services
- Social care
- Rights of Way
- Leisure services

and the Council would encourage the involvement also of managers from Police, Fire, Health and local schools and Children’s Centres.

We appreciate that people will only volunteer if they believe they can change something which matters to them. They will be encouraged to volunteer if:

- Partnerships concern themselves with key local issues
- Public services “get their act together” and respond to these local issues
- People seek opportunities to get involved and feel encouraged to do so

We believe our proposals would meet these objectives and we shall consult further on them. It will be important that there is local flexibility for Community Area Partnerships.

### **Would Partnerships become mini-Districts?**

These proposals are designed to introduce extensive delegation into the way one Council for Wiltshire would manage its services across the County within the framework of County policies and resources. The proposals are intended to build on the success of existing independent Partnerships and extend them to other parts of the County. We are not assuming cost savings from this element of our submission, but we expect much greater effectiveness, and reduction of duplication.

### **How would the Local Area Agreement fit in?**

The Government intends that the Local Area Agreement should set the framework for its relations with local public services – not only local government but Police, Health, Fire, etc. The Local Area Agreement can include local priorities as well as County ones. A “State of the Area” and an Area Plan can help to ensure that Wiltshire’s Local Area Agreement reflects local concerns and circumstances. The Local Area Agreement will not work if it is simply “top down” and these proposals are an important means of avoiding that.

### **What does this mean for Parish and Town Councils?**

These proposals for Community Area Partnerships (and Boards) are intended to complement our proposals to strengthen the role of Parish and Town Councils by:

- stronger role in development control
- a menu of services which individual Councils can choose to run (with budgets) on behalf of the Council in their town or parish
- opportunities to be represented in the Partnership (and the Board)

### **What happens next, what is the timescale and when must things be decided?**

If the Council’s Submission for ‘One Council for Wiltshire’ is approved by the Secretary of State we would want to strengthen local decision making as quickly as possible, but we would do this in consultation with existing Community Area Partnerships, and with Town and Parish Councils.

When the Secretary of State announces her decision, the County Council will publish its initial transition plan. That will include arrangements for consultation during the Autumn with the intention of introducing new arrangements from April 2008. However, the full change will not happen overnight. It involves a significant shift in the way services are managed and how local managers discharge their responsibility for their local services. It will require training for them, and also we should provide opportunities for training and development for local Councillors and other key partners and members of the Area Partnerships.