

REPORT TO THE CORSHAM AREA 4 COMMITTEE		Report No.6
Date of Meeting	18 December 2007	
Title of Report	Area Boards in North Wiltshire	
Link to Corporate Priorities	Partnership Working	
Public Report	Yes	

Summary of Report

This report provides background information and context to inform a debate at the Area Committee meeting around how Area Boards could be trialled and implemented in North Wiltshire.

The views of each of the Area Committees will be subject of a report to the Executive in January 2008. It will be at that point that consideration is given to the invitation from WCC to form pilot Area Boards in North Wiltshire.

Officer Recommendations

It is recommended that

Members of the Area Committee consider how an Area Board pilot could be developed and implemented in the Corsham Community Area and provide the Executive with their views.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
no	no	yes	no	yes
Contact Officer		Jo Cogswell Community Partnership Team Leader		

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides background information and context to inform a debate at this Area Committee meeting around how Area Boards could be trialled and implemented in North Wiltshire.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1. **Option One** It is recommended that
- 2.2. Members of the Area Committee consider how an Area Board pilot could be developed and implemented in the Corsham Community Area and provide the Executive with their views.

3. Background Information

- 3.1. Given the outcome of the Shrewsbury and Atcham legal challenge it is likely that the implementation of a Unitary Authority for Wiltshire will proceed.
- 3.2. The One Council for Wiltshire submission sets out *strong, effective and accountable leadership* as one of the main benefits of the proposal. The establishment of 20 Community Area Boards is presented as a key vehicle in achieving and driving strong leadership at a local level. These Area Boards are proposed to mirror the 20 Wiltshire Community Areas, in much the same way as the North Wiltshire Area Committees do.
- 3.3. The County Council is keen to see pilot Area Boards developed and operated in the period of time up to vesting day in April 2009. The benefit of the pilots would be to trial various aspects of the Area Boards proposal and to ensure that the Area Boards themselves are given every opportunity to succeed. An invitation has been extended by WCC to develop Area Board pilots across North Wiltshire
- 3.4. At the October 4 meeting of The Executive, Members considered a report that set out a short overview of how proposals to develop Area Boards in each of the Community Areas in Wiltshire could be implemented in North Wiltshire as a part of the transition to a new Unitary Authority. Lead Members are supportive of the opportunities that would be presented by piloting Area Boards in North Wiltshire. The Executive resolved that the views of the Area Committees should be sought before any such decision is made (see Appendix One).
- 3.5. The proposals for the Community Area Boards contained within the original submission set out in some detail how Area Boards will operate and describe how they should bring about greater community empowerment. At the heart of the proposals is improving relationships and engagement between Councils including Town and Parish Councils, the Voluntary and Community Sector, Community Area Partnerships, local residents and other key service providers including Housing Associations, the Police, Health and Fire Services.

4. Implementing Area Boards – opportunities in North Wiltshire

- 4.1. Across the County it is accepted that in North Wiltshire there are great strengths in our approaches to Community Planning, promoting local decision-making, and working with key stakeholders. North Wiltshire is therefore well placed to run pilot Area Boards ahead of the formal vesting day for the new Unitary Authority particularly given the skills and experience that exist amongst Officers and Members at the District Council

- 4.2. Feedback from the Department of Communities and Local Government has confirmed that one of the main reasons the WCC submission has been approved is because of the great emphasis that has been placed on enhancing community level governance and leadership. The development and implementation of Area Boards is central to those enhancements.
- 4.3. If North Wiltshire were to accept the invitation from WCC to form pilot Area Boards there would be the opportunity to influence the shape, form and function of Area Boards so that they are appropriate for communities in North Wiltshire ahead of the formal roll out. If this opportunity is lost, then there is a risk that a model developed elsewhere would then be imposed on the North Wiltshire Area Boards.

5. Implementing Area Boards – the change over from Area Committees

- 5.1. Whilst there are some similarities that exist between the ambitions for the Area Boards and Area Committees the two forums are distinctly different. It is important that Area Boards are not seen as just a new flavour of Area Committees, and to that end it, when considering how Area Boards could be implemented to greatest effect in North Wiltshire, Officers and the Lead Members agreed that there should be an end to Area Committees followed by a period of development ahead of the implementation of pilot Area Boards.
- 5.2. This would give time to work together - involving Members and community representatives including Town and Parish Councils and Community Planning Partnerships to develop the Area Boards, to launch the Area Board pilots and would free up the resources that would be required.
- 5.3. Consideration needs to be given as to what to do in the interim period between the end of Area Committees and the launch of Area Boards, ie what functions and areas of responsibility would need to be provided for during that interlude.
- 5.4. Officers and Lead Members have given this some thought and have a number of suggestions for debate at this Area Committee meeting. This will centre around;
 - Grants – Community Area Awards
 - Debate and Liaison with Town and Parish Councils
 - Links to Community Planning Partnerships
 - The opportunity for Elected Members to meet to discuss issues in their area both formally and informally
- 5.5. The scheduled Area Committee meeting times in 2008 could be used as development forums for the Area Boards in the work and build up to their implementation. There will be a key role for Members of this Committee to play in developing the new Area Boards. The experiences in North Wiltshire that are both good and possible areas for improvement will be valuable to ensure that they are responsive to local need and result in effective local forums.
- 5.6. The main focus of the debate at this Area Committee is to consider how an Area Board pilot could be developed and implemented in the Corsham Community Area.

6. Timescale

- 6.1. The views of each of the Area Committees will be subject of a report to the Executive in January 2008. It will be at that point that consideration is given to the invitation from WCC to form pilot Area Boards in North Wiltshire.

6.2. The success of Area Boards will rely heavily on the support and input of the various stakeholders that are detailed in the One Council for Wiltshire submission. At this stage project plans for the transitional arrangements are still being finalised. A specific timescale for implementation will be influenced by these plans. Key to success is the support of service managers at the County and District Councils. At this time it may be fair to say that a realistic timescale for launch of the first Area Board would be late Spring 2008 followed by a phased roll out in other community areas.

7. Financial Implications

7.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report the costs of Area Boards will need to be calculated and a budget identified as a part of the planning process for any Pilots.

8. Legal Implications

8.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report. The views of each of the Area Committees will be subject of a report to The Executive in January 2008.

9. Community and Environmental Implications

9.1. The implementation of Area Boards as an effective community forum and base for local decision making as described in the proposal will serve to ensure that North Wiltshire issues are championed through to appropriate discussion and decision in the new Unitary Authority. By advancing the pilot work in conjunction with local communities and key stakeholders there is the opportunity to shape the Area Boards so that they work to best effect for the residents of North Wiltshire.

10. Human Resource Implications

10.1. Officers in the Community Partnerships and Democratic Services Teams have time set aside in the current work plan to implement the programme of improvements to Area Committees. This resource can be realigned to facilitate the development and implementation of Area Boards during the transitional arrangements. Consideration will need to be given how the Area Boards will be supported once they have been launched as a part of the pilot programme.

11. Equality and Diversity Implications

11.1. The very nature of Area Boards and the ability of such a forum and decision making body to deliver against priorities in local communities and across the County puts issues of equality and diversity at its centre. There will be opportunities for inequalities to be addressed as a result of the stakeholder involvement in the development of the Area Boards and the subsequent decisions and actions that the Boards will make.

Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Executive Resolution October 4 2007
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to Council September 5 2006 Review of Area Committees, Report to Executive October 4 2007 Area Boards in North Wiltshire • One Council for Wiltshire Submission