

## REPORT TO THE AREA 2 COMMITTEE

Report No.7

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> December 2006</b>
<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Feedback from the Review of Area Committees</b>
Link to Corporate Priorities	Customer Focus, Equality and Diversity, and Partnership Working
Public Report	YES

### Summary of Report

This report presents the responses that local people across the Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Area (2) Community gave in a postal survey and workshop held in July 2006, investigating the value of Area Committees and how they might be improved.

The Council resolutions from a report reviewing Area Committees are outlined, together with the timetable for their implementation.

Short-term issues requiring further consideration by current members of Area Committees and their statutory, community and voluntary partners are outlined in a presentation, which forms an important adjunct to this report.

### Officer Recommendations

#### It is recommended that Members

Note the findings of the Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Area (2) Community survey and workshop and use this evidence to inform debate under Option 3.

Note the resolutions from Council, together with the timetable for implementation.

Work co-operatively with partners and the wider community to make specific and appropriate suggestions to develop the Short Term Recommendations for the Area 2 Committee, for the mutual benefit of the community; and thereafter participate in their effective implementation.

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
YES	NO	YES	YES	YES

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines the responses that the local people across the Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Area (2) Community gave to a survey and a workshop undertaken in July, which investigated the value of Area Committees and how they might be improved.
- 1.2 The report goes on to provide the resolutions from Council and a timetable for their implementation.
- 1.3 Some of the short-term issues requiring further consideration by current members of this Committee, Area Partnerships, other partners and the wider community are outlined in a presentation.

## 2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 **Option 1: Note the findings of the Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Area (2) Community survey and workshop and use this evidence to inform debate under Option 3.**
  - 2.1.1 This is factual information and cannot be disputed.
- 2.2 **Option 2: Note the resolutions from Council, together with the timetable for implementation**
  - 2.2.1 The recommendations from Council and timetable for implementation cannot be disputed
- 2.3 **Option 3: Work co-operatively with partners and the wider community to make specific and appropriate suggestions to develop the Short Term Recommendations for Area 2 Committee, for the mutual benefit of the community; and thereafter participate in their effective implementation**
  - 2.3.1 An opportunity presents itself to enable local people to work together within the short-term recommendations to make suggestions as to how the Area 2 Committee could work more effectively for them, bearing in mind the feedback highlighted under Option 1 of this report.
  - 2.3.2 Any changes may be viewed as experimental and reviewed at a later date, to be agreed, to ensure they are working to best effect. Where this does not prove to be the case there will be an opportunity to make changes.
  - 2.3.3 Failure to make appropriate changes reflecting the results from the survey and workshops and those people attending the meeting, risk jeopardising the future effectiveness and viability of Area 2 Committee.

## 3 Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Community Area (2) Postal Survey Results

- 3.1 Survey forms were sent out during the summer to Parish, Town, District and County Councillors. Copies were also distributed to members of the Northern Community Area Partnership.
- 3.2 Appendix 1 shows the results of Area Committee Review Survey for Cricklade and Wootton Bassett Area (2) Community and the whole of North Wiltshire.

3.3 Additional feedback was provided, much of which was positive and suggested that meetings were informative and a valued arena to bring a wide spread rural community together. Suggestions for improvement, which may influence debate under Option 3 of this report included (in no particular order):

- More devolved budgets and powers to the Area Committee
- Meetings need better publicity
- Better venues for meetings (if available)
- More informal and inclusive style of meetings to encourage local people to express their views and contribute to the discussion
- Better use of the Internet – Internet voting, meeting highlights posted on NWDC's website, an Internet forum to discuss issues raised at Area Committee
- Involvement of all partners in setting agendas with an annual programme of meetings
- Meetings should be less party political
- Parish representatives should be given a vote on some issues if not all
- More opportunity for the local community to better influence decision makers
- Better information and transparency about District Council working

#### **4 Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Community Area (2) Workshop Results**

4.1 The workshops enabled the collection of qualitative data to support the quantitative data provided from the postal surveys. In other words it allowed issues to be fleshed out and explored in more depth. A summary of the key findings (in descending order of priority) were :

✓ At an area level, decisions should be made relating to:

- budget and resources
- proper devolvement
- economic regeneration
- community project funding
- tourism
- decisions on a 3-tier level (a 'one stop shop')
- care in the community
- all decisions at local level
- format of meetings
- publicity
- local policing issues
- sport and recreation
- car parking
- non-delegated planning applications

✓ Area Committees should know more about:

- The work of NCAP, PCT and WCC (through better integration with each)
- consultations at a local level
- the priorities and expectations of key partners

- neighbourhood policing issues
  - RAF issues
  - Key strategic documents e.g.spatial planning
- ✓ Then Area 2 Committee could help deliver the actions in the Northern Community Area Plan by:
- allocation of dedicated officer resource (administrative and professional)
  - stronger powers for the Area Committee
  - promotion of partnership work to the public and local councillors
  - prioritised actions
  - creating better links to partners such as the PCT, Police and Fire Authorities
  - better publicity
  - officers with a local base and focus
  - sponsor and support projects identified in the Community Area Plan
- ✓ The majority of participants in the workshops considered that abolishing Area Committees would be difficult and that Parish Councils may be left without a voice (unless there was proper devolution to Town and Parish Councillors and/or the Community Area Partnership (including funding)). There was a danger that there would be a loss of local focus.

### **Resolutions made by Full Council of the District Council**

- 4.2 Members resolved on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006 that Area Committees should be retained and that the short-term recommendations (below) should be implemented.

#### **Short Term Recommendations**

- That meetings are made more inclusive and everyone is given an opportunity to debate issues and indicate their opinion. This opinion could be subsequently used to inform District Councillors decisions
- To improve publicity and public awareness of Area Committees
- That communication bulletins are developed jointly between the Democratic Services Policy Team and Community Partnerships Team to promote Area Committees
- Seating arrangements and room lay out to be made more inclusive
- That a 12 month schedule of meetings is developed
- That a revised guide to participation in Area Committee is sent to Parish & Town Councils, Community Area Partnerships, Police, Primary Care Trusts and other partners with a view to increasing the participation and the shaping of agendas and debate
- Parish and Town Council and Community Area Partnership representatives are invited to provide updates as a standing item on all Area Committee agendas
- That the Policy and Democratic Services Team and Community Partnership Team continue to work with Wiltshire County Council to develop practical joint working options
- That the Policy and Democratic Services Team and Community Partnerships Team work with Community Area Partnerships to investigate options for further co-operation with Area Committees
- That the Executive considers requests from the Area Committee to devote officer time to projects identified by that Committee
- To introduce a recognised mechanism to inform or refer issues from the Area Committees to Executive to ensure that they are considered

- That officers work with the Police to develop ways of supporting the Neighbourhood Policing agenda
- That officers develop options for seminar/surgery meetings prior to the start of Area Committees where local people could discuss matters with their local Member or officers.

4.3 Furthermore they resolved that Area Committees and Community Partnerships be given the opportunity to meet in a multi-tiered meeting as outlined in the paragraphs below:

The relationship between the Area Committees and the community planning process and implementation of the Parish Plans does not currently appear to be well integrated, although there are plans to revisit the Area Committee arrangements. This review will consider devolution of decision making, securing closer working between the Committee and the local community, a more inclusive membership reflecting other community partners and strengthening the role of district councillors.

Respondents wanted Committees to be more integrated with Community Area Partnerships, Primary Care Trusts and Wiltshire County Council. Plain English should be used so everyone can understand and the room layout of the meetings should be more inclusive. An annual consultation timetable was suggested. Informal sessions before meetings to enable Councillors to talk to partners and the public was suggested, as was an annual, social meeting to enable all partners to share their annual plans and achievements.

Area Committees could help deliver the actions in Community Plans by creating a forum for all tiers of local government, Community Area Partnerships and local people. It should offer expertise, advice and funding to community groups and projects. The emphasis should be on local involvement and communications between all levels. Voting rights for Parish Councillors was suggested, as was the idea of Executive powers residing with officers in consultation with a wider forum.

There could well be potential for a more symbiotic relationship between Area Committees and Community Area Partnerships. This, on the one hand, could enhance the community leadership role of Councillors, while on the other, enable issues that come to the forefront to be collectively addressed to best effect.

Wiltshire County Council are exploring an initiative called 'Voice to Choice' which aims to set up new arrangements that will bring Wiltshire County Council decision making closer to the community, improve joint working between the 3 tiers and support the delivery of community priorities identified in local Community Area Plans

4.4 Council also resolved that the Neighbourhood Policing Teams and Community Safety groups be invited to use the new Area Committee structure as referred below:

Wiltshire Police, as part of the implementation of Neighbourhood Policing Teams, is required to hold regular community meetings to identify and explore local issues. The concept behind Neighbourhood Policing is to bring policing closer to the community and includes a shared approach to problem solving particularly in areas related to community safety and anti-social behaviour. There is a willingness amongst local Neighbourhood Policing Teams and the district-wide Steering Group to work closely with the District Council and its partners at Community Area level. The rationale is to ensure best use of resources and to work together to meet community need.

4.5 Members also resolved that:

Area Committees develop multi-agenda and plenary meetings

The Area Committees be given the option to adopt the enhanced recommendations (see Medium –Long Term recommendations below)

An officer and Member task group is formed to consider any legal and constitutional changes necessary to progress these proposals and report back to Council.

4.6 The Medium-Long Term Recommendations for Area Committees are listed below.

### **Medium - Long Term Recommendations**

*Medium-term recommendations require ongoing development and would be subject of a further report to identify the implications for the Council.*

- A parallel debate should take place to consider how the frameworks for community engagement and partnership working should be developed further to avoid duplication and improve delivery of outcomes.
- Officers present a report following the publication of the Local Government White Paper in the autumn detailing the implications and possible development options for the Council's democratic arrangements
- Parish/Town Council and local fora are established 1-2 per year to inform the Area Committee schedule of meetings
- To encourage the involvement of hard to reach groups including young people in Area Committees/partnership working
- That a community "call-in" mechanism be developed to allow Area Committees to request a response to issues raised by the local community
- That officers work with the Executive to consider areas for devolution to Area Committees
- Devolution to Area Committees of decision making powers including budget.
- Constitutional Changes

## **5 Developing the Recommendations**

5.1 An officer and Member Working Group will be established to consider the Medium – Long Term Recommendations.

5.2 The publication of the Local Government White Paper, 'Strong and prosperous communities' on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006, will provide further scope for developing the Area Committees

5.3 An officer working-group has been established to assist in the implementation of the short-term recommendations. However, because the shaping of each Committee (within the schedule agreed by Council), remains to be influenced by the local community, a number of questions need to be asked to ensure that the new style of Committee can start to be implemented at the January/February 2007 Committee cycle.

5.4 It is recognised that the changes will be incremental and there will be opportunities for participants to review the effectiveness of any changes introduced.

- 5.5 A presentation arising from the Short Term Recommendations and the next steps will follow.

## **6 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Subject to agreement with the Corporate Management Team, short-term costs, to cover production of posters and newsheets have been identified from the Communications budget. No other additional officer time will be required within the current financial year other than that currently associated with operating Area Committees
- 6.2 There is likely to be a need for resources to be allocated to support the implementation of medium-long term plans for the Area Committee, however, these will form part of a later report to Council.
- 6.3 These changes may represent a financial benefit to statutory, community and voluntary partners who may have to attend fewer meetings.

## **7 Community and Environmental Implications**

- 7.1 There is a significant opportunity for the Area 2 Committee to develop in order that it may contribute to many more community focussed agendas, including those of Neighbourhood Policing and the Community Area Partnership.
- 7.2 Enhanced Area Committees could positively contribute to providing closer links between Council decision making, decision making of other statutory partners and the community planning process, promoting effective and meaningful partnership working to address key community issues at a local level.

## **8 Human Resource Implications**

- 8.1 Changes to the Area Committees will require enhanced support from officers in the Policy and Democratic Services Team and the Community Partnership Team which will impact on current and future workplans.

## **9 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 9.1 Two Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken and published on the Council's web site which would have an impact on this work (Community Living – Equality and Diversity – Equality Impact Assessments – Corporate Services -Policy & Democratic Services and Community Living – Equality and Diversity – Equality Impact Assessments- Community & Environment – Community Planning). The assessments concluded that the policy has no adverse impact on any particular sector of the community in terms of the seven strands of equality and diversity.
- 9.2 The enhancement of Area Committees will serve to support a more inclusive environment for individuals, statutory, community and voluntary partners to come together to address issues at a local level in a more accessible and participatory manner.

## **10 Risk Analysis**

- 10.1 The risk of following the recommendations outlined in the report are modest. Decisions to shape the short-term recommendations are made co-operatively between all and a review of their effectiveness is built in to programme of change.

10.2 Not taking the opportunity to shape the short-term recommendations, will limit the effectiveness of the Area Committee and the potential impact on the local community.

<b>Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appendix 1 Results of Area Committee Review Survey for the Cricklade &amp; Wootton Bassett Area (2) Community and the whole of North Wiltshire</li> </ul>
<b>Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review of Area Committees</b></li> <li>• <b>Future of NWDC Area Committees – Survey Results</b></li> <li>• <b>Future of NWDC Area Committees – Area Committee Workshop Data</b></li> </ul>

**Previous Decisions Connected with this Report**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee &amp; Date</b>	<b>Minute Reference</b>
<b>Review of Area Committees</b>	Executive 31 August 2006	E44
<b>Review of Area Committees</b>	Council 5 September 2006	C45