

Area Committees and the Voice to Choice Project

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide information to regarding the Wiltshire County Council (WCC) Project, Voice to Choice.
- 1.2 To agree a timetable for District Council involvement in the project.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Option One - That the Executive agree in principle the District Council involvement in the pilot project and the time table pending the receipt of a details on the financial, human resources and legal implications, at the meeting in April.**
- 2.2 Option Two – That the Executive do not agree to the District Council involvement in the pilot**

3. Background & Links to the Corporate Business Plan

- 3.1 There are no specific links to the Corporate Business Plan.
- 3.2 WCC has Beacon Status in the category – Getting Closer to Communities.
- 3.3 WCC has analysed the 20 local area community plans (Appendix One of WCC Report refers).
- 3.4 One of WCC's corporate aims is to deliver 80 actions identified in the 20 local community plans.
- 3.5 WCC have started a project called Voice to Choice which aims to set up new arrangements that will bring WCC decision making closer to the community, improve joint working between the 3 tiers and support the delivery of community priorities identified in the local area community plans. A copy of the current project framework and initial plan is included at Appendix Two & Three of the WCC Report respectively.
- 3.6 WCC Cabinet Member for Community, Cllr J.P.S.S. Thomson presented an outline of the Voice to Choice project to Senior Officers and Area Committee Chairmen & Vice Chairman on the 10th January. The District Council has been asked to work in partnership with WCC to pilot the new arrangements at one Area Committee. The response of the Area Chairmen present was positive. It is likely that more than one Area Committee will put itself forward for the pilot. WCC have stated that more than one Committee participating would be acceptable.
- 3.7 WCC and NWDC officers have met since the presentation, to discuss the timetable for implementation and some of the practicalities that will need to be addressed.
- 3.8 This project is not presently included within the Council's Corporate plan. Although the financial costs of the increased numbers of meetings are proposed to be met by WCC there will be an impact on NWDC Officer support time. This resource has not yet been identified. Although one pilot Area Committee has been invited interest has been expressed from more than one Area Committee.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 WCC has not yet identified the financial implications of the Project. This project is not presently included within the Council's Corporate plan. At present there is no indication that The District Council will have to allocate any extra financial resource for this project. WCC officers have indicated that resources can be made available for extra meetings and public promotion of the pilot.

5. Community & Environment Implications

- 5.1 The project will have the biggest impact on the Community and Environment Business Area. The Community Partnership Team in partnership with County Officers has supported the delivery of 5 local area plans and the development of the District Wide Community Strategy. Officers are providing dedicated support to the facilitation of local community planning partnerships, as well as the district wide Local Strategic Partnership. The Voice 2 Choice project could assist in strengthening the links between the community partnerships and the democratic process. It will be important, however, to ensure that the partnerships are considered in their own right and not subsumed into a bigger Area Committee.
- 5.2 With reference to Appendix B of the report, WCC will be addressing how support from their own community planning officers will be organised. This should be done in partnership with the District Council.

6. Human Resource Implications

- 6.1 It is likely that to accommodate the work devolved from WCC, the pilot Area Committee would be required to meet once a month. WCC officers have indicated that additional officer support for the meetings could be forthcoming from WCC but this has yet to be officially confirmed.
- 6.2 With reference to Appx B of the WCC report, WCC will be addressing how support from WCC employed community planners will be organised with specific reference to redefining the officer's role. This should be done in conjunction with the relevant District Council officers, including Policy and Democratic Services and the Community and Environment Business Area.

7. Equality & Diversity Implications

- 7.1 There is a steer from WCC that the pilot should be from a rural Community Area as there is already a large Town likely to be included in another District Area. The project provides an opportunity to test a devolution project in a rural setting.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 Details on how devolved decisions will be made have not yet been officially agreed.
- 8.2 The option suggested by WCC would be to hold tandem meetings. County Members could meet as a sub-committee at the same time and place as a District Council Area Committee to discuss the same topics, but technically exercising separate powers. By way of illustration, a parish council comes to the Area Committee to apply for money for a village hall, the parish has put £5K towards it and needs £10k more to finish the project. The Area Committee of District Councils vote to give £5k and the sub-committee of County Councillors vote to give some money to it.

8.3 Any 'joint' or tandem arrangements would have to be agreed with the District Council. At this point nothing in the proposals that would require any Constitutional changes.

9. Time table

9.1 The County Council would like to have arrangements in place to run a pilot by the end of April. Their timetable is at paragraph 8 schedule 1 of WCC report (attached as Appendix One).

9.2 The following timetable has been drawn up in line with the WCC schedule:

Purpose	Group	Timing
Report to Executive – requesting agreement to principle	Consultation on report with senior officers and Lead Member.	9th March 2006
Report to Executive – agreeing detail political arrangements and financial implications.	Consultation on report with senior officers and Lead Member.	20 th April 2006
Report to Council if any changes to Constitution	Consultation on report with senior officers and Lead Member.	25th April 2005
Begin Pilots		April/May 2006.

9.3 Officers have expressed to WCC the view that a later implementation for the pilot of May/July would be more realistic.

9.4 The Executive could additionally decide to consult the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 23rd of March.

Documents Used in writing this report:

Constitution of the Council
Wiltshire County Council Cabinet 16/2/04 - Report 9

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES STRATEGIC MANAGER TO THE EXECUTIVE - 9TH MARCH 2006

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