

<b>REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE</b>		Report No. 11
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>4 October 2007</b>	
<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Area Boards in North Wiltshire</b>	
<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Partnership Working / Resources &amp; Democracy</b>	
Link to Corporate Priorities	<b>Partnership Working</b>	
Key Decision	Yes	
Executive Workplan Ref	B358	
Public Report	Yes	

### Summary of Report

To present to Members a proposed way forward for the implementation of Community Area Boards in North Wiltshire during the transition to a Unitary Authority.

The proposed way forward will see the phased implementation of pilot Community Area Boards ahead of the formal Vesting Day for the new Authority. The involvement of community stakeholders in the establishment of the Area Boards is vital. Development work can be supported by officer resource from the Community Partnerships Team. To facilitate this it is proposed that Area Committees will not continue in their present form past the end of December 2007.

### Officer Recommendations

**It is recommended that**

- 1. The Executive support the development of pilot Area Boards in North Wiltshire.**
- 2. Area Committees will end in their current form by the end of December 2007.**
- 3. A quarterly Forum is established for Town and Parish Councils.**
- 4. Scheduled Area Committee meetings from January 2008 be used as development forums for the Area Boards.**
- 5. Delegated authority is given to the Community Partnerships Manager in consultation with the appropriate Lead Member or Area Committee Chair to agree Community Area Awards from December 31 2007.**
- 6. Delegated authority is given to the Community Partnerships Manager in consultation with the appropriate Lead Members to agree a timescale and advance the Area Boards work to develop the pilots specific to each of the 5 community areas.**

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	none	yes	yes	yes
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Jo Cogswell Community Partnership Manager			

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This report provides a short overview of how proposals to develop Area Boards in each of the Community Areas in Wiltshire will be implemented in North Wiltshire as a part of the transition to a new Unitary Authority. It is assumed for the purposes of this report that the plans to introduce a Unitary Authority for Wiltshire are confirmed by Government later this year.

## **2. Options and Options Appraisal**

- 2.1. **Option One** It is recommended that
  - 2.1.1. The Executive support the development of pilot Area Boards in North Wiltshire.
  - 2.1.2. Area Committees will end in their current form by the end of December 2007.
  - 2.1.3. A quarterly Forum is established for Town and Parish Councils.
  - 2.1.4. Scheduled Area Committee meetings from January 2008 be used as development forums for the Area Boards.
  - 2.1.5. Delegated authority is given to the Community Partnerships Manager in consultation with the appropriate Lead Member or Area Committee Chair to agree Community Area Awards from December 31 2007.
  - 2.1.6. Delegated authority is given to the Community Partnerships Manager in consultation with the appropriate Lead Members to agree a timescale and advance the Area Boards work to develop the pilots specific to each of the 5 community areas.
- 2.2. **Option two** Members put forward alternative proposals to the recommendations listed in paragraph 2.1 above.

## **3. Background Information**

- 3.1. 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 twenty Community Area Boards is presented as a key vehicle in achieving and driving strong leadership at a local level.
- 3.2. As work begins towards the new Unitary Authority current approaches and working practices are being reviewed and considered against what will be delivered by the new Authority and how.
- 3.3. The proposals for the Community Area Boards (included at Appendix One) set out in some detail how Area Boards will operate and describes how they will bring about greater community empowerment. At the heart of the proposals is improving relationships 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.
- 3.4. Comprehensive Area Assessment will mean that measurable community level outcomes will need to be delivered and monitored. The Area Boards present a vehicle to achieve targeted outcomes.

- 3.5. The work to develop the proposals for Area Boards was informed by the research that was carried out by this Council in the summer of 2006. Members will recall that at the September 5 2006 Council meeting Members agreed a programme of improvements to Area Committees informed by this research. Officer time and resource has been allocated to this work in the 2007/08 financial year.

#### **4. Implementing Area Boards**

- 4.1. Whilst there are some similarities that exist between the ambitions for the Area Boards and the programme of improvement for Area Committees the two forums are distinctly different. 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 Area Boards. That is to say that Area Committees cannot be *turned into* Area Boards.
- 4.2. Across the County it is accepted that in North Wiltshire there are great strengths in our approaches to both Community Planning and to promoting local decision making. 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. In addition the commitment and enthusiasm shown for area working and local decision making by communities and partners during the consultation for the review of Area Committees suggests that there would be support from key stakeholders.
- 4.3. There is at least one meeting of each Area Committee between now and the end of the calendar year. A report outlining proposals for Area Boards and how they could be implemented as a pilot in North Wiltshire can be sent to each Area Committee. Scheduled Area Committee meeting times in 2008 can be used as development forums for the Area Boards in the work and build up to their implementation.
- 4.4. Consideration has been given to what functions and areas of responsibility will need to be provided for in an alternative way if the Area Committees cease to exist in their current form at the end of the calendar year. Some functions will be picked up by the pilot Area Boards but there are areas that need consideration ahead of Area Board implementation. More specifically;
- 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
- 4.5. With respect to Community Area Awards each of the 5 Area Committees has a final award round in either January or February 2008. It is suggested that delegated authority be granted to the Community Partnerships Manager to approve award applications in consultation with the Lead Member and the Area Committee Chair for the relevant community area.
- 4.6. Town and Parish Councils have a more active role and make regular contributions at Area Committees. We will need to develop an alternative forum for these local councils to have an opportunity to raise issues and topics with the District Council. A quarterly forum meeting has been suggested to which all Towns and Parishes will be invited.

- 4.7. By using the scheduled Area Committee meeting times in 2008 as development forums for the Area Boards in the work and build up to their implementation the opportunity for Elected Members to get together and discuss issues in their area will still exist. There will be a key role for Area Committee Members, Chairs and Vice Chairs 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.
- 4.8. A phased roll out will be the most manageable way to implement Area Boards across the District. If there is a specific local issue that would be best debated locally ahead of Area Board launch in a particular area there is no reason why a special interest meeting could not be organised. This would ensure that local Members and service deliverers would continue to have the opportunity to debate issues locally.
- 4.9. In some community areas Community Planning Partnerships have quite an active input at Area Committee. Proposed revisions to the role of the North Wilts Local Strategic Partnership could provide an alternative forum for this in the absence of Area Committees.

## **5. Timescale**

- 5.1. 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.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1. The current direct costs of running Area Committees in terms of hall hire, catering and audio equipment costs are in the region of £3,000 per year. In addition there are Members allowances for Chairs and Vice Chairs in the region of £11,000 per year.
- 6.2. Democratic Services support to the Area Committees amounts to approximately 0.8 FTE Democratic Services Officer (in the order of £22,000).
- 6.3. There would be little or no cost savings from the proposals in the 2007/08 financial year, particularly if meetings scheduled for 2008 were used as development forums and if the Town and Parish meetings are organised on a quarterly basis.
- 6.4. The costs of Area Boards will need to be calculated and a budget identified as a part of the planning process for the Pilots. It is assumed that any additional costs – beyond that which this Council would have spent on Area Committees will be provided by the County Council from the transition, or other budgets. Reassurance that this will be the agreed way ahead will be sought from the County Council.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1. The structural aspects of the proposal will need the approval of Council. The Council's Constitution will then need to be amended to reflect the new arrangements.

The Executive has the authority within the Council's Constitution to agree recommendations 5 and 6 in this report.

## **8. Community and Environmental Implications**

- 8.1. 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.

## **9. Human Resource Implications**

- 9.1. 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.

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1. 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.

<b>Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Appendix 1 – Final Community Area Boards Paper (from One Council for Wiltshire proposal)</b></li></ul>
<b>Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Report to Council September 5 2006 Review of Area Committees</b></li><li>• <b>One Council for Wiltshire Submission</b></li></ul>