

Report

Report subject: Northern Area Committee - Review of Community Involvement
Report to: Northern Area Committee
Date: 23rd August 2007
Author: Councillor Colin Mills (Chairman) and Councillor Mike Hewitt (Vice Chairman).

1. **Report Summary:**

As announced at the last meeting, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman together with the Area Coordinator have produced some proposals aimed at encouraging greater community and parish involvement in the work of the Northern Area Committee. This report sets out proposals aiming to focus the work of the Committee more closely on the issues affecting the area.

2. **Increasing community involvement:**

- 2.1. Since its creation 11 years ago, the Northern Area Committee has considered a good mix of planning and community items. Planning is an important regulatory function and should always feature prominently in the work of the Committee. The planning procedures work well and are now understood and valued by the public, parishes and county councillors. This paper proposes no change to the way planning is handled.
- 2.2. Community items continue to come before the Committee, but in the main these tend to be items submitted by officers of the district council or are part of a wider consultation undertaken by the council's cabinet. Relatively few items arise from members of the Committee, local parish councils or other local community groups. This may be because it is not widely known that the Committee also acts as a community forum where any issue affecting the area can be discussed. It is this role we would like to promote and enhance.
- 2.3. The constitution of the area committee makes it clear that all members and local parish councils have the right to submit items for consideration by the committee. We wish to encourage members and parishes to bring more items to the committee - not simply to pad out the agenda but because the Area Committee can often help raise the profile of local issues and get things done. It is also a powerful lobby group and it can influence a whole range of local organisations including the District and County Councils, the Police, Hospital and Primary Care Trust, the MOD, Environment Agency and other Government Departments as well as many other important local organisations.
- 2.4. Local people and community groups also have the right to submit items for consideration by the Committee and again we would like to encourage and promote this more widely.

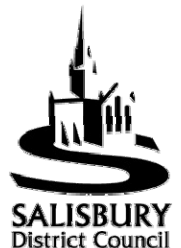


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- 2.5. It is our view that if the agenda of the Northern Area Committee mirrors more closely the concerns and issues facing local people, the more local people will want to take part and be part of it. We think this will have several benefits. It will help us: keep in touch with local issues, resolve local problems on behalf of the community and increase the profile and influence of the committee in the area. It may also help to demonstrate the value of devolving power and decisions to local communities and encourage Wiltshire County Council to think very carefully before it proceeds with its intention to replace the committee with area boards.

3. Making this happen, some suggestions:

The Vice Chairman and I submit the following proposals:

- 3.1. We wish to encourage county and district councillors and parish and town councils to submit items for consideration by the Committee. We will write to all district and county councillors and parish and town councils in the area reminding them of their right to submit agenda items for consideration by the Committee and explaining how this may be done.
- 3.2. In view of the high profile of crime and disorder in the area, we propose to invite the Community Policing Teams to attend meetings on a quarterly basis to provide an update on policing and community safety.
- 3.3. We want to involve local agencies - such as PCT, WCC, MOD, College - by inviting them to meetings when items of concern emerge in the area.
- 3.4. We propose that the Area Coordinator should prepare a leaflet explaining the role and work of the Committee for distribution in the area. This leaflet should set out how local organisations and individuals may submit items for consideration by the Committee.
- 3.5. We would like to refresh the Area Committee website, keep it up-to-date and include a 'submit an item/question form' for use by the local community.
- 3.6. We would like the results of local consultations undertaken using the Peoples' Voice, Tomorrows' Voice and the Voice&Choice Panel submitted for consideration by the Committee so that we can follow up any issues of concern.
- 3.7. We want to ensure that regular press releases are sent to the local media highlighting the work of the Committee.
- 3.8. We propose to include a slot on the agenda for members to provide feedback from outside bodies upon which they serve.

4. Making this happen, some other ideas:

The Vice Chairman and I have considered the following ideas, and we would welcome the Committee's view on these.

- 4.1. The Committee could pilot an area scrutiny role with small task and finish groups of members set up to investigate issues (such as for example the Tesco proposals at Andover Airfield) and bringing back reports for consideration. This would enable the Committee to respond to local issues much more quickly.
- 4.2. The Committee could have a 'State of the Area' debate focusing on an issue of concern in the area (such as affordable housing). The Committee could then make the issue its priority for the year with regular updates on the agenda.
- 4.3. The Committee could publish an annual report setting out what it has achieved together with its priorities and plans.

- 4.4. The Committee could involve local schools in the work of the Committee and we could ask the area coordinator to contact local schools to find out if this would be of interest.
- 4.5. The Committee could establish some well-being performance indicators for the area - house prices v average earnings, affordable homes completed, crime and health indicators, unemployment rates, etc - and monitor on a quarterly basis.

5. **Moving Forward:**

- 5.1. There may be other ideas that we have overlooked and we want to encourage all members to contribute to the development of the area committee role. However, we will need to bear in mind the resource implications of any decisions and avoid overloading the staff in the Democratic Services Team. The Area Coordinator has been involved in our discussions and is confident that the proposals we have submitted can be accommodated within the existing resource allocation.
- 5.2. However, in view of the resource implications of some of the items proposed - such as the creation of a short guide - the Area Coordinator may need to access the Committee's discretionary budget. We feel that the Area Coordinator should obtain quotes and submit requests for funding on a project-by-project basis.

6. **Recommendations:**

- 6.1. Members are asked to consider and comment on the proposals set out in this paper.

7. **Implications:**

- **Financial:** As set out in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 the Committee would have to work within the resources allocated with DSU and within the limit of the discretionary area budget.
- **Legal:** None
- **Human Rights:** The Human Rights implications have been considered but no potential breach of the Convention has been identified.
- **Personnel:** The implications for the Area Coordinator have been assessed.
- **Community Safety:** Proposal aim to strengthen community safety in the Northern Area.
- **Council's Core Values:** Supports all of the council's core values.
- **Wards Affected:** All wards in the Northern Area