SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT:
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WILTSHIRE PANEL

Executive Summary

As reported to the Implementation Executive in September 2008, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 provides an opportunity for local organisations and people to submit ideas on how government could change the way it currently does things, and by so doing, promote the sustainability of local communities. These ideas can involve changes to legislation, regulations and government policy, or the transfer of responsibilities and funding between public bodies, local people consider would improve community life.

In order to help Wiltshire residents take advantage of the Act, Wiltshire Council has worked with a broadly-based Panel of local organisations, as required by the Act, to publicise the opportunity provided by the Act.

This report aims to provide an overview of the process undertaken by Wiltshire Council and the Wiltshire Assembly in participating in the Local Government Association's Sustainable Communities Act consultation process.

As a result of the processes, the Panel recommended that Members agree to the submission of 22 ideas to Government:

Proposal

That the Implementation Executive:

a) Agree to the sharing of those ideas which do not need Government action for their implementation, as described, amongst the relevant services, portfolio holders, area boards and community areas. A full list of the ideas received is available for Members to view.

b) Consider and review the Panel's recommendations for ideas to submit to Government and agree to the Council's formal submission of those ideas to the LGA on behalf of the Wiltshire Assembly Panel and the Wiltshire communities and people. There is no limit to the number of ideas that can be submitted.

Authors: **DAVID MAYNARD**, Strategic Policy Manager
                  LIZ RICHARDSON, CLG Workstream Coordinator

Contact Details: 01225 713118, davidmaynard@wiltshire.gov.uk
                   01225 718448, lizrichardson@wiltshire.gov.uk

Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices

Appendix One   Submissions for Government – full list
                            (those highlighted are the ones recommended for
                            submission)

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WILTSHIRE PANEL

Purpose of Report

1. This report aims to provide an overview of the process undertaken by Wiltshire Council and the Wiltshire Assembly in participating in the Local Government Association's Sustainable Communities Act consultation process.

   Members are asked to consider and agree to the submission of the ideas listed, as recommended by the Wiltshire Panel.

Background

2. As reported to the Implementation Executive in September 2008, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 provides an opportunity for local organisations and people to submit ideas on how government could change the way it currently does things, and by so doing, promote the sustainability of local communities. These ideas can involve changes to legislation, regulations and government policy, or the transfer of responsibilities and funding between public bodies, that local people consider would improve community life.

3. Any supported ideas have to be sent to the Local Government Association (LGA), which has been appointed under the Act to advise Government on which ideas it should consider for implementation.

4. In order to help Wiltshire residents take advantage of the Act, Wiltshire Council has worked with a broadly-based Panel of local organisations, as required by the Act, to publicise the opportunity provided by the Act.

5. Information on how to submit ideas was distributed as widely as possible. This included:

   - Printed leaflets (including some large format) and posters distributed to all libraries and a wide range of other organisations.
   - A text message sent to all 14,000 of the people who voted in the Wiltshire Youth Parliament elections.
   - Electronic copies of the leaflet distributed to all staff via Friday Bulletin and Members via e-mail, and to schools via the Schools Bulletin.
   - Articles in The Wiltshire Times, Salisbury Journal and a range of specialist magazines as arranged by the panel members.
   - Inclusions in various community, partnership and club newsletters.

6. During the consultation which lasted from early March to 24th April, there were 260 responses. Of these, 111 would require Government action to be implemented. The Panel met on 30th April to discuss these submissions, and those recommended for submission to the LGA are listed at paragraph 18.

Main Considerations for the Implementation Executive

Criteria for selection

7. The LGA and Government are likely to use certain criteria to assess ideas. The Wiltshire Panel have applied the same criteria in selecting the ideas below which it is recommending Members to consider submitting to Government via the LGA.

8. These criteria include:-

   - **Does this idea require specific Government action?** Ideas that local authorities or other organisations already have powers to do will not be considered.
   - **Does the idea need significant additional funding?** The Government wants ideas to largely be cost neutral, and is likely to discount ideas which require new funding either at a national or local level.
   - **Does the idea demonstrate a positive cost benefit analysis with respect to the geographical area and groups that it will affect?** Government needs to be assured that the benefits of changing practice in a particular local area (or part of a local area) outweigh the economies of scale of services that are run in a consistent way nationally.
   - **Does the idea cut across any high profile Government policy positions?** Government is unlikely to change established policy positions for which it is politically accountable.
   - **Have the ideas been developed in a way which is consistent with the requirements and spirit of the Act?** This refers to evidence that the ideas have been developed as a result of an inclusive process that has involved a wide range of organisations and individuals, and that the advice of the Panel was seriously considered in arriving at a final choice of ideas to submit to the national selection process. Also, if the idea involves the transfer of functions and budgets between public bodies, either from the national to the local level, or from one local body to another, it must be shown that the affected bodies have been consulted, but they do not have to give their support to the idea for it to progress.

Next steps

9. The ideas at paragraph 18 were agreed by the Panel on 30th April as the strongest of those received that need Government action to implement, and which meet the Government's criteria for the Act.

10. It is intended that the remaining ideas that are capable of local implementation without government action will be handled locally. The information will be shared in three ways:

   1. Suggestions have been categorised by service area. These will be shared with the Service Director for discussion with their staff, and Portfolio Holder.

2.   Many ideas were specific to certain community areas only. These have been categorised by Area Board and will be shared with the Community Area Manager in advance of the first Board meetings to promote engagement on the issue locally.

3.   Once elected, unitary Members will receive the ideas applicable to their area.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

11.   There are no identified environmental impacts.

Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal

12.   Various equalities issues were considered in depth in discussion with the Head of Equalities in planning the consultation process. These considerations included inclusiveness of partners by offering the opportunity to sit on the panel to the wider network of partner organisations; access to information for the public through the provision of a large format leaflet, translation service, online submissions and library drop boxes; and broad distribution of information including to schools, youth clubs, community groups, staff and Members, and many others.

Financial Implications

13.   Costs during the consultation process were minimal and covered the printing of leaflets and some forms of advertising. Advertising in the local papers and through organisations was provided free of charge.

Legal Implications

14.   There are no identified human rights issues.

15.   The process of undertaking a wide consultation with the public and organisations to encourage participation in the democratic process is intended to improve the reputation of the Council. In particular, the process of reviewing local issues raised in the Area Board meetings will further demonstrate the Council's commitment to community engagement.

Options Considered

16.   In agreeing upon the final 22 ideas for submission to Government, several processes were undertaken to ensure we submit the strongest. This included separating the ideas which can be implemented locally and those which require for Government-led change and agreeing those ideas which, if

implemented, are likely to improve life for a number of people, not just a few individuals or certain groups.

17.   The full list of proposals received which are applicable to Government is attached at Appendix One.

Conclusion

18.   As a result of the processes outlined at paragraph 16, the Panel recommend that Members agree to the submission of the following ideas to Government:

Economy and Income

1   Voluntary organisations should not pay business rates for rubbish collection, but rather be treated as domestic customers.

Education, skills and lifelong learning

2   Access to education should be widened to cover as many people's needs as possible. Colleges should offer more courses online, exam shops where people can sit exams in their locality should be set up, courses shouldn't require attendance at classes and registration should be easier.

Housing and Built Environment

3   Rejuvenating the housing market is a key issue. If the rate of Stamp Duty was **stepped** in the way that income tax is, this would assist the housing market. At present Stamp Duty Land Tax on properties within certain threshold values (e.g. properties which sell for between £250001 - £500,000) are taxed at a certain rate for the **whole** sale price. It is proposed that one should pay the higher percentages in a stepped way i.e. only on the amount that falls within each threshold, up to the full sale price of the property. The rates themselves would perhaps need to change to make the whole thing revenue neutral for Government.

4   Adaptations should be made to new affordable housing at design stage to meet mobility targets, saving around £16,000 on wet room (kitchen/bathroom) adaptations on existing properties.

5   Stamp Duty Land Tax from house sales should be paid to the local authority to encourage the building of more affordable homes. This would assist people to buy or rent affordable homes in their local area and make Stamp Duty a more acceptable tax, as it would be directly helping local people who are on lower incomes. It may, over time, also reduce Housing Benefit expenditure. In 2007/08 property stamp duty paid within the Wiltshire Council area was £63M.

6   New houses to be equipped with rain water harvesting and solar power units to minimise their impact on the environment.

Transport and Access

7   Lowered curbs for wheelchair users should be painted yellow to ensure car drivers are made aware not to park in front of them. These curbs should also be lowered further for a smooth transition from pavement to road.

8   Inject Vehicle Excise Duty paid by Wiltshire residents (approximately £30-35M in 2008 for the 311,000 vehicles registered in Wiltshire) back into the local area (via the Council as transport authority) to fund significant projects to encourage a step change in sustainable means of transport, for example the use of public transport and a significant increase in the number of cycle paths, etc.. Currently, there is no policy mechanism linking car ownership and its impacts on local communities.

9   Change the traditional "white and black" national speed limit signs to state what the limit is, e.g. 60", "70", etc, as drivers leave speed limit areas as national speed limit means "any speed" to some drivers. There would be only marginal financial implications as this could be introduced as old signs need to be replaced.

10   Strict speed limits in town centres (20 mph) and villages (30mph) nationwide.

11   All MOT tests to include the statutory recording of mileage (and, ideally, the postcode of the driver) as standard to ensure accurate information is held for the purpose of local and national monitoring information, such as transport authorities tracking the real impact of any measures they introduce to reduce car usage and transport related CO_2 emissions. One way of reinforcing this will be to make NI 186, measuring CO^2 per capita, a statutory target.

Natural Environment

12   Government to set a requirement for a strategic policy for Climate Change to be developed and owned by local authorities, in partnership with other appropriate organisations, to put in place measures addressing the issue of climate change and promoting the development of a low carbon economy.

13   Introduce plastic recycling collections at the doorstep. Also, introduce legislation to ensure manufacturers use recyclable grades of plastic in packaging, and make it a requirement for manufacturers to use the appropriate code number to identify recyclability on all plastics in a visible, minimum 1cm high triangle symbol.

14   Energy production to be decentralised to local level, which could achieve up to 95% efficiency (currently 35%) and half CO^2 emissions. This would largely support the 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 target and would require local Councils to commission a feasibility study to look at how much energy could be produced at the proposed sites. For

example, in Wiltshire this could include establishing micro-hydro power at Bishops Mill, Salisbury.

15   Increase tax on chewing gum to 200% and excess revenue could then be devolved to local authorities to fund cleaning up discarded gum. Also, Government should enforce that manufacturers change ingredients to make it more biodegradable.

16   Government should make it mandatory for utility companies to publish or make available aggregate figures for utility usage on a community basis. This could then be used by the local authority and community groups to monitor actual usage figures to help inform sustainability planning.

17   Introduce facilities for storing electrical energy generated by renewables, such as wind, solar and tidal through the use of compressed-air energy storage (CAES), as has been used by scientists for 30 years. See www.theiet.org/engtechmag for more information. A local solution for this could be to adapt and utilise the mines at Corsham and Box.

18   The nation needs to agree that, until the end of 2050, landscape issues will not be considered as valid grounds for the refusal of planning permission for renewable energy installations, allowing for several decades of economic generation, whilst not committing to a permanent impact on the landscape. No other causes for objection (biodiversity, military safety, etc) will be affected. This recognises the urgent short-term need to cut carbon emissions through the generation of renewable energy whilst we work on creating a lower carbon economy. Where significant impacts on the landscape are registered as a concern these applications can be reviewed after 2050 and the installations removed if necessary.

19   Undertake a national review of the use of street lights. Then, explore the possibility of the selective reduction in lighting through different evening /night time lighting patterns for different locations, to reduce electricity use and save money/CO_2 emissions, light pollution, etc.

Government, Involvement and Cohesion

20   All Government computers to set default printer settings to dark grey, thus ensuring cartridges last longer. In the future, computer manufacturers could be requested to ensure that all new computers have printer settings set to grey rather than black.

21   The Sustainable Communities Act consultation process should not just be a one off, but be ongoing, or at least held once per year.

22   Proposal for definition of payment of 10% of income on Council Tax to be classed as "poverty", in a similar way to paying 10% of income on heating in the winter is classed as "fuel poverty"