

Minutes

Special Meeting of : Southern Area Committee
Meeting held in : Alamein Suite, City Hall, Salisbury
Date : Thursday 5 June 2008
Commencing at : 6.00 pm

Present:

District Councillors:

Councillor L Randall – Vice-Chairman

Councillors R Britton, C Devine, J King, D Luther, I McLennan, C Morrison, W Moss
County Councillor Johnson.

Apologies: Councillors R Clewer, J Launchbury, B M Rycroft and K Wren

Officers: Tom Bray and Jade Hibberd (Democratic Services)

135. Public Questions /Statement Time:

There were none.

136. Councillor Questions/Statement Time:

There were none.

137. Minutes:

Resolved – That the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 1st May 2008 (previously circulated) and the special meeting held on the 19th May 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

138. Declarations of Interest:

There were none

139. Chairman's Announcements:

There were none.

**140. Towards One Council – Parish Delegation and Local Government Reorganisation Issues:
Cllr Jane Scott, Leader of Wiltshire County Council and Dr Keith Robinson, Chief Executive, in attendance:**

The Committee received a verbal update on parish delegation and LGR issues in general. Councillor Jane Scott and Dr. Keith Robinson then invited questions from elected members, parish councillors and members of the public who were in attendance. A summary of the issues raised is outlined below:

Community Area Boards (CABs):

Dr. Robinson stated that over the next 6-9 months CABs will be developed by the newly appointed team tasked with their implementation. Area Board Managers will be tasked with engaging local members and parish councillors, and investigating effective ways of delivering local decision making at CABs. Councillor Jane Scott confirmed that CAB membership would consist of elected unitary councillors and parish councillors and key local representatives where appropriate. However voting rights would be held by the elected members only.

Councillor Scott stated that, although there were no plans to change the existing, historic community area boundaries, some areas might not prove large enough to warrant their own CAB therefore some areas might be linked with neighbouring areas for the purpose of the CAB. The purpose of this would be to ensure that there were sufficient elected unitary councillors on the CABs as key decisions are to be made. Therefore she stated that there will remain to be 20 Community Areas but the number of CABs could be 15 or 16. Members expressed some concern that smaller areas were to be grouped with neighbouring areas but shared the understanding that there is a need for sufficient number of elected members on a board to make them viable. Councillor Scott explained that due to the number of unitary councillors and the final boundary arrangements not being agreed to date, the final details around CABs and membership are still to be confirmed.

Parish Delegation:

Dr Robinson emphasised that delegation of service provision to Parish Councils would only be taken up if individual parish or town councils have the appetite to do so. He clearly stated that parish and towns councils are not obliged to take on responsibilities. However, he acknowledged that that parishes differ in size and capacity and therefore he requested parishes interested in taking on some services to evaluate their position over the coming months. A point was raised as to the level of financial support that would come from the new council if parishes decided to take on responsibilities. Dr Robinson indicated that the prescribed budget for that service would be transferred to the parish along with the required performance criteria. As an example of the types of service that parishes could take on, Jane Scott was enthusiastic about the possibilities of parishes determining street names within their boundaries. Formal agreements would have to be drawn up between the new council and parish to capture the financial arrangement and level of service required. The county council representatives identified the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils (WALC) as an important body in the discussion on parish delegation and stated that they would be consulting them throughout the process.

The matter of transferring the new council's assets to parishes for them to control on behalf of the local community was also discussed. Dr Robinson stated that this was in fact different from the notion of parish delegation but could be explored where it would benefit the local community. The management and control of allotments and playing fields were identified as potential areas where transfers could take place if it would benefit the local community to do so. Dr Robinson identified this as an area that could be explored once the new council was established.

Development Control:

Under the issue of development control, members of the committee requested an update on how the determination of planning applications is to be carried out. Dr Robinson stated that there were no firm proposals of how planning applications are to be determined as of yet. However, it was pointed out that the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board Development Control Tasking Group were investigating a way of bringing the 4 different methods of determining planning applications across the district together. The scrutiny group have been tasked with writing a report on development control and Dr Robinson hoped this would be completed this summer and would go on to be considered by the Implementation Executive.

Dr Robinson stated that there was likely to be 4 area planning committees with planning officers remaining within the local areas. He went on to stress the importance of consulting with parishes on this issue and therefore would be seeking feedback when the report is released.

Emergency Planning:

Councillors raised the issue that, following recent flooding in the area, emergency planning arrangements need to be improved. It was identified that there is often a lack of coordination between a number of public and private actors involved and therefore better joined up working arrangements are necessary.

Local Development Framework:

The issue of the LDF was raised and the Committee welcomed an update from the County representatives. Dr Robinson stated that Salisbury had been given the go ahead to continue with the LDF but at some stage a countywide LDF would be drawn up. It was confirmed that by October 2008 the county must submit, to the Government Office, an outline of the timetable for achieving this and a report would be going before the Implementation Executive in September regarding this issue.

Parish Plans:

Following on from the discussion on the LDF, the issue of parish plans was raised. Parish Councillors were keen to know how parish plans would be endorsed under the unitary authority. Dr Robinson indicated that current practice, where Salisbury District Council members endorse the plans, seems to work effectively. Therefore parish plans could be endorsed at CABs or perhaps the area planning committee, this would have to be confirmed.

Elections:

The Committee were keen to know the election arrangements for the unitary council and parish councils. Councillor Scott stated that the unitary elections were likely to take place in June 2009. In order to align parish elections with the unitary elections, the parish elections could take place in June 2009 or 2013. The latter was considered the more likely option and feedback on this from parishes would be sought. The cost of the parish elections would be borne by the unitary council.

Referring to the boundary review, some members of the Committee highlighted some problems with maps used by the County. The Committee requested that all maps used in future should be up to date.

National Park:

The Chairman stated that his ward was a considerable distance from Trowbridge and subsequently the unitary council could seem very remote for residents in the area. Councillor Scott assured the Committee that local public facing officers would be retained in the existing district hubs and overall it is the goal of the unitary council to make service more accessible. Where local officers were not available she stated that staff would be trained to deal with the queries effectively. Councillor Scott also confirmed that the new unitary council must take an active role in all issues concerning the New Forest National Park.

Post Offices:

Councillor King expressed concern over recent post office closures and requested information about Wiltshire County Council's plans to address the current problem. Councillor Jane Scott reassured the Committee that the county are currently looking at how services such as those provided by post offices can be supported. Councillor Scott confirmed that there was a task group chaired by Councillor Moss investigating the issue. She noted that a report would be produced that would follow on from the highly commended "Sustainable Rural Communities" report produced by SDC members. She stated that some community initiatives like shops and buses can help maintain vitality and also looked to the opportunities now available if I.T. is utilised effectively.

Doctors Surgeries:

Tying in with the issue of post office closures, the issue of doctor's surgery closures was identified as an area of concern to the Committee. The recently unveiled plans from the Primary Care Trust to amalgamate services into Primary Care Centres was discussed and widespread concern over the potential loss of local doctors was expressed. Councillor Scott stated that she would be speaking to the Chairman of the PCT in the coming days to get a better understanding of the issue.

General Issues Relating to Transition:

The Committee identified that retaining key staff through the transition would be crucial. Dr Robinson stated that in a number of work areas early transfer of staff was likely so that staff would have more security. In terms of job share arrangements, Dr Robinson stated that it was an area that was expanding and he suggested it would continue.

The meeting closed at 19:40 pm