

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL

23 FEBRUARY 2010

NOTICE OF MOTION NO. 9 – AREA BOARDS – FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS CASWILL AND COUNCILLOR TREVOR CARBIN

To consider the following motion:

'The Wiltshire Area Boards initiative has great potential but six months on there are lessons to be learned and improvements to be made to local delegation. Members should have the chance to debate and recommend improvements, and not be limited to responding to a questionnaire. In that spirit, we propose that Council:

- 1) agrees that the Area Board initiative should be continued.
- 2) recognises that several aspects of Area Board work have already proved successful, for example the regular attendance and positive attitudes of the Council's partners. Board meetings have sometimes been successful in attracting high levels of public participation.
- 3) recognises however that there is some way to go to achieve the stated goal "*to provide a focus for community leadership, local influence and delegated decision making*" (p. 27 of the Area Board handbook). The public will rightly be looking for evidence of actions flowing from Board decisions. Without this there is a serious risk that Boards will lose public interest and support.
- 4) expresses a number of specific concerns, based on experience to date:
 - a) that Board agendas are too tightly managed, which has led to elected members have too little influence over agendas, and Boards sometimes failing to address major local issues.
 - b) that issues have ended up on long lists at Board meetings, often without discussion, and then on a web site which too often simply disposes of issues once officers have had a look at them, without resolution and without the involvement of ward councillors.
 - c) that there is still a lack of clarity about the budgets which are allocated to Boards, and the extent to which they are earmarked for community grants, and for allocations to Area Partnerships.
 - d) that the budgets are in any case too small to allow Boards to address community needs.

- e) that there is a similar lack of clarity about the role of Area Boards in the Council's various consultation processes.
 - f) that the chairing of Area Boards by Cabinet members and Portfolio holders may inhibit open discussion, and may constitute a conflict of interest.
- 5) Notes the ambitions in the Area Board handbook that.....
"(Area Boards) must be provided with the power to influence local services and respond effectively to local views" (Area Board handbook, p.31), and
"Area Boards will help councillors develop a meaningful community leadership role" (Area Board handbook, p.29)
and recommends to the Cabinet that:
- i. Board budgets are at least doubled in the forthcoming budget process, not by increasing the overall budget but by releasing funds from central departments.
 - ii. the necessary constitutional and other amendments are made to specify delegations to Boards for decisions on the delivery of local services.
 - iii. financial guidelines are produced to make clear that each Board has control over its own budget.
 - iv. guidelines are produced to make clear that Boards have control over their own agendas and all elected members can help set those agendas.
 - v. ward councillor budgets are introduced on an experimental basis, subject to annual reports to the Boards, and accompanied by clear rules An initial annual allocation of £5000 per councillor is proposed, to be found from within current central allocations.
 - vi. Cabinet members and portfolio holders should not chair Area Boards.
 - vii. the handling of the 'issues' process and the involvement of Area Boards in council consultations be referred to Overview and Scrutiny, for their recommendations for improvement'.