

Area North Committee – 19<sup>th</sup> December 2007

### 13. Improved Area Working

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#### Purpose of the Report

To recommend to members the areas for service enhancements in Area North, as a pilot initiative, as part of the development of Area Working within South Somerset as agreed by full Council (14<sup>th</sup> December 2006).

#### Recommendation

- (1) Members are asked to comment on the proposals for enhancing local services and the development of Area Working:
  - to allocate the sum of £10,000 each to 2 area priorities – supporting young people, and support to older people, subject to further detail of planned outcomes, costs and timescales,
  - to host an Area Forum meeting in March 2008

#### Background

Full Council agreed the basis of an enhanced approach to area working (the South Somerset Area Vision) in December 2006. Each Area was commissioned to:

- o Develop Area Forum(s) to gain consensus on the main issues affecting communities and set priorities
- o Devise better ways for holding services to account for local service delivery
- o Explore innovative ways of enhancing / redesigning services around community aspirations.

The Area Committee, working with the Heads of Area Development have been charged with working out the details of this in a way that is suitable for each area.

#### Report

Following the report of Full Council by the Chief Executive in December 2006 a number of the agreed recommendations have been put in place. These are summarised below.

- o Each Area Committee has been allocated an extra £40,000 on a pilot basis to fund better alignment of relative needs with service delivery. This money is available from 1<sup>st</sup> October for a 1-year pilot period
- o Each Ward Councillor has been allocated £2500 fund to support local initiatives which improve the area and address corporate plan priorities. Full details of this fund were approved by full Council in July and a number of grants have already been awarded.

The grants scheme is managed by the Area Development Team, liaising directly with the Ward Members. An update report on the progress of the Frontline Councillor Grant Scheme was made in November 2007

- From the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007, Area Development North has assumed responsibility for running the Community Offices in Langport and Somerton. This means that Community Advisors who staff these offices will focus on dealing with face-to-face customer enquiries. They will also be in a position to better equip themselves with local knowledge about community matters in their area and support local research into needs across that community. Customer Advisors and Community Offices are managed by the Area Support Team Leader. A report is contained elsewhere in this agenda
- Area Chairmen have been appointed to represent the Area and Area Forums on the local strategic partnership - South Somerset Together

## **Proposals for an Area North Forum?**

An Area Forum is a place at which Area Ward Members can work with Parish & Town Council representatives, Community Groups, Business representatives, other Public Service representatives and the wider community. The Forum would be significantly strengthened should County Members and Officers decide to become involved in these groups as part of their own Area agenda to work more closely with communities.

A fully developed forum will look at all available information about local needs based on community plans and other data. It will agree local service issues and identify improvement priorities.

It is proposed that a first Area North forum meeting is arranged for March 2008, if possible, in conjunction with Somerset County Council. This meeting will look at the initial allocations for service improvements, as detailed in this agenda, as well as looking ahead.

## **Will the Forum have a budget?**

The forum will not directly control a budget but will have a major influence on how the Area Committee's additional service enhancement budget is spent (for 12 months from October 2007 this is set at £40,000).

The next step would be to bring County Council service accountability into such a system with step three being the wider public services in South Somerset. In this way, such local work would link through to district wide work of the local strategic partnership and onwards to a county wide level.

## **Enhancing services**

The Area Committee has an additional £40,000 to provide a pilot programme of service improvements, aligned to what local people want. An analysis of local consultation and research evidence, including parish and market town plans, and the recent Parish workshop held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007, indicates two strong themes which would appear suitable to develop locally funded solutions.

- 1) developing opportunities for young people – places to go, things to do, getting involved

- 2) Improving access to services for older people, either through improved local transport, or by bringing services nearer to where people live, and by improved communications and partnership working to develop new activities.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

The South Somerset proposals for area forums are seeking to increase community participation.

The District Council recognises that people participate once they can see that they can make a difference, that views and opinions are listened to and that in areas of interest there is an ability to directly influence a decision making process.

This is key to cohesive communities and active citizenship. The area system has achieved much in this regard at a local level, however the next step is to provide greater clarity for residents, businesses, community groups and others and how they can seek to influence a range of important decisions at an area level.

It is recommended that an initial £10,000 is allocated to each area, with further detailed proposals to be costed and planned, for agreement in January 2008.

## **Financial implications**

A sum of £20,000 has been allocated in 2007/08 with a further sum of £20,000 set aside for 2008/09 amounting to £40,000 over a 12-month period. Any further allocations will depend on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the new scheme.

## **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

Objective: Maintain above 75% by 2012, the residents who feel the Council gives good value for money.

Increase to 65% by 2010 the people who feel engaged in, and can influence decisions that affect communities.

Maintain above 80% the people who feel satisfied with their neighbourhoods as a place to live.

## **Other Implications**

The Area Forum will play a critical part in the review and monitoring of local priorities – held within the Area North Development Plan

The Area Forum will support the delivery of numerous community-led planning initiatives, and priorities from within local community plans, through partnership, influence and resources.

Service enhancements will be directly linked to local priorities including those identified in local community plans.

**Background Papers:** *Full Council Report 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006*