

Area North Committee – 23rd July 2008

11. Area North Community Forum Event 10th July 2008

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Purpose of the Report

To outline the progress of the work to establish a Community Forum within Area North, in line with the SSDC Area Vision, coupled with a programme of local service enhancements for 2008-09.

The Head of Area Development North will make a brief presentation to provide further detail on the results of recent consultation with residents, and review of prior research for Area North.

Recommendation

Members are asked to approve the allocation of:

- a) An additional £5,000 to local environmental services (added the existing allocation of £10,000) from the Area North Service Enhancement budget.
- b) Allocate £15,000 towards Area North local community initiatives, in line with SSDC community grants policies, which support the SSDC corporate plan, and the Somerset Local Area Agreement. Awards to be approved in detail by the Area North Committee through a series of grants, to be approved by October 2008.

Report

SSDC has a long tradition of working to address the issues that matter to local people, through a system of four Area Committees (North, South, East, West). Each area covers a population of between 30,000 to 40,000. The map below shows the area covered by Area North, with a population of around 32,000. This approach is described as the SSDC Area Vision.

Delivering the SSDC Area Vision seeks to improve ways to involve local people in decision making and service provision, which directly affects local communities, through a series of community (or area) forums. The aim of the forums will be 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.

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:

- Develop local Forum(s) to gain consensus on the main issues affecting communities and set priorities
- Devise better ways for holding services to account for local service delivery
- 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.

Each Area Committee has been allocated a budget of £40,000 for 2008-09 (April – March) on a pilot basis to fund improvements to local SSDC services. £20,000 has already been allocated in principle to improved local environmental services, and support for local community safety. This was based upon information from residents' surveys including parish and town community plans.

The Area Development team has reviewed the considerable depth of research and consultation available relating to the local needs and aspirations of Area North residents, communities and businesses. In addition the SSDC Community Resource Bus was used to visit a number of different venues in Area North on 8th and 10th July, to raise awareness of the service enhancement programme, and to encourage involvement. An online survey and alternative contact details were included. The consultation sought the views of residents in Area North to decide upon the final £20,000. This could add to the existing budget for community safety and environment, or be for something new.

Feedback through the local press, website and newsletters will be provided on the progress of the investment into the priorities set by the Community Forum, and a further forum event will happen in the Autumn. Members may wish to note that the current SCC Local Initiatives Budget also seeks to support local aspirations, which coincide with the Somerset Local Area Agreement. A meeting is planned in September to present details of the Local Initiatives Budget to the Health and Well-being Partnership.

The results of the consultation showed a huge variety of interest in local improvements, with an emphasis on local projects for facilities and activities and many general comments on improving the look and feel of the local environment. In Langport an additional focus on access to the River for boating brought many positive views on the benefits of this.

In conclusion, an additional sum allocated to SSDC environmental services, and creating an opportunity for small local grants to support local initiatives are recommended. This latter allocation would offer flexibility to work with the SCC Community Development team to maximize the benefits of the new SCC Local Initiatives Budget.

Corporate Priorities

The SSDC Area Vision seeks to support all aspects of the corporate plan, and the key mechanism for identifying and addressing community needs.

Financial Implications

If approved, the full budget for service enhancements for area North for 2008/09 will be allocated.

Background Papers: *Enhanced Area Working – Full Council Dec 06; Area North Service Enhancement reports Dec 07, Jan 08, Feb 08.*