

Joint Area North Committee – 28th January 2009

10. Joint Area Committees – Somerset County Council - Managing Expectations

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Purpose of the Report

This briefing paper sets a context for how Somerset County Council (SCC) business will be dealt with by Joint Area Committees (JACs) during the phases of their development. The paper covers all SCC functions delegated including Regulation 3 planning decisions.

Recommendation(s)

That Members note the contents of the report.

Background

The Phasing

In terms of the creation and implementation of JACs, it is important to emphasise the phased approach signed up to by both councils.

The phasing is as follows:-

- Phase 1: 'learning, understanding and development' – through to July 2009
- Phase 2: 'hard County Council delegation' – July 2009 and beyond
- Phase 3: 'true partnership' – within 2 years – achieved through delivery of a 'vision' of true multi agency decision-making and service delivery partnerships operating at a local level and supported and influenced by flexible and comprehensive community led engagement and empowerment mechanisms.

Phase 1 is about learning to live and work together. A successful phase 1 will help build confidence to move into the more challenging phases 2 and 3. The appendix to this report sets out the range of SCC functions delegated to JACs with the exception of non-strategic Regulation 3 planning decisions which are covered later in the report. This represents a considerable list and commitment by the Council to embrace JACs within its structures, processes and procedures. For JACs to be fully involved in all of the functions listed will take time and your early agendas will be aimed at building the necessary knowledge and understanding of SCC's business.

Phase 1 will therefore concentrate on:

- each JAC being briefed on SCC's business in the area covered by that committee – you need to understand what is being delivered locally before you can scrutinise performance delivery etc
- dealing with any immediate and specific service delivery issues identified by members of either Council
- helping SCC – from both the member and officer perspective – understand what the JACs want in terms of information and officer support. This in turn then has to be

matched to SCC's ability to provide information and officer support to and outside of JAC meetings.

Dealing with SCC Business

The intention during phase 1 is to provide each JAC with a broad overview of SCC services in their area. This will build on the ad hoc input that the area committees have enjoyed and will be achieved through systematic forward programming of business – see next item on your agenda. The intention is to keep your agendas manageable and, where appropriate and sensible, SCC and SSDC business will be brought forward jointly to promote a more joined up approach. This is the starting point to building a level of understanding. Initial officer support at meetings will target specific items of business.

In addition to the functions detailed in the appendix, non-strategic SCC Planning applications (often referred to as Regulation 3 applications) will be delegated to JACs from March 2009. At this stage the intention is that SCC members on JACs will be able to vote in relation to all non-major applications coming before JACs for decision. Likewise District Council members will be able to vote on SCC applications coming before JACs. Prior to this, planning training will be provided for JAC members where appropriate.

The expectation is that under phase 2, each JAC will have sufficient information and support to start to tackle the full range of activities outlined in the appendix. Also, both councils will be considering in due course what further decision-making functions to delegate to JACs.

Financial Implications

There are unlikely to be significant additional financial consequences for either council as a result of the approach set out in this paper for phase 1 as the main impact will be on officer time. Any additional financial implications anticipated for phases 2 and 3 will be picked up as part of the review of phase 1 and considered at that stage in the light of experience.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

From the perspective of SCC, the approach set out in this paper will assist in the delivery of:

Aim 1 of the Annual Plan: Making a Positive Contribution

Aim 7 of the Annual Plan: Enhancing the effectiveness of SCC

Other Implications

SCC is hopeful that these arrangements will have a number of positive impacts for the Council in terms of improvements to local and strategic service delivery, improved customer access and engagement and partnership working.

Background Papers: *Agenda, paper and relevant Minute from the County Council's Executive Board meeting – 5th November 2008 – Proposal to Establish SCC/SSDC JAC; the subsequent Executive Board report to full Council on 12 November 2008 and Minute*