

Joint Area Committee - North - 27 May 2009

11. Promoting Quality Of Life In Area North – Priorities for 2009-10 (Executive Decision) (Excepted Business)

Portfolio Holder: Patrick Palmer, Chairman of Area North Committee
Head of Service: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North)
Lead Officer: As above
Contact details: charlotte.jones@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01458 257401

Purpose of the Report

To seek agreement for a set of local priorities for 2009-10 to assist with:

- The direction of resources under the control of the Joint Area Committee
- To provide the basis for the Joint Area North Committee Forward Plan

Recommendation

Members are **RECOMMENDED** to

1. Consider and amend or endorse the nine priority themes for Area North – indicating a top priority if wished - set out in the Proposed Priority Themes for 2009-10 section of this report and note that these priorities will be used to assist with future decisions on use of Area North resources, and to develop the Forward Plan.
2. Note that as part of the review of Phase 1 of the project to establish Joint Area Committees, a revised Area North Development Plan 2009-10, covering planned work, resources, local priorities and a summary profile of the area, will be circulated by the end of June, by the Head of Area Development (North).

Background

The former Area Committees, maintained by South Somerset District Council (SSDC) established a set of local priorities on an annual basis, and sought to influence progress against these priorities through allocating resources, influencing partner and/or SSDC service planning, and monitoring performance.

From these priorities, a work programme was developed, which together with the monitoring of local investment or service enhancement funded or promoted by the Area Committee, created the 'Area Development Plan', monitored quarterly.

In January 2009, SSDC and Somerset County Council (SCC) formed four Joint Area Committees in South Somerset. At present South Somerset District Executive has delegated similar budgets to the Joint Area Committee, and these are under the control of district councilors only. Further development of the Joint Area Committee, and the potential for pooled budgets or similar, are subject to the evaluation of phase 1, and progress to phase 2.

In summary the Area Portfolio aims to identify and address local needs, and in turn promotes improved local quality of life, either through direct interventions and executive decisions, collaborative working or use of influence and leadership. The Area Development Plan, and endorsement of a set of local priorities serve to support this.

Proposed Priority themes for 2009-10 – Area North

The table below suggests nine priority theme, developed from priorities set for 2009-10.

Members will recall that during the year to increase the supply of affordable homes for local people was agreed as the single top priority objective. Members may wish to indicate a top priority again this year.

Recommendation 2 of this report asked members to consider whether to confirm a top priority. Otherwise all priorities are treated equally, recognising that within the 32 parishes in Area North, a different mix of priorities will exist.

The following priorities are proposed, developed from available evidence of need and consultation, including:-

- Results of the Annual Meeting with Parish Councils, and other recent consultation or feedback from community events
- Analysis of the past year’s community enquiries and requests for support to SSDC services, plus discussions with various service managers
- Review of the recently published South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy, SSDC Corporate Plan, and Somerset Local Area Agreement
- Review of current and potential partnership work affecting Area North
- Review of current available statistics and research for Area North
- Feedback from ward and division members on local issues and priorities
- Review of the 2008-09 Area Development Plan – including targets not met
- Results of the 2008 Place Survey (further analysis is being undertaken)

	Priority theme	Areas of work this is likely to cover
1.	Increase the provision of affordable homes , with a particular focus on use of the rural exception planning policy, and the Somerset Rural Housing Enabler programme.	The Rural Housing Enabler programme and the Strategic Land Availability Assessment; including use of additional funding to target at specific local communities; use of district /county wide groups to increase focus on performance, and addressing barriers to success; involvement with major planning applications; provision of authorised pitches for gypsy and travellers
2.	Increase the availability of community and public local transport services , in particular to promote access to services and to reduce isolation	Participation in LINKS community transport (Somerton and Langport); influencing SCC / SSDC public transport planning; (relates to SST project to map and review provision of community transport in South Somerset)
3.	Increase the number, accessibility and quality of community facilities, activities or services , in particular for children and young people, and older people	Provision of advice and start-up / project support, including use of grants and service level agreements to develop community managed facilities and activities; develop strategy for community facilities (PPG17) including developer contributions through section 106; support delivery of programme of youth & play facilities into SSDC owned and community owned recreation areas;

	Priority theme	Areas of work this is likely to cover
4.	Increase access to public and community services , including the development of local public access points and access to Internet technology.	Management of Langport and Somerton offices; support to develop locally managed information centres and community offices; greater use of ICT; and through a programme of outreach events and communication activities; support district / national campaigns through use of existing mechanisms to engage with local community;
5.	Increase levels of local action and involvement in decision-making, which seeks to improve self-containment and sustainability	Promote community involvement in development of the Core Strategy and other long term planning activity; support to Transition Town / Village initiatives; potential programme to promote 'keep it local'; support to review / publish local community plans
6.	Retain and enhance key local services and businesses for residents, visitors, and employers, together with the necessary infrastructure to ensure their contribution to a vibrant economy, and local quality of life.	Involvement with land-use and spatial planning decisions, including economic development and assessing the impact of new residential development on existing infrastructure; policies to support retention of local services; small business development and business networking;
7.	Increase opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages to access and enjoy the built and natural heritage of Area North	Promote maintenance and development of local rights of way network, trails and volunteering; promote access to the waterways for boating / canoeing; support cultural events and facilities; raise awareness of and opportunities to promote local heritage for learning and tourism
8.	Increase levels of community safety and cohesion , reducing crime and the fear of crime, and anti-social behaviour through partnership work to target local priorities	Work with the Police Neighbourhood teams and other partners to identify and address local priorities to reduce crime and fear of crime, and anti-social behaviour; review and support Police Posts; civil contingencies / emergency planning;
9.	Increase local environmental quality through enforcement, education, voluntary action and joined up services.	Promote close collaboration between environmental services teams and partners; monitoring of performance at JAC; ensure local action can be targeted at priorities; support educational and volunteer based activity; involvement with Levels and Moors programmes and partnerships;

Resources to support the achievement of priority themes, or projects within those themes

The following is a summary of the available resources from SSDC to support the achievement of the Area Committee's priorities. These are in addition to the core staffing of services and main budgets for service delivery, and special programmes as agreed within the Corporate Plan.

- Community Grants budget of £29,360 for 2009-10. NB: This includes provision for continued support under existing service level agreements to the Somerton and Langport Links Community Transport Service and the Martock Youth Project.
- £150,000 over three years for capital projects (see report to Joint Area Committee – April 2009), plus a £50,000 capital reserve and £15,000 for feasibility costs.
- In addition a number of in principle allocations are held with the current capital programme including:
 - £10,000 towards feasibility work to consider a scheme to improve safety and access, and promote a strong town centre in West Street, Somerton
 - £35,000 towards a partnership project with Somerset County Council and Yarlington Homes to implement a new roundabout at Huish Episcopi (Field Road)
 - £35,00 towards the Langport Vision for river boating and improved access to the countryside around Cocklemoor and the River Parrett.
 - £2000 towards continued enhancement of the Martock precinct area.
 - New play equipment at SSDC Play Areas – Bracey Road, Martock and Stanchester Way, Curry Rivel.
- £40,000 for 2009-10 towards additional services (service enhancements)
- Carried forward from 2008-09
 - £15,000 for local rights of way / access improvements
 - £15,000 to progress the delivery of affordable housing schemes

In addition there are many projects taking place across the area, funded from main service budgets and the Corporate Capital Programme and details of these can be made available.

Monitoring progress against priorities, and promoting collaboration

It is proposed to continue the current practice that a monitoring report will be presented quarterly (July, October 2009, January 2010) to the Area Committee.

Reports from key partnerships, agencies and service teams that contribute to addressing local priorities within Area North are included within the Forward Plan, or their involvement can form the basis of community workshops or Area Forum events.

In addition reports can be provided on an ad hoc basis to ward members on particular projects or issues affecting their ward.

Conclusion

A main strength of the South Somerset area system is to provide local infrastructure to support the delivery of strategic programmes, and this will continue to be the case. Use of staff time, grants, service enhancements, capital investment, community offices, and the Joint Area Committee itself can assist with improved targeting of work, which can be challenging in rural areas, where statistics may not reveal local need. In addition, in a

rural area, economies of scale can be harder to achieve for public services, and building on existing partnerships, or promoting voluntary action can assist with successful delivery.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The set of nine area priorities has been fully informed by the new SSDC Corporate Plan, including priority themes and key targets. There are also clear links to the Somerset Local Area Agreement and South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy.

Financial implications

None from this report

Background Papers: *Area Development Plan 2008-09; Enhanced Area Working – SSDC Full Council October 2008*