

Area North Committee – 23 February 2011

10. Addressing Community Priorities - Area North Development Plan 2010-11 – 3rd Quarter Update Report

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Purpose of the Report

To provide a progress report of the work undertaken by, and on behalf of the SSDC Area North Committee to address the priorities identified for the municipal year 2010-11

[Please note:

This report should be read in conjunction with the associated report from Financial Services on the budgets under the control of the Area Committee. Councillors are asked to contact the Area Development Manager or other named contacts in advance of the meeting with any requests for further information]

Public Interest

The Area Committee adopts an annual set of priorities, drawn from evidence of local need and aspiration in Area North. These priorities drive its work throughout the year to invest in or influence the use of public resources in the locality. During the year, the Area Development (North) team work with a variety of partner agencies, SSDC service teams and members of the local community to develop, progress and complete projects and programmes.

This report provides information on work supported (through influence or direct investment) by the Area Development Service and Area North Committee, completed or taking place from April 2010 to date.

Recommendation

Note and comment on the report.

Background

In a rural area such as Area North in South Somerset, economies of scale can be harder to achieve for public services. Building on existing partnerships, or promoting voluntary action can assist to make real improvements for local people.

South Somerset District Council aims to address this challenge, and build upon the local skills and knowledge found in local communities, through its nationally acclaimed arrangements for Area Working, the Council's 'enable-partner-deliver' ethos, and its mission to be 'an organisation consistently improving local quality of life for all'.

The area priorities, together with a range of powers and functions delegated to the Area Committee by SSDC form the SSDC Area Portfolio, held by the Chairman of the Area Committee. The Area Chairman is a member of the District Executive for SSDC, and also represents SSDC as a member of the Local Strategic Partnership board (South Somerset Together.)

The Area Development Service aims to **enable**:

- The delivery of community-led projects and initiatives that promote local economic, social and environmental well-being;
- Local involvement in decision making
- Local partnerships and investments between communities and public services.
- 'Face to face' public access to services through community offices / Local Information Centres.

Area North Priorities 2010-11

The Area Committee adopted the following six priorities in May 2010, and has used these throughout the year to inform decisions for allocating resources under its control, implementing local scrutiny and service performance monitoring, promoting local partnership working and supporting community engagement activities.

TOP	
1	Ensure delivery of current Area North programme and continue to develop further affordable housing .
2	Increase access to services to improve quality of life, through local and outreach services, transport and ICT.
3	Promote resilience and growth for local services and businesses .
4	Promote community safety - reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour – where it occurs.
5	Increase local action towards carbon descent and enhance the local environment .
6	Increase and improve voluntary run community facilities and activities for all ages.

Appendix A provides further information to the current six Area North priorities and links to the SSDC corporate plan.

Appendix B includes updates on the range of work that aims to address local community priorities, and is included in the Area Development Service work programme, and / or supported by SSDC investment into services, grants, and partnerships from April 2010 to date.

Further information on the local delivery of SSDC services can be provided at a ward or parish level on request.

The presentation of this report will include some highlights of recent positive achievements and indicate issues that require further attention.

Notes and additional information

Service enhancement programmes

Members will be aware that the current SSDC budget has deleted the service enhancement budget of £40,000 as a corporate saving. The 2010-11 programme was suspended to better review the implications of various public sector cuts in South Somerset. At the time of writing it is anticipated that a request to carry forward the remaining budget will be made in order to provide investment which can support sustainability through innovation within Area North.

Previous allocations not yet fully completed are noted below:

Year	Service area	Amount allocated	Status / outcome
2008-09	Access improvements – rights of way	£15,000	A series of local priorities agreed with volunteers. Some delays due to changes between SSDC & SCC for management of rights of way. One project not yet completed.
2009-10	Access to housing services & welfare benefits	£10,000 Remaining - £8000 approx	Carried forward to 2010-11. Underspend due to taking a more corporate focus – reviewing overall service design & staffing levels for access to Welfare Benefit take-up advice & guidance. Further details available to explain how programme will be completed. Carry forward to be requested.
2009-10	South Somerset – Community Cars	£5000 Not spent	Carried forward to 2010-11. Match funding required was not achieved. Scheme will not progress. Reviewing options to address needs for future decision.

Factors affecting progress in work programmes / points to note

- Progress of the **Rural Housing Programme** appears to have virtually halted, pending national / regional / local reviews of investment. However, work between Area Development, Development Management, parish councils and ward members will continue to provide a better foundation of knowledge and understanding of ways and means to improve levels of affordable housing in local communities. An update report is expected from the Strategic Housing team.
- **Post Office Network** – “field changes”. In Area North the majority of post offices are run by self-employed sub-postmasters under contract with Post Office Limited. Field changes are when an existing Post Office service alters – perhaps through the resignation of a retiring sub-postmaster, or the closure of the host premises (eg a shop). In the recent past there have been three such occasions in Ash, Ilton, and Stoke-sub-Hamdon, each with different circumstances. We have prioritised assisting local communities to retain a Post Office service, albeit perhaps with a different

business model or service level, with success so far in Ash and Stoke-sub-Hamdon. The strong involvement of the ward councillor, MP and Parish Councils, appear critical factors – together with suitable alternative premises, at a time when the economic case for running Post Offices is diminishing. Post Offices are still regarded by communities as providing important local services – and continue to support the viability of small shops. The capacity of the regional / local structure of Post Office Limited is limited, making local action paramount if a service is to be preserved.

- A key piece of work for the Area Development Service, working closely with the Housing and Tourism services, relates to the presence and development of **Local Information Centres and Community Offices** in four largest Area North settlements. The SCC review of libraries has prompted further local discussions to consider the most viable and accessible means to for residents and visitors to access the information and ‘face to face’ support they need.
- A number of housing developments, which have **s106 contributions for community facilities** attached to them, are progressing towards their ‘trigger’ points – when developer contributions are to be paid towards facilities. Together with SSDC capital programme and other Government funding, there is substantial planned investment into local community facilities particularly in South Petherton, Ilton and Huish Episcopi / Langport. Further details are available on request from Development Management and Community Health & Leisure Services.

Financial implications

None from this report. The current financial position of the Area North budgets is included in the next report.

Corporate Priority Implications

The set of six area priorities has been fully informed by the SSDC Corporate Plan (2009-12), including priority outcomes and key targets. The Area Development team’ work programme is developed with direct reference to ‘Our Targets’ for 2010-11.

In the main the programme supported is drawn from local priorities raised by community groups, residents, local businesses and Town & Parish Councils. In consultation with ward members, a greater proportion of time may be spent on certain projects than on others, where this can also be directly linked to corporate priorities. Examples include where there may be budget savings for SSDC through reduced demand on services, local income generation or community asset transfer.

Carbon Emissions and Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None directly from this report. There are a number of local initiatives designed to promote carbon reduction including support to ‘Transition’ volunteers. In particular where we are asked to support buildings projects, applicants are expected to assess the business case for energy efficiency and carbon reduction. Opportunities for sustainable transport and promoting local self-containment are priorities.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None directly from this report. The Area Development plan includes a number of projects and initiatives, which actively promote equalities through removing barriers to discrimination and promoting diversity.

Background Papers: *Community Priorities for SSDC Services and investment in Area North – May '10.*
Reports of surveys and consultation activity are available, in addition to published town and parish plans.
