

9. Area North Priorities 2011-12

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Purpose of the Report

The report provides an opportunity for a discussion by Councillors on priorities for the coming year(s), ahead of a workshop, and review of the SSDC Corporate Plan.

The presentation of the report, by the Area Development Manager (North) will include the suggestions of priority areas.

[Please note:

- *This report should be read in conjunction with the report from Financial Services in this agenda on the use of 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

In past years, a range of priorities has been agreed, and used to inform decision making for grants and the allocation of time by the Area Development team. The priorities have also been used to influence the work of other SSDC services, and to develop the co-operation of other partners to improve local quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses, whilst protecting the local environment.

During year the committee makes financial decisions to support projects led by the local community, as well as making its own investments, which together provide long term benefits to the community.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to discuss matters of local interest and indicate priorities for the coming year(s), which would assist in promoting local quality of life.

Background

In a rural area such as Area North in South Somerset, economies of scale can be harder to achieve for public services and private sector. Building on existing partnerships, or promoting voluntary action can assist to provide greater equity of service for local people. Lack of access may bring pressure to re-design service provision.

South Somerset District Council aims to address this challenge, by promoting the local economy, by service innovation, and by building 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 Role of Area Committee

The SSDC Constitution outlines the role of the Area Committee as follows:

Each Area Committee shall monitor service delivery in its area, provide leadership for its communities, and take decisions on regulatory matters such as planning applications and statutory orders. They shall also take executive decisions as specifically delegated by the Executive. (SSDC Constitution, Part 3)

In addition to having the responsibility to determine planning applications (made under the Scheme of Delegation), and other regulatory matters; the Area Committee possesses a range of powers and functions as part of the council's Area Working system. These include:

- Discussion of any matter of interest to the area;
- Public consultation, participation and partnership working, including the fostering of a 'good working relationship' with parish councils;
- The management and oversight of local regeneration projects and capital schemes;
- Oversee and monitor the operation and services in the area;
- Enable opportunities, through partnership to provide services and benefits for local people;
- Assist with the development of corporate policy, including submitting ideas for improvement and service innovation which may be of benefit elsewhere.

Responsibility for the work of the committee (the 'Area Portfolio' is taken 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

The Area Development Service is within Area Portfolio, and seeks to reflect the community leadership role the Area Committee, by providing a range of services which **enable**:

- The creation, development and delivery of community led projects and initiatives;
- Local involvement in decision-making
- Local partnerships and investments between communities (including businesses) and public services.
- 'Face to face' public access to SSDC services via the 'Customers First' system, and other advice and information services helping residents, visitors and businesses.

The priorities agreed by the Area Committee, provide an important framework for its decision-making, and will direct the work programme of the Area North Development Service. This work is summarised annually into the Area Development Plan, monitored on an on-going basis and reported quarterly to the Area Committee.

To support a more *precise* understanding of the work taking place, (often undertaken directly *within* parishes), further development of the agreed priorities takes place in partnership with individual ward members. The council's commitment to being

'community based', recognises the values and principles of community development. In simple terms, this means acting to provide the skills and knowledge required for good decision making, and acting to ensure that decisions are taken as 'locally' as possible, and by the people in the best position to take them.

During the year, the Area Development (North) team works with other SSDC service teams; district, county and parish councillors; other public services; and volunteers from local communities to develop, progress and complete a variety of work which makes a difference to local quality of life.

The service also includes the provision of face to face public access to SSDC services in Langport, Somerton and Martock community offices and support to locally managed information centres in South Petherton, Martock, Somerton, Langport.

Priorities for use of the Area Committee resources, and use of influence.

In past years, a range of priorities has been agreed, and used to inform decision making for grants and the allocation of time by the Area Development team. The priorities have also been used to influence the work of other SSDC services, and to develop the co-operation of other partners to improve local quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses, whilst protecting the local environment.

The priorities for 2010-11 were as follows:
(see Appendix A for further details)

- Ensure delivery of current Area North programme and continue to develop further **affordable housing**. (This was identified as the **top** priority).
- Increase **access to services** to improve quality of life, through local and outreach services, transport and ICT.
- Promote resilience and growth for **local services and businesses**.
- Promote **community safety**- reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour – where it occurs.
- Increase local action towards carbon descent and enhance the local **environment**.
- Increase and improve voluntary run **community facilities and activities** for all ages.

As can be seen, these priorities reflect the main aspects of a sustainable community, for which a number of models exist, embodied by the themes of the South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy (www.southsomersettogether.org.uk). It should be assumed therefore, that all decisions to allocate time and funds would be made in the light of contributions to overall sustainability.

Whilst this ambition is unlikely to change, it is proposed to simplify the number of priorities, and to be more specific. Perhaps **three** priorities would be more succinct for both communication and evaluation. This is not to imply that nothing else matters, but is to highlight the *particular* areas for attention, which it is believed, will produce real and lasting outcomes for the community. A small number (often 3) is also easy to communicate, which is particularly relevant when the priority set is largely one of influence.

The identification of priorities can be drawn from a variety of sources gathered together, to provide good local knowledge of opportunities and problems expressed in a variety of ways by a range of 'communities' and individuals to help inform further discussion.

- Community forums or other methods to involve people in the early stages of decisions which may affect them.
- Requests for help from or action by SSDC – received from ward members, parish & town councillors; residents; businesses; other public services; and business / community groups.
- Published parish & community plans and local surveys / research available.
- Wider plans and priorities of other organisations and partnerships. For example, Somerset County Council, Avon and Somerset Police, and the NHS.
- SSDC corporate and service plans, including existing or emerging duties and powers of national legislation, notably the Localism Bill; and the Medium Term Financial Plan set by Full Council.
- Previous years' plans and work programmes that continue to benefit from local or other support.
- Other potential sources of local knowledge gleaned from 'networking', for example from meetings and events, or by reports in the local press and community newsletters.

Review and agreement of priorities for 2011-12 and future years.

As previously discussed, the start of a new four-year term of office (2011-2015) provides an opportunity to review and re-consider the Area Committees main areas of interest and ambition.

All councillors are asked to consider current work and past achievements for SSDC to be '*an organisation **consistently** delivering an improving quality of life for all*', and take account of possible future changes for this to be realised in future.

This is easily said!

Ways to form agreement will include: -

- A councillors workshop session in September,
- A short written questionnaire
- Further discussions between councillors, the Area Chairman and the Area Development Manager as needed.
- A further report to the Area Committee (November)

As a starting point, for discussion the Area Development Manager proposes THREE priorities for the coming year. This will both direct the time and allocation of funds held by the Area Development service, and act as a basis for influence with others.

- 1) Delivery of the Area North Affordable Housing Programme
- 2) Adding value to the economy in Area North, including small business development and the visitor offer
- 3) Enabling local access to services and promoting self-help in order to address disadvantage in Area North, where it exists.

The Area Committee is *well-placed* to address these priorities for a number of reasons:

- It has powers of public decision making delegated from Full Council.
- SSDC is the Local Planning Authority, Strategic Housing Authority, and the statutory provider of Licensing, Billing, Rate Relief and Streetscene services.

- The Area Committee's membership includes all elected SSDC councillors for the area, and holds regular meetings, held in public. (SCC councillors are also invited to take part if they choose).
- The Area North Portfolio has control of (limited) resources – staff, investment budgets and access to premises.
- The committee, councillors and staff may form agreements, within certain limits to help promote collaboration and for the provision of services.

To provide transparency, and a further formal public opportunity to comment, it is proposed to bring a further report later in the year, however in the meantime, the work of the Area Development service will continue to progress work already in hand, based on the current Area Development Plan, working in close consultation with ward members.

Current Area North Development Plan.

The summary of projects and issues currently supported by the Area Committee's investment into grants, partnerships or through the Area Development team's work programme, known as the Area Development Plan will be circulated separately, however a public copy can be provided on request.

Financial implications

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

Corporate Priority Implications

The allocation of resources by the Area Committee, including the Area Development Service work programme, has been fully informed by the SSDC Corporate Plan (2009-12), including priority outcomes and key targets.

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.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None directly from this report. The Area Development Plan includes a number of projects and initiatives, which actively promote equalities and aim to remove barriers to discrimination.

Background Papers: *Community Priorities for SSDC Services and investment in Area North – May 2010. Area Development Plan Progress report Feb 11.*

Reports of surveys and consultation activity are available, in addition to published town and parish plans.

SSDC Corporate Plan and South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy