

## 12. Area Lean Review Summary Report

*Strategic Director:* Rina Singh, Place & Performance  
*Assistant Director:* Helen Rutter & Kim Close, Communities  
*Lead Officer:* Helen Rutter & Kim Close, Communities  
*Contact Details:* helen.rutter@southsomerset.gov.uk  
kim.close@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462060

### Purpose of the Report

To present a summary of the recommendations being implemented following the Lean efficiency review of the Area Development service.

This report follows on from the two reports that were presented to and agreed by District Executive (DX) earlier. It summarises the changes agreed following the review, costs and the implementation plan. The review was designed to support the direction set by elected members and enable service provision costs to be reduced while maintaining the same level and standard of service.

### Public Interest

South Somerset has a unique Area Development Service which supports Ward Councillors to address the local issues faced by their Ward and supports local community self-help. The changes being made will reduce the cost of the service whilst protecting the services provided.

### Recommendation

That Members note the report and that the estimated total savings from the Review are £197,000

### Background

The Area Review began in March 2011 when the staff carried out an activity logging exercise and members completed a questionnaire to gauge their perception of what they value about Area working. The activity logs were analysed providing an overview of the work carried out in the Areas, in what capacity and by whom. The results from the questionnaire provided the key principles currently valued by Members, which will help to shape the future model of Area working in South Somerset.

A part of the Area Review and agreed by Members (DX - November 2012) has been the reduction in opening hours of the front desks to align with the changing pattern of demand, reducing associated costs whilst retaining access to the service across South Somerset.

This Area Development Service review was part of the Council's planned Lean efficiency review programme and has been carried out in accordance with the agreed Lean methodology.

## **Main Findings of Review**

Establishment structures proposed are jointly arrived at through discussion with the Assistant Director and Director.

SDDC Area System has an excellent reputation and has stood the test of time. It has built in infrastructure for 'Localism'. When taken in isolation, each Area Development Team is being run reasonably efficiently within the existing capabilities and infrastructure of the Service. However, when taken as a collective, opportunities for efficiencies are being missed. The geography and demographic of each Area is different, therefore each Area Development team has tailored the way in which they work to suit. The result is that four Area Development Teams work to some extent in isolation from each other, each with its own working practices and way of doing things. This has been evident from talking to staff who work across multiple Areas and their frustration of having to 'learn' the idiosyncrasies of each Area. The differing working practices are in some cases historical, legacy ways of working, with others evolving over time. The review worked at:

- How the current level of service can be delivered more efficiently whilst continuing to meet elected member expectations?

The future model for Area Development will see the four Area Development Teams continue. Crucially, each will retain its identity and serve the local area as they do now in the most suitable way. However, the 'ethos' to be adopted is that of a single team, sharing resources and working practices and where service delivery will not be affected at the local level if processes are to be centralised (e.g. Grants administration). The new way of working must ensure consistency across all Areas whilst allowing for local differences.

There are current working and reporting practices which date back to a time when more of the Council's activities were delivered locally through the Areas. Over the last few years, these activities (the 'branches') have been pulled back centrally, however the underlying infrastructure (the 'root structure') hasn't, introducing waste and reducing the effectiveness of the Area Development Teams. The Lean review has analysed processes and activity data.

The following sections outline the findings of the Lean efficiency review and arising recommendations. Appendix 1 gives the Implementation Plan.

### **Four Area Committees**

#### **Maintaining Area Committees**

Democratic Services are integral to managing the Area Committee cycle. The efficiency of this aspect will be addressed through a separate Lean Review of Democratic Services. This review therefore only addresses the support provided by the Area Development Officers to elected Members and Chairs and streamlining Area Development process for reporting to the Area Committees.

There is an anomaly in Area East which operates a Community Regeneration Sub Committee (CRSC). This is the only remaining Sub-Committee/forum where support from Democratic Services is provided. Area West having previously had a similar arrangement but dropped their Community Forum Sub-Committee, which hasn't met since 2009.

Discussions with ADM East regarding the purpose of the CRSC indicated that this was historically set up to involve Members with community planning, Having served its original purpose it is considered that it is no longer required; however it has continued without review. It is now seen to draw additional resources and duplication exists between the CRSC and main Area East Committee, with reports being tested at CRSC before report to Committee. The review has only addressed the duplication and inconsistency with other Areas to release ADM/CDO time. Support to CRSC in part would account for the increased resource used in Area East for Area Committees, as shown in the first round of activity logging (March 2011) that was questioned by Members from all Areas.

Improvements in the Area Committee cycle include creating service and financial report templates which will be consistent across all Areas and only reports using these templates will be presented at Committee. The revised templates will reduce the amount of 'chasing-up' Democratic Services currently carry out, ensuring reports are on time and in a suitable format and present elected Members with the most relevant information.

There will be a further review of Democratic Services as part of the Lean Programme this coming year.

### **Area Teams based in all four Areas**

The proposed structure will ensure that Area teams retain their local base

### **Proposed Establishment**

One of the key principles agreed by Members is that the Area teams are to be based in all four Areas. This principle has not only been met on a geographic level (retention of Area Offices but in appropriate and cost effective locations), but also through the proposed establishment. Detailed below, the proposed establishment will provide:

See structure chart at Appendix 2.

The establishment proposed has jointly been arrived at through discussion with the Assistant Director (AD) (Communities) and Strategic Director (Place and Performance) and presented to the Area teams for consultation. As a result the main points raised have been studied and summarized. This feedback is broadly supportive of the structural changes and gives no cause to alter this aspect. There are some very useful suggestions and improvements to the detail of the roles and other aspects of implementation which will be taken on board by ADs at the next stage. Existing temporary arrangement (East and South) demonstrate that an Area Development team can be managed by 0.5 FTE Area Development Manager.

### **Local projects & local delivery maintained, including Community Safety**

#### **Community Development/ Regeneration**

The Community Development Officer (CDO) role, supporting community development and working with communities to form partnerships to address community regeneration, has been the bedrock of the area system. It predates the formation of the current area development teams, playing a vital role in direct support for community organisations as well as supporting and working with councillors in their community leadership role. The Regeneration Officer (RO) posts were established (2003), to give more holistic capacity to the newly formed Area Development Team at a time of major recentralisation of services. The role has always had a significant amount of work in common with the CDO,

but boosted our ability to support implementation of physical projects and programmes arising from community led plans and other identified need. At the same time technical capacity from other Services (Engineers, Planners etc.) has declined steadily.

In most Areas, responding to clear local needs and Area Committee priorities, the regeneration role has developed a strong component of economic regeneration and economic development. Members indicated that this aspect is important to them in the Area Review last year. The focus of the Council Plan approved by Members underscores this importance.

The role and focus of the corporate Economic Development (ED) & Tourism Services have changed considerably over time and in recent years have meshed with somewhat patchy effectiveness with the Area based Regeneration Officers. Now there is a better focus on priorities with the newly adopted ED Strategy there is a real opportunity to work proactively together, linking business community priorities, such as those being supported with Town Teams, to specialist Officer support.

Overall the recommendations will retain the full capacity we currently have at this level but refocus the roles to respond more readily to current challenges and opportunities.

### **Community Safety & Equalities Issues**

There is little change in these roles other than streamlining processes and specifying the need to work on projects. This is facilitated by changes in reporting lines and mainstreaming of equalities will be reflected in all Job Descriptions.

The main objective in terms of efficiency with regard to community safety is to provide the Community Safety Coordinator with the capacity and quality information to improve further community safety in South Somerset.

### **Back Office Support and Front Desk Reception (inc opening hours)**

A proposal has been approved at DX (November 2012), to concentrate access in 6 offices, including a reduction in the opening hours of those community offices (Yeovil (Petters), Wincanton, Langport, Crewkerne, Chard and Ilminster) to reflect the demand for front office services. Also, withdrawal of staffing hours from the 4 smaller community offices in Somerton, Castle Cary, Martock and Bruton has been accomplished without any problems. Team Leaders spend on average 37% (Activity Logs 2012) of their time performing duties related to those of a Team Leader. These include but are not limited to: analysis of statistics, health and safety, training, management of buildings and staff management. The remainder of their time is spent on duties similar to that of the Area Support Assistants.

The Team Leader (inc Assistant/Deputy) post, has changed considerably over the last 9 years with the removal of admin support for recentralised services, for example Planning, Building Control, etc. creating management capacity utilised for taking responsibility and staffing for the front desk.

There has been no further reduction in community support staff as a result of the Lean Review; instead resilience has been built in by providing clarity around flexible roles and this will be crucial to the delivery of the service. As agreed in the DX report, the front desks need to be reducing downtime according to demand. The location of the Community Support Assistants will be more flexible and required to provide cover where needed in the Areas.

## **Leaned and Efficient Service and Consistent Standards Across all Areas**

Processes common across all Areas, taken from an Area working perspective, have been reviewed and modified with those members of staff carrying out these out processes common across all Areas, include those relating to grants and financial procedures.

### **Making Grants**

Whilst grants policies are agreed by Corporate Grants Committee (CGC), these are not always adhered to and are not always applied consistently. There is no robust system/check for ensuring that each application follows the policies and changes have crept in over time. In some cases it is not clear corporately which Committee is responsible for awarding funds against a particular budget.

The general administration of the grants process is inconsistent as services use different forms and processes and accurate data and a comprehensive picture covering all grants is not easily available.

In order to protect this front-facing support we need to maximise efficiency in our back-office systems and administration, as well as ensuring our limited resources are being used most effectively in areas of need; this requires good quality management information. Actions relate to bringing about better consistency for both delegated and non-delegated grants and clear readily accessible information. Also the need to revisit and have a wider discussion around the role of the Corporate Grants Committee was recommended because the number of district-wide grants has reduced in the past 2 years and CGC is only now responsible for 5 budgets (totaling 8 grant awards pa). CGC is made up of DX members and meetings are held on the same day after DX. These 8 grants could easily be considered as one item at District Executive in March.

### **Issues common across all Areas**

The workshop findings, observations and recommendations in this section apply to several processes and are presented here to avoid repetition.

Currently all Areas are working from the same central server at Brympton Way, yet the Areas still retain much of their independent file structure, increased storage costs as files, photos are saved multiple times. The current practice introduces waste where Officers work in more than one Area as they must learn the file structure for each service.

In Area West, an in-house team of cleaners is employed. It is claimed the estimated costs are comparable to inclusion in the corporate cleaning contract; however this has not been checked for some time. The time spent by the Area Support Team Leader coordinating the in-house cleaning team is an additional unnecessary burden.

Each of the Area teams updates and maintains their own dedicated section on the website resulting in an inconsistent look and feel to Area Development online and information duplicated making it difficult for members of the public to navigate.

## Finance

### Budget Monitoring & Reporting

The budget monitoring process is in itself reasonably efficient. The waste in the process is related to the content of reports, where the information presented does not always fit the audience. The Area teams often have to carry out additional work to certain reports, especially those intended for Area Committee, where for example the Members not only wish to see what the current level of spend is, but what funding resource remains.

The financial reporting system for the Areas, in consultation with the Finance department, is to be fully reviewed and where appropriate reports are to be amended. The revised reports must be focused to their audience and the level of detail appropriate.

### Conclusion

The proposed structure will:

- Deliver the current level of service more efficiently;
- Meet elected member expectations and

SSDC pioneered working alongside its communities nearly 20 years ago and already has a long established system to support community development, a flourishing community action culture and extensive use of parish/community led planning and delivery. This has positioned us well to meet the demands of the Localism Act and the proposed structure ensures capacity for strategic change and ability to refocus to take full advantage of any useful new tools of localism and beneficial fiscal incentives available.

Area Development aims to meet local needs but will include a significant focus on:

- Seeking to ensure that as many local people as possible have skills and confidence to play a more active role in places they live
- Enabling the creation of more sustainable communities through joined up, creative working
- Neighbourhood Plans where communities decide to proceed with a plan.

*Its strengths include:*

- Locally based, small teams with detailed local knowledge,
- Very skilled and experienced practitioners,
- Established local working relationships,
- High accessibility for community groups and an enabling focus,
- Close working relationship with Councillors

*The weaknesses however are organisational and structural issues that are addressed as*

- A relatively localised, low profile,
- Some fragmentation/ patchy sharing of practice,
- Tensions with corporate service teams,
- Complex to work with for outside bodies especially at a strategic level

The proposed structure aims to make the most of this significant investment and its strengths, while at the same time addressing the weaknesses listed above. The structure that was put in place in March 2010 did acknowledge this and put in place the post of AD Communities. It was intended that this role would be key to the organisation having a policy and strategic overview for communities.

The AD Communities post would form a bridge between organisational strategy and communities. A key element of this role is advocating for and exploring ways to work more effectively, on a place basis, with our communities, business community and partner organisations to save costs, reduce wasteful duplication and support services in community engagement. Corporate approach to Area Delivery through a key officer within Management Board. The Localism agenda brings with it new opportunities for enabling communities to help themselves, creating social enterprises and there is a pressing need to market and promote the community capacity building role of the Council better via its dedicated Area teams working closely with our technical services. This role has been in place on a temporary basis and has been invaluable. Retention of the ADM role is also essential. It is proposed to have it as a half-time post that focuses on the local delivery supporting Area Committees, partners etc. Fundamentally the role is important and does not change.

Similar to the temporary AD Communities position this part-time ADM role has been in place in East and South for approximately 18 months. This has worked extremely well and the Area Chairs who have had the part-time ADM, though were sceptical at the start, are fully supportive now after the experience first-hand.

### Implementation Programme

As explained earlier in the report, the implementation summary is contained in Appendix 1 and is already underway.

### Financial Implications

The cost of the Review itself involved staff time from both the Lean team and staff within the Area Development Service, Assistant Director Communities and Director (P&P). This is met from within existing budgets. Throughout the year the services has been maintained in Area Development and no back filling has taken place.

The table details the savings already delivered and those identified:

<b>MTFP Year</b>	<b>Savings</b>	<b>£</b>
2012/13	Management Support Post	28,730
2012/13	Additional contributions from South Somerset Together Partners	20,000
2013/14	Staff efficiencies from reduction in community office opening hours	50,610
2014/15	Staffing efficiencies	97,800
	<b>Total Savings</b>	<b>197,140</b>

A further saving of £100k is expected to be delivered from property rationalisation as per the DX report in Feb 2012.

### SSDC Council Plan Implications

The preferred model enables the authority to deliver its corporate priorities and to provide the Area Development service, including a balance of access points and choice for residents across the area, at a reduced cost, through efficient working.

## **Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)**

None in relation to this report

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

Equality impact assessment complete, no significant issues raised.

**Background** *District Executive Report, Review of Area Working Feb 2012*  
**Papers:** *District Executive Report, Community Office Opening Hours Nov 2012*