

Area West Committee – 18th July 2007

7. The Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel

Head of Service: Andrew Gillespie, Head of Area Development (West)

Lead Officer: Val Keitch, Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator

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Purpose of the Report

To note the progress of the Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members note and comment on the report to be given by the Project Co-ordinator.

Background

In July 2004, Area West Committee appointed two representatives to the Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel Implementation Group. The Panel went live in 2005 and progress reports have been submitted to the committee each year.

Val Keitch, the Panel Co-ordinator, is based in the SSDC Area West Offices in Chard. She will be present at the Committee and will speak to her report.

This report outlines progress so far and give details of outcomes. Plans are in hand for the future rollout of the project.

Progress Report

The Panel has now been operational for some 2¹/₂ years and has just received confirmation of at least one more year's funding. This funding will come from the Home Office, with other small contributions from Avon and Somerset Police, and possibly South Somerset Homes. Since the last report the Panel has been able to find an additional post for a Part-time administrator. Julia Cook is with the Panel on secondment from SSDC.

The Attorney General visited the project in January 2007 and wrote a very favourable report. He was impressed with the scope and opportunities the Panel offered. He had commissioned work on how to mainstream the idea. In February 2007 the Panel hosted a conference for over 70 people from other local authorities and community groups. The conference was successful and explained how the Panel operates. The deputy Mayor of Chard (Cllr Martin Wale) welcomed guests and there were contributions from a variety of people. The DVD demonstrating the work of the Panel was shown and copies given to all delegates.

The Co-ordinator recently delivered training on restorative Justice to a University in Texas. A workshop was presented last November in Philadelphia demonstrating the Panel.

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Cases

The Panel has now dealt with over 100 cases, from Police sources, South Somerset Homes and Environmental Protection Team. The successful resolution rate is about 94%. Clearly there are some cases where the case is reopened for minor breaches. Those cases have resulted in resolution with only one being referred back to the Police for other action to be taken.

Training

The Co-ordinator has now been accredited as a trainer with the International Institute for Restorative Practice. A volunteer is now undertaking the 3-day facilitator training in Conferencing. The Panel has evolved in its methodology and is now more Restorative. The Co-ordinator is currently advising other areas on setting up similar schemes.

Further Expansion of the Project

Crewkerne is now included as part of our agreement with South Somerset Homes, and it is planned to use existing volunteers. In time volunteers will be recruited from the Crewkerne Area. The Police are still working on a solution to the sanctioned detections problem. The Project is officially part of Conditional Cautioning for this Police area, and will deal with any such cases that are suitable for Restorative Justice. Conditional Cautioning is a sanctioned detection.

Financial Implications

Through the Head of Service for Area West the Council supported the recruitment and employment of the Co-ordinator. Current funding comes solely from the Home Office, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. Funding was in place until the end of June 2007 but confirmation has now been received that further funding will be made available that allows the Project to continue until March 2008. Funding beyond that point is unclear and work is in hand to identify other income streams. The Home Office view is that local agencies should assist with funding.