

Area West Committee – 20th August 2008

6. The Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel

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

To note the progress of the Community Justice Panel in South Somerset.

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; this has since been increased to three to include Crewkerne representation. 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 gives details of outcomes. Plans are in hand for the future rollout of the project.

Progress Report

The Panel has now been operational for some 3 ½ years and has funding in place to enable the project to continue until October 2008. The bulk of funding is from the Home Office, with other small contributions from Avon and Somerset Police, and South Somerset Homes. A part-time administrator, Julia Cook, is with the Panel on secondment from SSDC.

The current Attorney General has expressed a wish to visit the project but the date coincided with Cllr Jean Smith's funeral and has been postponed.

The Co-ordinator has again delivered training on Restorative Justice to the University of Texas, which generates income for the project. The Project has presented workshops at several National Conferences over the past year, and will speak at an International Conference in Canada in October 2008.

The Co-ordinator is to visit Belfast and advise on a scheme operating in Andersonstown. Their main interest is how we link with the local community and the Police.

Somerset County Council introduced awards for projects involved in Community Safety. The Justice Panel received first prize in two of the five categories and John Lacey (Chair) was runner-up in the Volunteer of the Year category.

Cases

The Panel has now dealt with over 200 cases from Police sources, South Somerset Homes and Environmental Protection Team. The successful resolution rate is about 96%. Clearly there are some cases where the case is reopened for minor breaches. Those cases have resulted in resolution with only 7 being referred back to the Police for other action to be taken.

Training

The Co-ordinator is accredited as a trainer with the International Institute for Restorative Practice. All volunteers undertake the 3-day facilitator training in Conferencing. Training has been delivered over the past year to staff from South Somerset Homes, Police, Taunton Deane Borough Council (Housing Officers), Knightstone Housing and volunteers. The total number trained is 65. Further training is planned for PCSOs, Housing staff and volunteers. PC Bill Geddes QPM Safer Stronger Neighbourhoods Team Beat Manager at Chard has just completed the trainers course and will assist the Co-ordinator with training. The Co-ordinator has acted as mentor for the new project in Wellington and Area, which has been funded by Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Further Expansion of the Project

The whole of South Somerset is now included as part of our agreement with South Somerset Homes, and it is planned to use existing volunteers. Volunteers are being recruited from the Crewkerne area and cases are being heard at Crewkerne. The Police are referring juveniles as well as adults and that has increased the workload of the Panel. Work is ongoing with Swanmead School, Ilminster to assist with identified behavioural problems. Holyrood School in Chard will use the Justice Panel and are becoming a direct referral agency.

The likelihood is that the Panel will be renamed in the future "Community Justice Panel – South Somerset Area".

Financial Implications

Through the Head of Service for Area West, the Council supported the recruitment and employment of the Co-ordinator. Current funding comes from the Home Office, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, Avon and Somerset Police and South Somerset Homes. Funding is an issue and discussions are being held over the future. Funding beyond October is unclear and work is in hand to identify other income streams. The Home Office view is that local agencies should assist with funding. Somerset County Council is looking at ways to deliver the Project over a wider area.

Background Papers: *Progress report to Area West Committee – 18th July 2007*
