

Joint Area Committee - West - 15th July 2009

## **9. Review of Opportunity Events**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To review the Opportunity events that have taken place over the past two years; and to seek members' views about holding similar events in future.

### **Recommendations**

That the Area West Development Team organise more opportunity events taking into account the views of elected members about changes to the current format.

### **Background**

For the past two years all the Area Development teams have been organising and delivering Community Forums with the aim of engaging more with the public and increasing the number of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality' (a target from the Local Area Agreement and National Indicator 4)

Each area has chosen a different approach to delivering the Community Forums with Area West branding the Forum as 'Opportunity' events. The 'Opportunity' events use Participatory Budgeting methods allowing the public to get more involved in the democratic process locally and have a say on how grants are spent in their community.

Since autumn 2007, six very successful 'Opportunity' events have taken place in Area West.

### **Opportunity Events 2007 – 2008**

During the first round, £30,000 was made available in each of the three Areas based around the market towns of Ilminster, Chard and Crewkerne. Community groups and parish / town councils were asked to apply for up to £5,000 for a project that would help improve their community. Representatives of the projects that passed the criteria were invited to a public meeting where they gave a three minute presentation explaining how they would spend the money and the benefit it would bring to the community. The presenting groups also provided a display board of information in support of their application. Once all the presentations had been heard the audience voted to decide which applicants received funding.

After feedback received at the first event in Ilminster, it was agreed that at the second event in Crewkerne, people who were unable to attend the meeting due to other commitments (e.g. childcare or transport difficulties), would be allowed to vote for the hour before the meeting. This resulted in some groups bussing in their supporters who voted without watching the presentations, leaving applicants making presentations to a half empty hall.

At the third event it was then agreed that all voters needed to attend the meeting and watch the presentations before placing their vote. The event proved so popular that not everyone who wanted to attend was able to get into Chard Guildhall.

Overall in the first round of 'Opportunity' events 29 groups received funding of £95,840 - see Appendix 1 (attached at pages 13-15) for details.

## **Opportunity Events 2008 – 2009**

Working with the feedback received from the previous Opportunity events and the members workshop, changes were made to this year's events to improve the process. The main changes that happened were:

1. The amount of money available differed with each town, based on per head of population. This meant that Ilminster received £20,000, Crewkerne got £30,000 and Chard had £40,000.
2. Groups were assessed in one of five categories: Community Participation, Children & Young People, Village Life, Improving Services and Healthy Lifestyles. These categories were chosen for a number of reasons, which were:
  - They fitted in with the aims of the Local Area Agreement, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the SSDC Corporate Plan.
  - As many of the previous years projects were for children and / or young people it was recognised that such projects needed a category in their own right.
  - Feedback from the previous events had highlighted that the villages felt they were disadvantaged against the town groups, so a separate category was created just for village projects.
3. Thirdly, a ticket only system was created for the event. The events are being held in the largest venues so to avoid the situation that arose at Opportunity Chard in March 2008, the public were invited to apply for a free ticket to attend. At all three events there were a greater number of applications than there were tickets available.

In the second round of Opportunity events £93,174 was allocated to 40 different projects.

## **Range of projects/organisations supported**

The range of projects that have been supported through the Opportunity process has been varied and has in many cases improved services or facilities for residents in Area West.

With the help of Opportunity events a number of villages have been able to improve their village halls or play facilities, this includes Donyatt, Dowlish Wake, Clapton & Wayford, Horton and North Perrott.

Transport for people with limited mobility has been improved in Crewkerne and Chard, whilst bus users along Canal Way in Ilminster will soon have a shelter to protect them from adverse weather conditions.

A number of community events have been supported including the Ilminster Experience, Combe St Nicholas Play Day and Ilminster Victorian Evening, these are all occasions that bring people together and help build community cohesion.

A wide range of sporting activities have benefited from additional funding including football in Ilminster, Winsham and Forton, martial arts in Ilminster and Crewkerne, hockey in Chard and the triathlon in Crewkerne.

Activities for children and young people have benefited greatly from Opportunity events. Young people in Ilminster now have a drop-in café, the skate park in Chard has improved facilities, and scouts and majorettes in Crewkerne, Ilminster, Chard and Hinton St George all have been able purchase new equipment or improve their meeting space.

**General Feedback**

The ‘Opportunity’ events are proving to be very popular with residents. The level of engagement with the public through the Community Forums is far greater in Area West than it is in other parts of South Somerset. Attendance at the events during the first round exceeded the capacity of each of the venues.

Table A below shows how many voting packs were distributed at each event.

**Table A: Number of voting packs issued at Opportunity events**

<b>Opportunity Event</b>	<b>Number of voting packs issued</b>
Ilminster November 2007	192
Crewkerne January 2008	365
Chard March 2008	415
Ilminster October 2008	190
Crewkerne January 2009	148
Chard April 2009	193

Attendance at the second round of Opportunity events was limited because of the ticket system. However at all three events we had double the number of requests for tickets than actual tickets available.

Opportunity events are also proving popular with people who would not generally attend a Council meeting. People attending the event were asked to complete an evaluation form and Table B below shows how many of those people had not attended a council meeting before.

**Table B: Percentage of Opportunity attendees who had not been to a Council meeting before.**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Number of completed evaluation forms</b>	<b>Percentage of people who had not attended a council meeting before</b>
Ilminster 2007	69	62%
Crewkerne 2008	121	53%
Chard 2008	136	67%
Ilminster 2008	86	65%
Crewkerne 2009	91	55%
Chard 2009	99	69%

The largest number of comments about a particular issue related to the tickets and the limit on how many people could be involved in the democratic process. All the people who commented, felt that a system needed to be devised that would allow more people to engage with the ‘Opportunity’ process.

The second cause of concern for people focused on the categories created in the second round. Some people felt they were not fair and did not agree with the way some of the projects had been allocated to a category. However, others recognised the need

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for categories and felt that they worked better than the previous round when categories had not existed.

### **Financial Implications**

Funding for the two rounds of Opportunity events came from the Area West Reserve. Funding to support further events would have to be found from Area West Reserve or other sources.

### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

The Opportunity events addressed the corporate aim to “Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities”, and in particular key target areas:

- 4.16 Outcome: An empowered community where all people take part in shaping their neighbourhood
- 4.19 Increase civic participation in the local area
- 4.20 Increase % of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality

**Background Papers:** *Previous reports to former Area West Committee  
Event evaluation forms*

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