



# **JOINT AREA COMMITTEE - WEST**

## **OCTOBER 2009**

### **ITEM FOR INFORMATION**

Should members have questions regarding any of the items please contact the officer shown underneath the relevant report. If, after discussing the item with the officer and it is felt appropriate, a member may request an item to be considered at a future Committee meeting.

## **Funding for County Information Points**

In response to members' queries, Julian Gale, SCC Group Manager – Community Governance has provided the following information;

### **Background**

This note provides information in respect of the County Council's decision – confirmed on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2009 - to withdraw funding to CIPs. This decision was taken as part of the Council's 2009/10 budget process and followed a review of the Council's involvement in CIPs.

The reasons behind the withdrawal of funding can be summarised as:

- It was considered that they no longer provided value for money for the level of County Council investment (the report identified that the overall average in respect of County Council enquiries was just 12% of the total with the exception being Porlock (71%)). It was noted that in 2008 West Somerset & Sedgemoor District Councils withdrew their support for those CIPs in their areas.
- It was considered that the relevance of CIPs to the County Council had been overtaken by other access channels that had developed over the time that CIPs had been active – most notably the web and Somerset Direct.
- The need to find significant savings in the Council's 2009/10 budget. In the critical financial climate that SCC found itself in the expenditure on CIPs was no longer considered justifiable by the previous Administration faced with many difficult decisions in relation to protecting front line services.

Currently, the Council is looking to take advantage of the ever developing technology and access channels for customer contact. Work is on-going with TDBC through Southwest One on new telephony / on line access proposals to enhance the customer experience via those routes. In addition work on a customer access strategy for the whole of Somerset is proposed under the Pioneer Somerset programme.

SCC continues to provide a wide range of services in local areas and is appreciative that the District Council is continuing to provide a 'signposting' service for County Council services. This will complement the plethora of direct access / contact points which the County Council has with the public across all district areas - ie highway offices, libraries, schools and other local offices so members of the public have numerous access routes and opportunities to make contact at the local level.