

**INFORMATION BRIEF:
COMMUNITY AREA BOARDS**

NOVEMBER 2007

The Community Area Board will be a formally constituted arm of the new Council for Wiltshire and will have delegated authority assigned to it by the Cabinet in order for it to act as a local executive arm of the Council. In the longer term, the aspiration is for other key organisations providing public services to the area to be represented on the Board and for them to make executive decisions at these meetings.

Overarching Aim

The overarching aim is for the Councillors of Wiltshire Council to be empowered at the local level to help build strong and resilient communities across the County.

Purpose

To be a highly transparent and visible local governance mechanism where information about community priorities and issues can be considered; decisions about the local element of service provision can be made and local problems can be resolved through the public sector and other agencies working collaboratively.

Responsibilities

- To act as a local executive on unitary authority services which is responsive to the local community area, its communities of interest and the Community Area Partnership
- To be empowered to work with a wide range of service providers at the local level
- To be local and transparent by ensuring that local people within the community area are aware of what decisions have been made that have an impact on their locality, by whom and why
- To exercise voting rights on specific key decisions

Functions

- To agree a framework for consultations carried out in the community area on behalf of the Council (and, in the longer term, consultation carried out by other partners) and to take into account the findings where relevant to decisions being made; also to provide feedback on major statutory consultations on behalf of the community area
- To influence the delivery of public services in the community area in order to pursue local priorities and issues (this will include services provided by the Town and Parish councils as agents under contract to the Council)
- To solve local problems directly and/or encourage and support local people and the Community Area Partnership in developing local projects to address any problems or issues
- To allocate budgets to the Community Area Partnership, to develop participatory budgeting processes in the area and to be instrumental in supporting and

developing funding applications to external bodies and funding streams (including where possible, to be the administering body for this funding if it is secured)

- To provide excellent two-way communications for the community area about public service provision and to the Council and Cabinet about the implementation and effectiveness of policies
- To bring together partners, service providers and the local community into a coherent system where issues and priorities are identified through a State of the Community Area Debate (to feed into the annual State of Wiltshire debate).
- To agree actions to address these issues in a published Local Area Assessment. To provide grants for local projects and actions and participatory budgeting opportunities through an annual Decision Day event. To tackle difficult or cross-cutting issues through a Local Area Challenge (this could be linked to a countywide process)

Membership

- Elected unitary councillors in the community area (typically 4 to 6 councillors, depending on the community area, the chair to be selected from and agreed by this group)
- Cabinet member of the unitary council
- The Board would be able to call in, with their agreement, organisational representatives who have control of local resources and the authority to make a decision e.g. Police, Fire and Health at a senior decision-making level; service providers as and when required; elected representatives from the Town and Parish councils in the community area; chair of the Community Area Partnership etc.

Connections - organisations

Community Area Partnerships and its theme groups

Town and Parish Councils

Wiltshire Council Cabinet

Wiltshire Assembly

Wiltshire Public Service Board

All other public and voluntary sector organisations eg Police, Fire, Health, CVS, Citizens Advice Bureau etc

Other substantive partnerships (transport, economy, culture etc)

Wiltshire Forum of Community Area Partnerships

Local Involvement Networks (Health)

Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs)

Housing and Social Care Networks and Associations

Plans and Strategies

Local Area Agreement (especially, Safer and Stronger Communities block), Community Strategy, Local Development Framework plus other strategies which have a significant impact on the local area eg Strategic Assessments

Coverage

To cover the whole population and interests of all of the towns and parishes in the community area, including the divisions of the unitary councillors.

Frequency

The Community Area Board will determine the frequency of its meetings for the year in advance, these to be held quarterly as a minimum. There will need to be some preparatory meetings with the Community Area Partnership which could adopt a workshop style in order to plan the State of the Community Area Debate event, for example.

Resources

- Community Area Manager
- Democratic Services support
- Core funding to support Community Area Partnerships
- Project funding to support priority community projects
- Assistance with research, intelligence gathering, consultation, external funding applications, events management, communications and publications, financial and performance management
- Training and development programmes
- Clear and consistent focus on the community area eg in terms of policy development, decision-making and service provision (with access to and the participation of local service providers)

Transformational Outcomes

The new arrangements will have to mark a difference to what has gone before and will have to achieve something different. In terms of transformation, the differences will be that:

- Elected members are exercising their mandate as local community leaders
- The performance of the Council, its services and the Community Area Boards is visible and held accountable at the community area level
- All services will be community-facing and highly responsive to Community Area Boards
- Local issues and problems can be addressed quickly and Community Area Boards, working closely with the Community Area Partnerships, are able to help build resilient and strong communities

Risks

- A realistic level of resource needs to be available to pilot and experiment with this model as well as to implement it on an ongoing basis
- A tendency towards a more traditional, bureaucratic approach could hinder the transformation that is needed in community governance arrangements
- People's awareness of local democratic processes is low and an effective communications strategy is required to ensure enhanced public engagement in democratic processes

Evaluation

Evaluation criteria can be drawn from the new set of national indicators where these are applicable to the community area level. Evaluation criteria were also examined by Wiltshire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny in April 2006.