

Area East Annual Parish & Town Council Meeting Summary of Issues Raised – For information

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Purpose of the Report

To inform Members of the topics discussed and the issues raised at the Annual Parish and Town Council Meeting.

Public Interest

All Area East residents are represented at the local level by their Parish Councillors. Issues that are not within their direct control can be taken up with the District Council, County Council and other public service organisations. This Annual Meeting covered topics of interest to Parishes and this year had a focus on Community Broadband, GDPR and Changes to Local Government in South Somerset.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

Background

Each year the Area East Committee (AEC) hosts an Annual Parish Meeting. This enables the District Council to share information about topics we know to be of interest to Parishes. It also enables Parishes across Area East to come together to discuss locally important issues and raise matters of concern with the District Council. The Area East Committee receives a summary of the event with any issues raised and actions taken arising from the meeting.

The Event

This was hosted at Churchfield on Monday 23 April 2018. Half an hour was allocated before the meeting started to enable informal discussions with Councillors, officers and speakers.

The event was well attended with 24 Parishes represented (36 people), five District Councillors and six presenters present. Cllr Nick Weeks welcomed Parishes and said that feedback helps us to make best use of AEC resources and helps to set priorities for the coming year. He went on to thank those Parishes which had provided funding for South Somerset Community Accessible Transport (CATbus) as these financial contributions mean that there are sufficient funds for the service to continue to operate for the next year.

Community Broadband Solutions – Tim Adams (Blackford & Compton Pouncefoot), Phil Crawford Smith (Cucklington) & Matt Barrow (Stakeholder Engagement Officer, Connecting Devon & Somerset - CDS)

Matt Barrow did a comprehensive presentation about the Superfast Broadband (SFB) Phase 1 achievements and advised the Phase 2 programme is due to be announced imminently. Commercially-funded superfast is now available to 653,500 homes and businesses across the CDS

area. Combined with the CDS' rural-focused programme, it means a total of 952,400 homes and businesses across the whole region now have access to superfast broadband.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the programme had not been without problems the approach adopted made sense given that the programme had to fit around commercial delivery to around 550,000 properties. The announcement of the Phase 2 delivery programme should be made by the end of April. The Phase 2 programme is a partnership with Gigaclear and Airband. Gigaclear's commercial provision will be by fibre to 43,000 properties with 35,000 through the CDS programme and Airband will provide for 13,000 properties. A voucher scheme, comprising three different elements (individuals, community solutions and a challenge fund) would also be announced after the Phase 2 programme launch. Whilst the CDS programme had been successful in providing largescale coverage there is also scope for local solutions and the meeting went on to hear from Tim Adams and Phil Crawford-Smith about the approach adopted in their Parishes.

Tim Adams explained that in Blackford, (a Parish meeting) they faced particular problems about how to raise funds legitimately for a scheme. Connectivity was via the North Cadbury exchange, sited in South Cadbury. After considering a variety of options Blackford felt BT Openreach provided the most suitable, 'future proofed' solution for their village and sought to achieve an initial commitment of £500 per property from householders. Actual contributions were reduced following a grant from SSDC. Work is now underway with routing, mainly through existing ducts and from poles, within the village.

Phil Crawford-Smith explained that Cucklington was split between two exchanges both 4+km from village. Following initial research they had five potential options which ranged hugely in cost up to £175k. The village's proximity to North Dorset where Wessex Internet were active meant that their service was the most viable option. A combination of cost underwriting by individuals within the parish, the CDS Phase 1 voucher scheme and a grant from SSDC meant that at a cost of around £9k the solution was very achievable. Going live in May 2016 the Wessex offer had proved to be very reliable with the original 30 subscribers now increased to 80, the scheme has also been extended to include Stoke Trister

Common to both schemes was the willingness of householders to contribute, with actual take-up often exceeding initial commitment. It was agreed that copies of presentations would be circulated with notes of the meeting.

Tim Adams mentioned that as a result of the success of phase 1, CDS was to receive some additional funding referred to as 'Gainshare'.

Q&A session:

Q – Will properties not operational from CDS Phase 1 automatically be included in the Phase 2 programme?

A – Yes, these will roll forward automatically

Q – Would you consider that the Phase 1 CDS programme was a success?

A – On balance, it was successful in delivery an extensive programme, complimenting commercial provision, it also over achieved by around 20,000 properties

Q – Why did SSDC not release the funds they hold to support the programme

A – They sought greater clarity about how these funds would be targeted and used to supplement other funding such as LEP but as we launch the Phase 2 programme it would be fantastic to open a conversation about this

Q – SFB, talked about for so long but frustratingly slow

A – Approach will be much clearer in Phase 2, Gigaclear daily work is bigger and there will be better information about build dates and live dates

GDPR – Zoe Rodgers

Zoe gave a brief explanation of the new rules coming into force in May 25th 2018. She explained that all public bodies needed to take a number of steps to prepare for the new regulations. Zoe has produced some guidance and supporting templates for Parish/Town Councils and training sessions had been arranged.

Q&A session:

Q – Do the new regulations apply to a Parish Meeting?

A – Subsequent to meeting confirmed that, some Parish Meetings have additional powers which would make the new rules applicable.

Q – Why are we being told this now, with so little time to prepare?

A – The GDPR information has been available for years. SSDC isn't responsible for supporting other organizations but has compiled this information help.

Transformation and Locality Working – Caron Starkey and Tim Cook

Caron Starkey, the Council's Transformation Lead explained that a £2.5m revenue saving was required so something radical needed to be done, whilst protecting frontline services - in line with Members' wishes; she said that having been Council of the Year many years ago, there was a real will to reignite ambition for the council. Caron's slides showed that the way in which people interact with the Council is, and will continue to change and there is a need to 'catch up' particularly by enabling customers through technology. How Parishes engage will also change but Parishes will be advised as Parish accounts and other processes start to 'go live' over a 90 day period from January 2019. As part of the 'one team' approach phase 2-3 of the recruitment into new roles is underway with 230 staff involved, she asked that people to be aware of changes as we transition to the new ways of working. In parallel with this, and like many other Councils, we have adopted a Commercial Strategy, to achieve a better yield on our investments, helping us to generate income to invest in preserving and improving our services.

Tim Cook, in a new role as Locality Manger since January, advised that his team will bring a number of the Council's community facing activities such as pest control, some Environmental Health, Planning, Leisure and Area Development functions together in early 2019 as a new Locality Team. This team together with others will work together as 'One Team' working more strategically to deliver the next phase of area working - Area Plus.

Q&A session:

Q – Are we running Somerset the best we can – or would unitary Councils be more efficient

A – No known plans for unitary arrangements in Somerset.

Feedback on the event responses

Out of the 17 feedback forms handed in one rated the evening excellent, 12 rated the evening good and 3 acceptable (one didn't answer). All agreed the content was relevant. There were 3 *new* Parish/Town Councillors in attendance.

Future Events for Town and Parish Councils

An Annual Parish & Town Council Meeting is held in each of the 4 Areas. In between times the Area teams arrange other workshops and events for Parishes depending on need. Parishes enjoy a close working relationship with their Ward Members who will discuss and advise on how to take up matters of local concern as well as being a vital communication link. In addition, they receive agendas for and

are warmly invited to attend the monthly Area East Committee meetings where they can raise any topics of interest or concern to their residents.

Financial Implications

There are no new financial implications as a direct result of this report

Corporate Priority Implications

This meets the following Corporate Aim:

- *To deliver well managed cost effective services valued by our customers*

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

Equality and Diversity Implications

Background Papers: *Notes of the Area East Annual Parish & Town Council Meeting held on 23rd January 2017;*
