


HEARING THE RURAL VOICE – GOVERNANCE AND DECISION MAKING IN A RURAL AUTHORITY

- **How to make the ‘rural voice’ heard?**
- **How have the creation of unitary authorities led to changes in governance?**
- **How can the Unitary engage the rural community?**
- **How has devolution worked in Wiltshire?**
- **How is the neighbourhood planning process helping rural communities express their needs and aspirations?**
- **How significant is the role of Neighbourhood Planning?**



A grayscale photograph of Stonehenge, a prehistoric monument in England. The large, rectangular stone structures are arranged in their characteristic circular formation. In the foreground, several sheep are grazing on the grass. The sky is clear and light-colored. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

The Rural Urban Classification is used to distinguish rural and urban areas. The Classification defines areas as rural if they fall outside of settlements with more than 10,000 resident population according to www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-classification.



WHAT DOES RURAL MEAN IN WILTSHIRE

- **1.4 persons per hectare**
- **Single city of Salisbury**
- **20 Market towns**
- **There are 500,000 rural businesses :**
 - **micro and small businesses employ 70% of workers in rural areas**
 - **Agriculture, fisheries and forestry employ 15% of workers in rural areas**
- **Rural in Wiltshire means:**
 - **20 market towns**
 - **253 parish councils**
 - **80% of the County**
 - **20% of the population**

HEARING THE RURAL VOICE

- Community engagement embedded in the community
- Community engagement managers
- Local Area Boards
- Task Groups
- Neighbourhood Planning



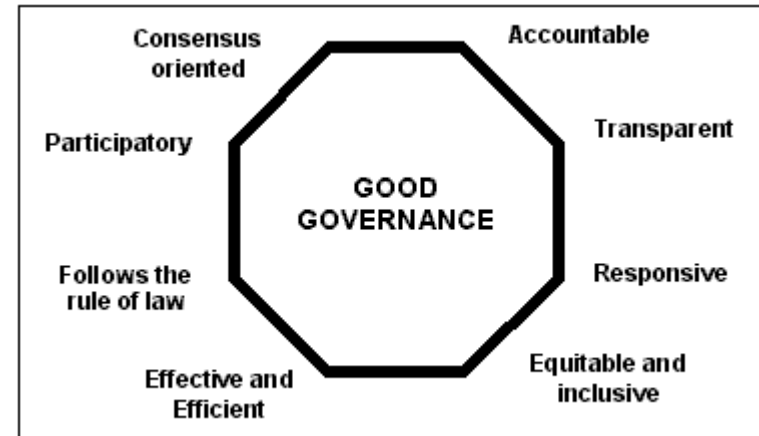
CHANGING GOVERNANCE IN WILTSHIRE

■ Pre 2009 –

- Kennet
- North Wiltshire
- West Wiltshire
- Salisbury
- Wiltshire County Council

■ Post 2009 –

- Wiltshire Council
- Salisbury City Council



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COMMITTING TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



- Community at the heart of everything the Council does
- Area Boards have been set up to bring local decision making back into the heart of the Community.
- Meetings take place every 8 weeks and in between there are Task Group meetings.
- The Task Groups consist of local people, Wiltshire Council staff and Councillors who tackle local issues and find solutions to take forward to the next area board.
- The Area Boards provide grants to community groups and youth funding in partnership with local youth networks
- There are also Local Community Engagement Managers to facilitate and enable closer working between the Council, the Community and Area Boards

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH COMMUNITY AREA BOARDS



“Is there an issue affecting your community that needs to be addressed? Would you like to change something about where you live? Do you think something could be done better?”

One of the key roles of the Area Boards is to help local people find solutions to things that are complex or non-routine and affect the community as whole - not simply a few individuals. For the majority of routine problems, the Council can respond directly and this is the best place to start for most problems that are likely to affect you”

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGERS



- Create, support and develop stronger communities
- Strategic partnership working and empowering volunteers
- Facilitation of outcome focused community led action to deliver local priorities
- Supports the delivery of devolved community governance and service provision
- Oversees the investment of £1.5 million Area Board Budget
- Working to ensure that communities are fully engaged at community area level, within areas such as health and wellbeing, positive activities for young people, highways and transport and services for older residents.

WORKING OUT DEVOLUTION



- Creation of a Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Programme
- Acknowledgement that assets and services are often better delivered as a more local level
- Asset Transfer programme is benefits driven and operates on an accelerated schedule
- Town and Parish Councils are seen as place shapers
- Asset transfer offers immediate benefits to communities
- Less financial constraints on Town and Parish Councils – ie Cap versus No Cap on revenue raising powers
- Closure or transfer of public conveniences and play areas

DEVOLVING WILTSHIRE



- New policy was approved by Wiltshire Council in late 2017
- Principles and framework of packages on offer to Town and Parish Councils clearly defined
- Core services and associated assets were defined as grounds maintenance and street scene and some environmental services including Markets, woodlands, open cemeteries and tree maintenance
- A streamlined process with due diligence at the beginning to promote better flow once the town and parishes are involved and invested
- Aiming at completion within 12 months whilst acknowledging more complex transfers may take longer

EVOLVING DEVOLUTION



- Salisbury was the first with the transfer of services and assets on a cost neutral basis including revenue generating assets and services
- Change was needed to the Council's business plan and the need for savings has meant a move away from a cost neutral basis to a positive benefits position for the Council
- Lessons learnt have shaped the development of the policy
- The programme is targeted to achieve £2m of savings through investment of £0.782M by having a lower cost base and some targeted staff reductions
- Continuously looking for further opportunities i.e. enforcement

GOVERNING DEVOLUTION



- Designated programme group with project managers, property solicitors, commercial solicitors, estates surveyors, accountants, highways engineers and countryside officers
- Programme Board as decision makers for the programme
- All packages agreed first at relevant bodies full council meeting and then by Wiltshire Council Cabinet

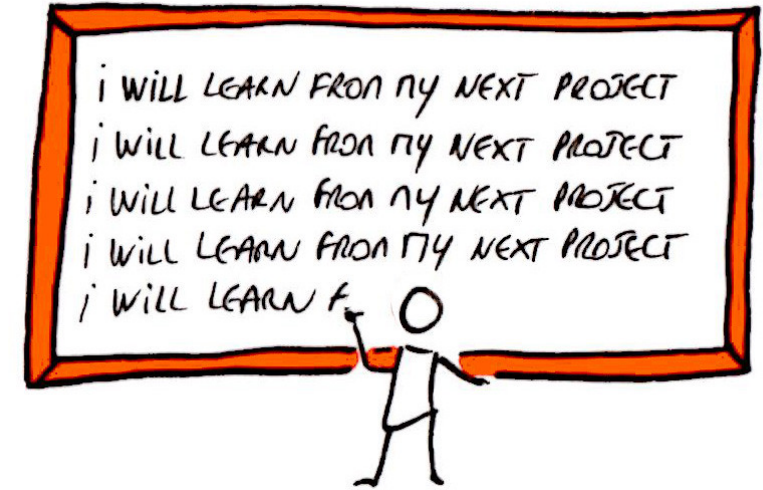
REALISING THE BENEFITS OF DEVOLUTION

- Benefits are not always tangible
- Other benefits include those which cant always be accurately quantified and attributed ie
 - Cost avoidance
 - Hidden savings
 - Stronger partnership working
 - Empowering communities

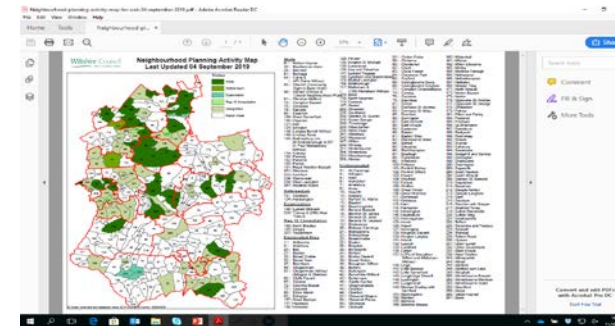


LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM DEVOLUTION

- The need for a clear purpose – why are we doing this and repeating the message
- A benefits driven approach
- A formal governance foundation and framework
- Adoption of a model process including template documents
- Know and agree the common position
- Determine bottom line for effective negotiation



RURAL COMMUNITIES – NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS



The **Our Community Matters** sites aim to strengthen local communities in Wiltshire by making it easier for local people and groups to talk to one another online. Users can use these virtual noticeboards to find about local news, local debates, events and volunteering. Users are also welcome to register as a contributor to connect with their communities through posts and comments or advertise community events and volunteer opportunities.

HOW SIGNIFICANT IS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING IN WILTSHIRE

- 253 Parish and Town Councils :
- 29 Made Neighbourhood Plans including 1 Community Right to Build Order
- 2 Neighbourhood Plans at Referendum
- 2 Neighbourhood Plans at Examination
- 3 Neighbourhood Plans at Regulation 16 Consultation Stage
- 46 Neighbourhood Plan Areas designated
- 152 Parish and Town Council areas not designated



HEARING THE RURAL VOICE – AND LISTENING TO IT



- Neighbourhood Planning is one way of ensuring that the rural voice is heard and listened to
- Community Matters website is a valuable tool
- Bringing the debate directly to the community
- Empowering the community and devoting appropriate resources
- Sharing the knowledge

THANK YOU

- Flo Churchill
- Interim Director of Economic Development and Planning
- Wiltshire Council

