

## **Cabinet – 18 March 2009**

### **LNP Review**

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Perry, Communities and Partnerships
<b>Service:</b>	Walsall Partnership
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	No

#### **1. Summary of Report**

- 1.1 This report updates Cabinet on the progress made with the consultation on the future of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships. It aims to communicate to Cabinet how the Walsall Partnership Board expects to take its recommendations forward and seeks approval to establish a working group and for the allocation of funding.
- 1.2 The report is being brought to Cabinet as urgent business because grant funding for the LNP team terminates in June and staff are therefore at risk of redundancy. The approval to short term funding, recommended below, will remove this risk. The Chairman of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel has been consulted on the need for urgency, in line with the constitution.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the establishment of a working group to review and develop the full report, and to produce an agreed action plan for the way forward.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the allocation of £197,000 of Performance Reward Grant to the current LNP team to sustain it from June 2009 until March 2010.

#### **3. Background Information**

- 3.1 The Walsall Partnership became the governance structure for LNPs in 2006. Due to budget pressure, diminishing grants supporting LNPs and the need for Walsall Partnership to fulfil its governance role of LNPs in a partnership approach, a review of LNPs was initiated jointly by the Chief Executive and Leader of Walsall Council in September 2008.
- 3.1 To support this, the Walsall Partnership secured funding for a consultant, undertake the review through the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency

Partnership (WMRIEP) Chris Allen is the Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser (NRA) appointed to this assignment and he presented his report to the Partnership on the 9 March. The Executive Summary is attached at appendix 1.

#### **4. Resource Considerations**

##### **4.1 Financial:**

- 4.1 Funding to support the current LNP team will cease at the end of June 2009 and consequently the employment of all staff concerned are at risk. This shortfall of funding for the full financial year has arisen as the result of reducing grants from central Government.
- 4.2 Irrespective of any new arrangement or staffing structure that might be agreed as a result of the review, it will be necessary to sustain a support service during the transition from the existing to the new. The cost of sustaining the existing team until the end of March 2010 is £197,000.
- 4.3 One of the recommendations of the report is that LNPs should be jointly owned and invested in by the partners. However, this would be difficult to achieve for 2009/10 at this stage, with so little lead time and with partners having already set their budgets. It was therefore agreed at the Partnership that Cabinet be recommended to allocate Performance Reward Grant to sustain the existing LNP team until the end of March 2010. Based on current estimates, the Performance Reward Grant generated by Walsall Partnership's performance against Local Area Agreement targets should be at least sufficient to absorb this cost.

##### **4.2 Legal:**

Not applicable

##### **4.3 Staffing:**

The LNP staff are currently funded by Area Based Grant until June 2009. As a result staff have been notified that their posts may be at risk. The recommendation to approve funding for the remainder of the financial year 2009/10, if agreed, will allow this risk to be removed and provide continuity and stability to support the working group and implement its recommendations.

#### **5. Citizen Impact**

- 5.1 The impact on citizens could be significant and the likely outcomes would be more engagement by service providers and greater influence of local people over the resources spent in their LNP area.

#### **6. Community Safety**

Not applicable.

## **7. Environmental Impact**

Not applicable.

## **8. Performance and Risk Management Issues**

### **8.1 Risk**

A complete risk analysis needs to be undertaken.

### **8.2 Performance Management:**

The proposals, if adopted, are likely to impact positively on performance and provide a logical platform from which to deliver key aspects of CAA

## **9. Equality Implications**

- 9.1 The LNP structures offer the opportunity to engage in different ways with different communities. There is an equality action plan in place to improve and widen engagement of different communities.

## **10. Consultation**

- 10.1 The consultant report and its recommendations are a result of a wide-ranging consultation including interviews, online surveys, individual and group meetings.

### **Background Papers:**

Draft executive summary (see appendix 1) of a consultant report reviewing Local Neighbourhood Partnerships.

Report to Walsall Partnership Board dated 9 March 2009.

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Jamie Morris  
Executive Director

18 March 2009



Councillor Garry Perry  
Portfolio holder

18 March 2009

# **Walsall Local Neighbourhood Partnerships Review**

**Local Improvement Adviser assignment**

**March 2009**

## **Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

- 1.1 On the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2008 the Walsall Partnership Board considered a paper from the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council that raised the following key questions concerning the development of LNPs.
  - What is their role and purpose going forward?
  - What resources are needed and where are they to come from?
  - How do we ensure effective community involvement?
  - Are partners properly engaged?
  - How do we ensure this all leads to better public services?
  - Do they cover the right areas?
- 1.2 Walsall Partnership commissioned this review of the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) with funding and support from the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership. The purpose of the review is to recommend improvements in the light of good practice from other areas and knowledge of the specific circumstances within Walsall. The review also sits in a broader national policy context including the Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper, particularly the “duty to involve” communities in service planning, the Community Empowerment White Paper, Local Area Agreements (LAAs), Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs) as well as the need for efficiency savings.
- 1.3 LNPs are crucial to realising the Vision for Walsall in the year 2021 as stated in Walsall’s Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). Locally identified priorities are set out for each LNP, and generically LNPs will have a lead role in the achieving the delivery of “Strong and Dynamic Communities”, namely
  - Encouraging active citizens in local decision-making processes
  - Ensuring groups, neighbourhoods and communities can influence decisions affecting their local area
  - Ensuring strong neighbourhoods where people can on well together
  - Valuing and enabling families to be self supporting and resilient
- 1.4 The three year delivery plan for the SCS is the Walsall LAA, which outlines the following relevant “Stronger Communities” national indicators (NIs).
  - NI 1 – *The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area*
  - NI 4 – *The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality*
  - NI 5 – *Overall/general satisfaction with local area*
  - NI 7 – *Environment for a thriving third sector*
- 1.5 In conducting this review, opportunities to be consulted were provided to all partners, using a range of methods. This included an online survey, one to one meetings, small group meetings and briefings, consultation evenings and a document review. The time available for the review was very limited, and further ongoing consultation is critical to the future LNP development process.

- 1.6 A key conclusion arising from the consultations is that greater attention appears to have been given to what LNPs are rather than exploiting the potential for what LNPs can do. There has been too much emphasis on process rather than the purpose of LNPs, including a lack of consistency with regard to governance and the respective roles of stakeholders. It is essential that the process of LNPs is shaped by their purpose, and not vice versa.
- 1.7 There is no common understanding (and significant misunderstanding) of the purpose of LNPs. This needs to be addressed urgently. Each neighbourhood plan clearly states *“LNPs aim to influence services which are being delivered in their area by working in partnership with various service deliverers and the community. Working as a partnership will ensure services in the LNP areas are meeting the needs of residents and partners. It also ensures resources are maximised to their fullest potential”*. This statement of LNP purpose needs to be understood, owned and communicated by Walsall Partnership and all concerned. The prime purpose of LNPs should be that of facilitating engagement of residents by service providers leading to an increase in the responsiveness and quality of service provision. This will require that LNPs are able to influence (but not necessarily control) wider public spending and other investment in their area. A secondary purpose could include that of capacity building of local initiatives that will enhance community involvement and support local groups to take on responsibilities alongside their rights to influence.
- 1.8 Central to the achievement of these purposes is developing a common understanding of community engagement across all public agencies with a ‘duty to involve’. Engagement within LNPs and at a more local level needs to go beyond being a forum for complaints. Engagement means, for example, developing processes for information sharing, consultation, influencing service design and delivery, and scrutinising the quality of received services. This engagement needs to be undertaken by the service providers themselves, coordinated by LNPs. 88% of respondents to the online LNP survey identified themselves as White – British, demonstrating the need to extend the reach beyond the current levels of engagement. Community engagement is demanding, yet it is an aspiration within the SCS and has merit both in terms of process (the ‘right’ thing to do) and also in terms of impact (improved services).
- 1.9 There is a lack of clarity and consistency related to the governance of LNPs. They should be seen as sub partnerships to the Local Strategic Partnership, yet they are perceived as a Walsall Council mechanism. The LSP should performance manage against agreed outcomes – central to which is community engagement and empowerment. The coordination and chairing of LNPs should have clear lines of accountability to the Walsall Partnership. There is a sense of frustration in some areas at the perceived political domination and lack of a partnership approach. There is also evidence of a lack of mutual respect between those providing public service and those receiving it, which mitigates against a partnership approach. When an LNP is clearly not functioning appropriately, the LSP does not seem to be taking responsibility or action to remedy it.

- 1.10 The lack of clarity regarding both purpose and governance of LNPs has also led to confusion with regard to democratic process and the respective roles of all partners. LNPs provide an opportunity to link together *elective democracy* through the involvement of front line ward councillors along with *participatory democracy* through the involvement of resident service users from the area alongside the professionals delivering those services. The involvement of elected members is essential and builds in their role as community leaders who are able to facilitate problem solving by enhancing dialogue between all stakeholders.
- 1.11 Although some concern was raised about the geographical boundaries, they seem to be fit for purpose. However, it should be recognised that these “lines on a map” are pragmatically drawn in order to give coverage to the LSP area. Community engagement needs to link to more local networks (eg Community Action Groups, Children’s Area Partnerships, Neighbourhood Watch, Tenant Management, etc). The LNP should play the role of the umbrella organisation that is able to maintain an overview of local intelligence and facilitate dialogue centred on problem solving between partners. The LNP should also have an overview of data relating to its area and an overview of the public spend it should influence.
- 1.12 The role of the LNP staff team also needs to be clarified and developed. The lack of funding continuity has resulted in staff turnover and loss of experience. The confidence of existing staff is also damaged. This review highlights that LNP staff are appreciated and valued, but the lack of clarity in their role means that they can be drawn into inappropriate activity. *Ideally, each LNP would have a full-time area coordinator to facilitate it.* The financial burden for this should not lie with Walsall Council alone (See further on “investment” below). Good practice from other locality working initiatives demonstrates that an area coordinator needs both experience and commitment from all stakeholders.
- 1.13 The form of each LNP may vary as long as their function/purpose is consistent to all and there is a clear line of accountability to the Walsall Partnership. LNPs should be owned by appropriate partners who are able to influence service delivery. Due to LNPs having a “complaint centred” approach, there has been a loss of constructive dialogue and some service providers have established other vehicles for engagement. The role of partners is to bring their perspectives (eg as an elected member, service provider, resident, third sector body, etc) into a problem solving forum. Their role is not about representing groups. The make up of a partnership can be locally determined around their purpose. However, as a key element of partnership working is strong working relationships, there should be consistent appropriately senior representation by all stakeholders. The chairing can be locally determined, but elected members in this role is advantageous as long as it is inclusive and facilitative. There may be value in some areas to see whether an existing partner might have value as an ‘arms length’ regeneration body or community trust. It would be inappropriate for the LNP to be so constituted, as it would break the governance line to the LSP.
- 1.14 In order for LNPs to function efficiently, there needs an appropriate level of investment from public partner agencies and other local groups. The financial burden has fallen to date on the Council, yet recent government legislation and

guidance places an obligation on all public agencies with regard to community inclusion. There is reluctance to invest in a partnership when it is seen to be council owned and politically driven. There is also the potential for increasing investment via other local bodies from sources that are inaccessible to public service organisations. Investment via a well performing LNP would be able to demonstrate added value within the Improvement and Efficiency context.

## **Key Recommendations**

1.15 This principle recommendation of this report is that clarity regarding the purpose of LNPs is achieved with urgency. This will not involve changing the stated aims/purpose of LNPs, but rather increasing the understanding, communication and ownership of these. As identified above (paragraph 1.5) this review is part of an ongoing consultation process. It is therefore proposed that a working group is established by the Board of Walsall Partnership to address the issues identified in this review, which in summary include:

- Examining how LNPs might exert influence over a wide and appropriate range of service delivery. This will entail having an overview of all the resources being invested in the area, and not just the very small percentage spend that LNPs may have at their disposal for commissioning.
- Looking at models for community engagement as part of good practice and fulfilling requirements arising from “duty to involve”. It will also require developing an understanding of the different levels of engagement, how this is best fulfilled, and how support officers from all partner agencies can complement each other’s activity rather than duplicating.
- Establishing the governance model in line with that previously agreed and published. This will entail the LSP will ensuring an appropriate level of consistent partner involvement, appropriate chairing of LNPs and information sharing procedures being developed.
- Developing a performance management framework that will monitor progress against outcomes in the SCS and LAA. It will also entail assessing how LNPs are functioning as partnerships and umbrella bodies in their areas.
- Examining the implications for all partner stakeholders. This will include information sharing regarding local data and investment, mechanisms for engagement and shaping service delivery.
- Developing the LNP support team. The team’s role needs to become one of coordinating service deliverers who themselves must (and have a duty to) engage communities. This is a change from the current role of the LNP support team, which is to directly engage communities. Consequently, different skills will be required in the support team.
- Establishing a learning culture that will encompass the skills required for all stakeholders and officers within a partnership context, and identify where learning needs must be met.