

Cabinet – 14 September 2011

Evaluation of Area Partnerships

Portfolio: Communities and Partnerships - Councillor Zahid Ali

Service: Walsall Partnership

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

As Walsall's Area Partnerships have now been operating for over 12 months, Walsall Partnership Board recommended that an evaluation be undertaken to identify where improvements can be made to the model and any issues which need to be addressed.

The evaluation was undertaken by Chris Allen, West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, and the findings and recommendations are attached at **Appendix A**.

The recommendations of the evaluation report will have a positive impact on how Council and partner services are better able to respond to and support resident's concerns.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet is requested to consider the findings and recommendations of the 'Evaluation of Area Partnerships'
- 2.2 That Cabinet consider Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel's proposal that Elected Members should not attend Area Partner Meetings
- 2.3 That Cabinet agree that the recommendations of the "Evaluation of Area Partnerships" (**Appendix A**) be submitted to Council when the report on changes to the Walsall Partnership Constitution and Accountable Body Agreement is considered at the November meeting.

3. Report Detail

- 3.1 During 2009, Walsall Partnership proposed to Walsall Council to review its community engagement processes to enable these to be more effective. Following a lengthy consultation process with our Elected Members, partners and communities, Walsall Council, at its meeting in January 2010, agreed to establish six Area Partnerships. It was acknowledged that each Area would develop dependent of its own needs and ways of working. Therefore, an independent review of progress to date was welcomed to identify successes and areas where improvements could be made.
- 3.2 Chris Allen, West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (WMIEP), undertook the review and his findings and recommendations are presented in **Appendix A**. The support of WMIEP has been continuous throughout the establishment of Area Partnerships. Chris Allen provided Walsall Partnership with the proposals for establishing Area Partnerships, following research into other Local Authorities who were considered to be 'best in class' at developing community engagement and consultation with residents.
- 3.3 The key findings of the evaluation are:
- Area Partnerships are developing effectively with recognised excellent support from Area Managers and their Support Officers. Members report that the new structure is both enabling and accelerating actions to tackle local issues. The Area Managers are seen as skilled and dedicated officers, who are able to unravel complex issues and enable appropriate action
 - The approach taken from the pilot onwards has been to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of solving problems at the earliest possible stage before they escalate
 - It is recognised that the Managers are central to the success of the programme, and that recruiting more experienced managers has been a worthwhile investment
 - There is broad cross party support for Area Partnerships. This will be essential for the long term culture change needed to enable 'Smarter Working
 - There are some excellent emerging partnership approaches, demonstrating a new culture of working with partners such as Health, the Police, Fire and Rescue, ASB team, social housing providers, etc
 - The evidence that highlights the strength of partner engagement is a willingness to share data and intelligence in order to enable joint working
 - A number of different types of meetings are emerging (Partnership, tasking, task groups). Clarity needs to be established with regard to the

purpose of each meeting, which will identify who is critical to the process, and reduce time demands on those who do not need to be there

- There is a misconception that community engagement is confined to the community meetings. In reality, they are just the 'tip of the iceberg' of engagement. There is increasing good practice beyond this in all areas
- Some areas are experiencing greater demand and work load volume and intensity, placing excessive pressure on their Area Managers
- It is recognised by senior management that the Area Partnership approach has been a 'pioneering' first step within the Working Smarter programme

3.4 Since the evaluation report was produced, a number of recommendations have been, or are in the process of being implemented, including:

- A number of projects and events have been held across all Area Partnerships
- Partners continuing to effectively engage and lead on a number of work streams within the Area Community Plans
- A workshop for newly elected members scheduled for 26 September 2011 and a workshop for other elected members in early October
- Development of our websites to enable residents to raise issues and let us know how they want to be engaged with Area Partnerships
- Additional staffing resource to deal with the high volume of work in the large area partnerships of North Walsall and South Walsall
- Area Partnerships being closely linked to the evolving Working Smarter Programme.

3.5 The findings and recommendations were presented to the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 12 July 2011 where they were welcomed and all the recommendations endorsed. The Panel requested that an additional recommendation be made to Cabinet and Council to request that Elected Members should not attend Area Partner Meetings.

3.6 Walsall Partnership has reviewed its overall structures to streamline how this operates and to become more efficient and effective in how it makes decisions. At the annual meeting held on 4 July 2011, A Borough Management Team was established to replace Walsall Partnership Board; an Operations Group was established to replace the Area Partnership Implementation Group and Borough Tasking Group; a Walsall Intelligence Network was established to bring together data and intelligence across partners to enable sharing of data at a strategic and local level to provide better information for decision making.

4. Council Priorities

Area Partnerships impact on each of the Council's priorities.

5. Risk Management

Any risks associated with Area Partnerships are monitored through the Area Partnership Project Highlight Report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Consideration will need to be given to the continued officer support for Area Partnerships to ensure that the actions identified in the Area Plans are delivered effectively and efficiently. There continues to be a risk associated with the continuation of partner contributions to the funding of Area Partnerships from the NHS. A reduction in contribution will have a negative effect on resources available to continue the work.
- 6.2 As Area Managers continue to work with elected members, communities and partners, additional local issues are being identified, which have considerably increased the work undertaken within Area Partnerships.

7. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications directly in relation to Area Partnerships.

8. Property Implications

There are no property implications directly in relation to Area Partnerships.

9. Staffing Implications

The staffing of Area Partnerships is reliant on the continued support of the Council and its partners, particularly the NHS and Walsall Housing Group, who provide seconded staff.

10. Equality Implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been developed for Area Partnerships.
- 10.2 A presentation on Area Partnerships has been made to the Equalities and Diversity Group in June 2011, where information was provided to evidence the work being undertaken within Area Partnerships is linked to the equality and diversity priorities.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 The establishment of Area Partnerships was consulted on with elected members and partners.
- 11.2 The Area Plans are continually reviewed and updated with issues and priorities identified by elected members, communities and partners.
- 11.3 The evaluation report was consulted on with elected members and partners including the Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

Background Papers

None

Author

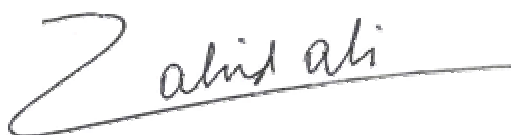
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5 September 2011

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Portfolio Holder



5 September 2011

Walsall Area Partnerships

Interim Review

July 2011

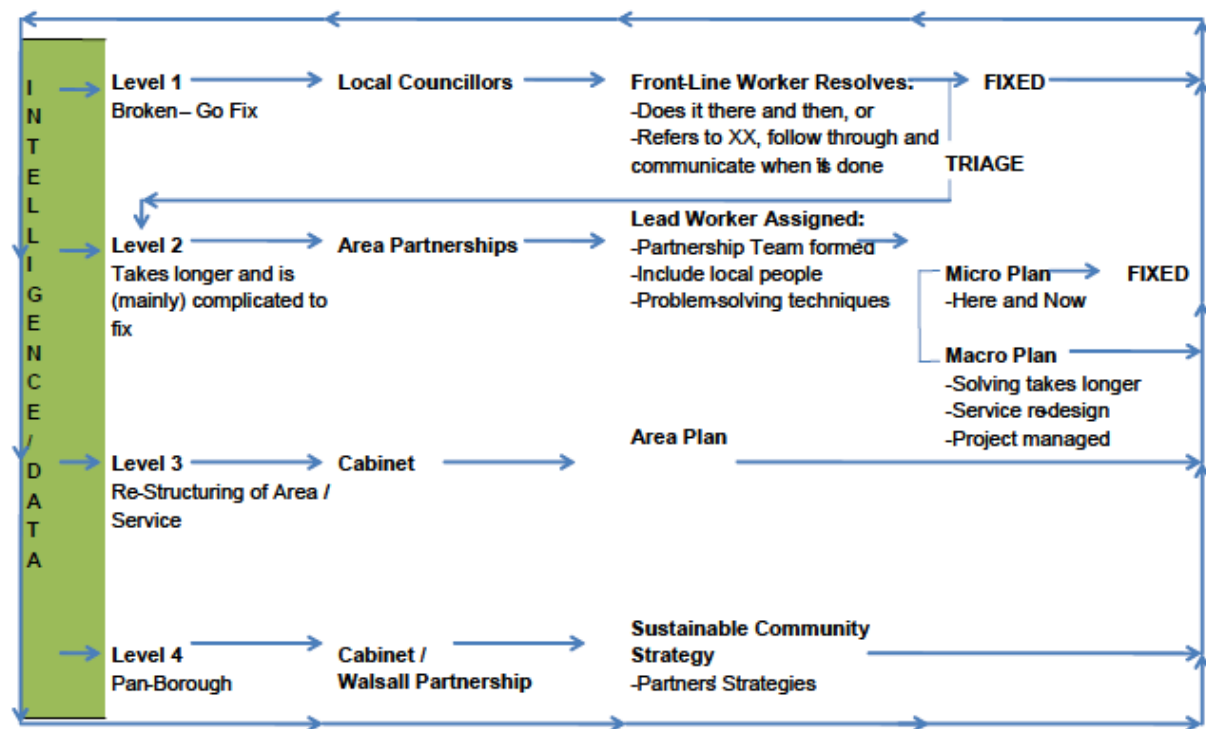


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Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been resourced via the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programme (IEWM) via the assigned Place Adviser to Walsall Partnership (WP). Its purpose is to review the Area Partnership approach as it completes one year of operation, and to recommend changes that will raise performance.
- 1.2 IEWM supported this assignment given its core principle of a partnership approach to problem solving using a 'smarter' methods that will save resources. It was recognised that
 - the Area Managers and their support officers are the 'linchpins' of the area partnership approach in Walsall.
 - the assignment would promote learning within the team internally and across the borough as a whole.
 - the approach supports co-working between elected members and officers.
 - support would protect the investment of partners by seeking to minimise staff turnover.
 - learning could be enabled through the development of benchmarking.
 - work was being conducted with partners in a challenging economic environment.
- 1.3 Area Partnerships form a key strand of the Walsall 'Working Smarter' programme, and the approach was developed learning lessons from the previous Local Neighbourhood Partnership approach. This review looks at developments from the previous approach, and highlights areas where progress has been achieved as well as highlighting where reversion to the previous approach needs avoiding.
- 1.4 The Working Smarter programme is seeking to embed a 'Whole Systems' approach, which looks at different levels of delivery. It is built on a four level model that was very successfully piloted in St Matthew's ward 12 months' ago. A case study from the pilot is appended below.
 - Level 1: Simple action now to save complex costly intervention later
 - Level 2: Low level partnership working needed using problem solving techniques
 - Level 3: Need for a high level multi –agency intervention to sort an increasingly complex issue
 - Level 4: There is need for a systems change at a borough level (Cabinet intervention and impact on partner strategic plans)
- 1.5 Area Partnerships primarily enable 'Level 2' problem solving through facilitating multi-agency working, with Area Managers fulfilling the role of catalysts for positive change in their respective areas.
- 1.6 This approach is based on
 - putting residents at the heart of action planning
 - enabling local people to influence decisions
 - working smarter and in partnership to reduce the impact of steep budget cuts
 - ensuring that the service to residents is right first time, every time.



1.7 The 6 area partnerships endeavour to

- introduce a radical change in how engagement occurs
- empower local structures and people
- communicate with ALL residents
- create clear responsibility and accountability
- ensure a partnership approach
- align service delivery to local needs.

1.8 The methodology for the development of this report has been

- Agree time allowance with lead officers in WP and IEWM.
- Ongoing liaison with lead officers.
- Consult with Area Managers and Support Officers, and provide recommendations to the Partnership Director
- Provide support training to Area Managers and Support Officers
- Assimilating relevant information from the wider support work and knowledge of the Area Partnerships.
- Liaison with the Leadership Centre support to members.
- 1-1 interviews with identified elected members.
- Observation and discussions from Chairs and vice chairs meeting.
- Observations from Area Partnership meetings.
- Meetings with senior officers with Walsall Council.
- Meetings with stakeholder partners.
- Elected member consultation (open to all and ongoing).

Work in Progress:

- Analysis of area plans.
- Further consultations as required by elected members and stakeholders.

Findings

2.1 Effective development:

Area Partnerships are developing effectively with recognised excellent support from Area Managers and their Support Officers. Members report that the new structure is both enabling and accelerating actions to tackle local issues. The Area Managers are seen as skilled and dedicated officers, who are able to unravel complex issues and enable appropriate action.

There are some misunderstandings about the level of support available (ie a misconception that there is a 'team' of people behind the Area Manager). There are also some tensions about 'who gets the credit' in some instances. The attitude needs to be that of benefit for all rather than aligning credit to a particular group, especially in the public 'service' arena.

Partner stakeholders also recognise clear improvement from the previous LNP model. Local multi-agency tasking lies at the heart of success. It has been clearly stated a flexible approach is encouraged within the context of the four level model. There is also increasing understanding and application of the four level model by Area Partnership chairs and vice chairs (ie it is becoming embedded in their terms of reference).

2.2 Value for Money:

The approach taken from the pilot onwards has been to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of solving problems at the earliest possible stage before they escalate. The strategy of linking together 'common sense and calculators' as a mechanism for problem solving and demonstrating saving is especially critical in the context of immense pressure on public finance.

It is also recognised that the funding for quick wins and early intervention available to Area Managers is vital both in terms of nipping problems 'in the bud' and also demonstrating to members of the public that action can be taken, thus raising public confidence in the whole approach.

2.3 Area Team:

The area team currently consists of 6 area managers and 3 support officers, along with managerial support for both groups. There is a 'can do' attitude within the team, which is recognised and respected by the great majority of partners (ward councilors, other public and community leaders and workers, etc). It is recognised that the Managers are central to the success of the programme, and that recruiting more experienced managers has been a worthwhile investment. The managers have great satisfaction from their jobs, even though some barriers to progress can be frustrating.

The 'can do' attitude unfortunately means that managers do not find it easy to say "no" to tasks that they believe outside their core duties. This is especially true when requests come from elected members.

2.4 Elected members:

There is broad cross party support for Area Partnerships. This will be essential for the long term culture change needed to enable 'Smarter Working'.

Elected members are vital to the success of Area Partnerships – providing the

both the 'clout' and democratic legitimacy. A strong working relationship between ward councilors and the Area Manager is essential.

However, not all elected members have taken ownership of Area Partnerships and given their full commitment, support and leadership. Elected members themselves also identified the need for future support and training. It also needs to be recognised that some Members feel they are attending a plethora of meetings and guidance as to what would make the most of their time would be helpful.

There is some variation in thinking with regard to whether elected members should attend stakeholder meetings. Some feel strongly they should, and some feel it is not their role. Of those wishing to attend, some feel it is to share information, and some feel it is to gather it. There is also some unease amongst some stakeholders about the attendance of elected members at these meetings with regard to the confidentiality of information being shared, especially when related to operational matters.

There is the need for further understanding regarding the role of members. This review is seeking to highlight areas where there might be some consistency, whilst still leaving scope for local variation, as one size never fits all.

2.5 Partner engagement:

There are some excellent emerging partnership approaches, demonstrating a new culture of working with partners such as Health, the Police, Fire and Rescue, ASB team, social housing providers etc. There are some internal partners where there is a struggle to engage with Area Partnerships when the central strategy is pan borough, or even Black Country wide (eg Economic development).

It has been observed that under the previous LNP programme, there was nowhere to take issues that needed a multi-agency approach (such as ASB), but now area partnerships enable such a process. There is feeling that some partners are not 'stepping up to the plate' in some incidents, and seeking to park problems with Area Partnerships rather than looking to lead and use the Area Partnership as a means of taking an effective partnership approach.

The evidence that highlights the strength of partner engagement is a willingness to share data and intelligence in order to enable joint working. The confidence of partners in the process is enabling this increasingly. There is also evidence that Area Partnerships are influencing change in mainstream partners' way of working.

2.6 Area meetings:

A number of different types of meetings are emerging (Partnership, tasking, task groups). Clarity needs to be established with regard to the purpose of each meeting, which will identify who is critical to the process, and reduce time demands on those who do not need to be there. All meetings are seeking to develop a holistic approach to tackling local issues. It is entirely appropriate that some meetings are closed when dealing with sensitive and confidential information.

2.7 Community Engagement:

In reproducing the recommended way of working, there is a misconception that community engagement is confined to the community meetings. In reality, they are just the 'tip of the iceberg' of engagement. There is increasing good practice beyond this in all areas. The evidence suggests that the larger part of community engagement and consultation in Area Partnerships occurs outside of community meetings with some excellent and innovative practice, which places Walsall as a leader in the Localism agenda. Enabling processes through which the community can recognise what needs to be done, and be supported to do it for themselves lies at the heart of both Big Society and empowerment of local communities.

All partners also have their own engagement processes that can help extend the level and quality of engagement (eg the Police 'conversations with a purpose' and Walsall Housing Group's residents survey).

Although it was identified that old LNP style meetings were ineffective and unrepresentative of local communities, some elected members valued the opportunity to face the public and hear their issues directly. Accordingly, community meetings were included with the Area Partnership model. The intention was that these meetings were developed and led by ward councilors with the support of constitutional services. However, in practice, the onus has fallen to Area Managers to organise, lead and encourage people to attend community meetings. Not only has this increased the burden on Area Managers who are working to full capacity, some of the meetings have not been owned by councilors, and some have also been critical of them.

2.8 Capacity:

The success of the programme also provides one of its threats – that is, the capacity of the Managers and the Support Officers. Some areas are experiencing greater demand and work load volume and intensity, placing excessive pressure on their Area Managers.

The inappropriate time demand on Area Managers includes having to deal with 'Level One' issues if requested by their local councilors; organising and supporting Area Community meetings; leading on issues when partners are reluctant to take a lead role; and facing internal 'Level 3' and 'Level 4' type barriers.

2.9 The 'Working Smarter' context:

Area Partnerships have been a key an underpinning support for "Working Smarter" programme. They contribute significantly to Walsall Council's new operating system, with potential to identify how the council can improve performance in the eyes of the customer. It is a very successful and well managed initiative, backed by clear thinking at a cabinet and management level.

Although the four-level model is being incorporated into working procedures across the council, there is greater evidence, at this stage, that external partners to the council are engaged with the model (especially within Area Partnership work streams) than internally within the council. However, it is recognised by senior management that the Area Partnership approach has been a 'pioneering' first step within the Working Smarter programme.

Recommendations

3.1 Recommendation 1: Cross Party Support

It needs to be recognised that 'success is a journey and not a destination', thus placing the Area Partnership model within a long term culture change context. Commitment to this culture change process from the principal party leaders will give confidence to both partners and the public for the long term. Scope still remains for change in the light of learning, but leaves intact the fundamental principles and structures.

3.2 Recommendation 2: Finance

Processes remain in place to quantify cost savings as demonstrated within the pilot stage of the programme. This will continue to enable confidence that the programme continues to save costs for the public purse, as well as highlighting barriers that limit further cost savings. This will also strengthen the rationale for increasing the capacity of the Area Partnership team.

3.3 Recommendation 3: Area Manager budget

The funding assigned for the Area Manager to spend is left solely in their discretion in order to tackle 'quick wins' (eg up to £10,000). This enables a swift response to issues and also separates the funding from political influence. Managers remain accountable for any spend through monitoring procedures, but the culture should be that of 'seeking forgiveness' rather than 'seeking permission'.

3.4 Recommendation 4: Area Partnership meetings

The Area Manager needs to be entirely responsible regarding who should attend partnership meetings, tasking meetings and task group meetings in order to maximize the efficiency of them. This may involve informing elected members that their presence may inhibit progress, or it may involve informing members that their presence would be critical to enable progress. Any information shared needs to be classified as confidential and, if necessary, outline confidentiality agreements should be agreed and signed. The meetings are not appropriate for the purpose of briefing members.

3.5 Recommendation 5: Area task groups

Area Managers need to recognise the limitations of their own capacity and seek to identify partners who will take a lead role regarding identified priorities in their respective areas. This lead role might be taken by a partner agency or department (eg Police, ASB team, Health, etc), or possibly one of the local ward councilor. Without that supportive leadership from partners, local tasks will not be able to be advanced effectively.

3.6 Recommendation 6: Level One issues

In order for the model to continue to work effectively, elected members should go directly to front line workers to resolve such issues in the first instance. This will protect the capacity of the Area Manager to focus on issues than demand a partnership approach. If a Level One issue proves to be more complicated than first identified, then referral to the Area manager would be appropriate.

3.7 Recommendation 7: Elected Members

A workshop is facilitated¹ in order to brief new members, and refresh previous members, about the core issues of the area partnership approach. This will help clarify what is expected of members, and their vital role in enabling this process through their leadership and giving it democratic legitimacy.

3.8 Recommendation 8: Community Engagement

It needs to be recognised that community meetings are the tip of the iceberg in terms of community engagement. This recognition will enable the development and integration of the rich variety of engagement mechanisms that can drive customer intelligence as part of Working Smarter in Walsall, and enable ownership as an aspect of empowerment with the development of Big Society principles. Increasing access to the Council's internal customer intelligence and external partner's information will encourage and 'resident insight' approach.

3.9 Recommendation 9: Area Community Meetings

The purpose of community meetings should be made clear and communicated. They should be owned and led by ward councilors and organised with the support of constitutional services, and **not** the Area Managers or their Support Officers (due to the increasing pressure on their capacity). Councilors have the flexibility to organise their own meetings as they feel most appropriate (eg Ward Meetings, Community Forums, or no meetings at all). Area Managers should have the flexibility to attend the meetings as their capacity allows. Learning gleaned from such meetings can be shared at the Area Partnership chairs and vice-chairs meeting.

3.10 Recommendation 10: The 'Working Smarter' context

A workshop is facilitated² that enables consideration of emerging good practice that will help shape the wider 'Working Smarter' programme. An "Appreciate Inquiry" mechanism is recommended which would enable a 360 degree understanding of progress during the first year of the programme. This would also enable issues at levels three and four to be identified and tackled.

3.11 Recommendation 11: Local financial need

There is a danger, as is highlighted in evaluations of previous local initiatives, that the pertinent financial issues for local people are put secondary to the cleaner, safer, greener agenda. The current economic climate demands a priority on financially related issues such as debt, doorstep lenders, poverty, worklessness (especially amongst young people), etc. It is recommended that the local barriers to employment be considered as part of the pan Borough and wider Black Country economic development approach.

¹ Time exists within the current review process to enable this

² Time also exists within the current review process to enable this

Appendix - St Matthew's Pilot

St Matthew's ward is in the Walsall South Area Partnership (St. Matthew's / Paddock / Palfrey / Pleck)

Client Group/Topic:

- Adult Social Care
- Children's centres and think family
- Other projects (not highlighted here):
 - Worklessness
 - 16/17 year old homelessness
 - Street scene
 - Town centre
 - ASB (Williams Street)

Objectives:

- General:
 - Working smarter using the 'four level model' (see appendix below)
 - Cost savings
 - Increased customer satisfaction
- Adult social care purpose:
 - To re-design adult social care around a more flexible, immediate and appropriate to customer needs.
- Children's centres and think family purpose:
 - To test the validity of intervening at an earlier stage to prevent families needing complex and costly support services in the longer term.

Outcomes: - in particular is work delivering efficiencies/ and could it be replicable elsewhere:

- A borough wide roll out of the adult social care project estimates savings of just under £1.5m. The figures are verified by the Finance.
- Increased staff job satisfaction and motivation.
- Learning outcomes are stated as
 - Clear leadership is required to bring about cultural change.
 - Leaders must model the behaviour needed to implement the system and to prevent staff from reverting to the old system.
 - Members have a vital role to play in developing communities to be part of the solution.
 - Design new systems and services to meet demand, rather than re-design existing systems.
 - The resistance of the existing system is significant.
 - Prototype at small scale and then roll out when a solution works.
- Replicating elsewhere: The St Matthew's pilot highlighted that money can be saved in five key ways:
 - 1) Working with true demand, avoiding queues, unnecessary management and costs of bureaucracy.
 - 2) Improved working methods and practice to do only work valued by the customer.
 - 3) Combining what were previously separate services so that the whole job is done in one go with fewer costs, management and administration.
 - 4) Preventing demand by acting before something goes wrong. It is cheaper to prevent, rather than deal with a problem when it has got bad enough to trigger when a service would ordinarily be provided – a 'stitch in time'.

- 5) Empowering front-line workers to do more and report more to others, requiring less management and less bureaucracy.

Case Study:

Assessments are made to determine the care and support children might need. In the St Matthew's pilot, the assessments of two families have been compared. The families had certain similarities, but with Family 2 presenting now with the issues that Family 1 presented seven years ago.

Family 1 was identified through a list of top five re-referrals to Children's Services, they were repeat users of the police and also known to Caldmore Housing as heavily supported occupants within the St Matthew's ward. The family includes mum, dad and three children. The family received a number of service interventions starting in 2003 and culminating in Child Protection, due to domestic violence. Family 1 came into assessment seven years ago and received multiple-agency involvement, often in isolation and without cross-reference to each other – lots of relationships, but no meaningful relationships.

Family 2 consists of a core family unit: mum, dad and two children, who were recently referred by the Health Visitor to Palfrey Sure Start Children's Centre with issues identified following the birth of a new baby, older sibling behavioural issues with new baby and mother not coping, feeling isolated and house-bound. The family lives in the St Matthew's ward, which is within the catchment for Palfrey Sure Start Family Support. This family was presented for assessment during the St Matthew's pilot and received an intensive more efficient service, coordinated by a named lead professional. This took a whole-family approach, whilst ensuring that the child remained at the centre of the assessment.

In our prototype, the needs of Family 2 have been considered more holistically. For example, they have been loaned a double-buggy so that the mother can take the two children out of the house, reduce isolation and access other services.

A number of improvements to existing services have been identified as a result of this work-stream, largely strengthening the role of lead professionals and processes within the new system. It is not possible to say with certainty whether the second family will follow the same high-cost path as the first and so cost savings cannot be supported by Walsall Finance. However, by spending a relatively small amount now with Family 2 there is the potential of saving significant costs in the future.

Further evidence now needs to be gathered by working with the new prototype system with additional families at level 1. This would provide the necessary further evidence of potential cost savings. As it stands, Family 1 have cost £26,197 (October 2009-present) and by comparison Family 2 have so far cost £347 (June 2010 – present). Should the early intervention with Family 2 be successful this is a saving of over £25,000 and obviously a better outcome for the family.

Statistically Family 1 has a one in 10 chance of going into care. The costs of this would be around £259,000. Although we do not yet have the evidence, it is clear that if such costly care packages can be avoided it is better for families and saves a significant amount of money. This supports a case of acting early to prevent problems, rather than waiting until they reach a threshold of being bad enough.