

Council – 6th March 2006

Proposal to consider revised governance arrangements for Local Neighbourhood Partnerships

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali

Service Area: Communities and Partnerships

Wards: All

Summary of report

The purpose of this report is to recommend changes to the constitution of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships which will strengthen their role in delivering the local area agreement and promote partnership working in neighbourhoods.

The Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) are formal committees of the Council and form part of the Council's constitution. This means that these partnerships are limited in the way they can act by the rules governing local government and cannot benefit fully from the significant advantages that are available if the LNPs become part of the structure of the local strategic partnership (WBSP).

The advantage this has for the LNPs is that they will be able to develop neighbourhood agreements in support of the Local Area Agreement and attract financial support. Government Office of the West Midlands requires that the Local Area Agreement has "locally based partnership working" and Walsall has the distinct advantage of already having this in the form of LNPs.

This report details how the LSP will preserve Councillor representation on the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and seeks Council's approval to the recommendations set out below.

Recommendations

- (1) That Council agree to the alignment of LNPs to the governance structures of WBSP with effect from 1 May 2006.
- (2) That Council support the establishment of the nine LNPs as neighbourhood based strategic partnerships with a revised terms of reference linked to the governance arrangements of the WBSP.
- (3) That Council note the Councillor's involvement, ie all Councillors being full members of the nine LNPs, will continue.

Resource and legal considerations

The Local Government Act 2000 Act introduced Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategies. This resulted in the development of representative bodies, with a common vision and promoting collaborative working. As informal partnerships working with the local authority and other public sector agencies they enjoy greater freedoms and are able to attract a wider range of external finance to deliver local priorities.

A recent ODPM consultation paper – “Local Strategic Partnerships, Shaping their future (Dec 2005)” – describes the involvement of elected members as crucial to their success and that of the Sustainable Community Strategy. As community leaders, elected members will play an invaluable role through LNPs in scrutinising the proposed priorities of WBSP (as stated in the community plan) and ensuring the results of local consultations are taken into account when decisions are being considered by WBSP.

WBSP has identified in its revised Community Strategy as one of its strategic priorities creating community leaders and active citizens who participate in local decision making and are able to influence service delivery. They have acknowledged that one of the primary ways they will achieve this is through neighbourhood based structures. The LNPs offer an almost ready-made solution for WBSP removing the need for them to create their own separate structures.

Any additional costs that may be incurred for staffing or other support will be met from Neighbourhood Renewal Funding as part of a wider WBSP commission that is being developed by the LNP team to deliver Community Plan outcomes around creating active citizens and community leaders.

New officer arrangements for supporting LNPs are also being introduced. There will be one Council manager for each of the nine LNPs whose main responsibilities will be:

- Advising and supporting LNPs – especially LNP Chairs.
- Promoting teamwork by ensuring council activity is co-ordinated which in turn will enable more of a neighbourhood focus for service delivery.
- Making connections - Advising LNPs of emerging policy (local, regional and national) which could impact on and benefit their work. Also making connections with the council's service and financial planning processes to encourage more influence on mainstream activity and resources.
- Encouraging participation by Council appointed partners and the local community in the work of the LNP.

Contacts are also being identified for each LNP in all key service areas (eg, environmental regeneration, streetpride, libraries, youth service, parks and open spaces, Safer Walsall Borough Partnership). This will be a big step forward to better co-ordination of service delivery at LNP level. There will be a key role for the lead managers to bring together these contacts and promote local team working.

Citizen impact

At the point that LNPs move to become part of WBSP's structure, the governance arrangements and membership for the partnerships will become the responsibility of WBSP. The terms of reference (previously Article 10 of the Council's constitution) and

code of conduct are being revised and updated to reflect the style of WBSP and to align with its updated terms of reference. These will be presented to a future meeting of WBSP for approval after consultation with LNP Chairs and partnership members.

From April 2006 LNPs will report to the WBSP Board in relation to its membership and governance arrangements and to the Pillar Executive Groups and Commissioning Executive in relation to neighbourhood commissions and delivery of borough-wide targets at the local level.

At its Board meeting on 23 January 2006 WBSP agreed that the existing membership and chairing arrangements remain as they are for the foreseeable future with the following minor amendments:

- Council appointed partners change to “WBSP nominated partners” and to this group is added the Fire Service, the Community Empowerment Network and a housing representative.
- The chair continues to be a councillor supported by two deputy chairs, one elected from WBSP nominated partners and the other elected from the locally appointed partners.

The core membership of the LNPs would therefore continue to be all ward councillors, WBSP nominated partners plus locally appointed partners selected by individual LNPs. In addition to the enhancements to the existing membership, it is proposed that LNPs should meet on a bi-monthly rather than a quarterly basis from May 2006. This is in response to feedback from all LNPs over the last 12 months

This will overcome one of the primary barriers to participation in local decision making as a result of LNPs being part of the Council constitution. LNPs were created as a response to the Local Government 2000 Act which gave councils powers to delegate to area committees any functions and decisions that do not adversely affect other areas or the whole of the council. The code of conduct and declarations of interest currently required to be signed will be amended to reflect those used by WBSP as an informal partnership. This will deal with the concerns previously raised about the rigidity of the Council's code of conduct.

The terms of reference state that the LNPs, as Council committees, should be chaired by an elected member. This will continue under the proposed revised governance arrangements.

The overall objective in this next stage of development for the LNPs therefore is to widen the engagement of Walsall's communities in decision making and action planning at a neighbourhood level. This will create active citizens and empower local groups and individuals to have their say about the quality, type and range of public services delivered in their area.

Environmental impact

All LNPs will have the opportunity to develop Safer and Stronger task groups, mirroring the pillar group structure of WBSP. The focus of activity for this task group will be to develop actions that will see improvements in community safety, tackle local environmental issues and develop stronger communities. Pledges and priority actions developed will be incorporated into each of their neighbourhood agreements for 2006/07 and these will also form pledges mirrored by the Council.

Performance management and risk management issues

Following the completion of the review of current LNP plans with local residents, partner organisations and community based organisations, each LNP will produce a neighbourhood agreement for their area. The agreements will be managed and monitored, with a progress report published annually, and consistent with the council's performance management arrangements.

Equality implications

The neighbourhood partnerships team is undertaking a review of LNP membership as part of its equalities impact assessment for 2006. Comparisons of current membership against the social and demographic profiles for each area will be completed during March 2006. Current membership expires in April 2006 and LNPs will use this information as part of the selection process for new members for 2006. The selection process will be under the governance of the WBSP Board.

Consultation

The benefits to partners and the wider community of LNPs becoming neighbourhood-based LSPs have been discussed at the LNP Chairs Forum, the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership Board and joint Community Empowerment Network and WBSP workshops held during November. In broad terms each discussion has resulted in acknowledgement that this would be a positive step in the next phase of development for LNPs, linked primarily to strengthening Walsall's Local Area Agreement and sustaining the engagement of local communities.

The LNP Chairs Forum has been at the forefront of discussions to further develop LNPs in light of present and future plans by government and taking into account the need for reform which has resulted from the Chair's discussion with the portfolio holder.

Revised terms of reference will be developed during February and March 2006 in consultation with existing LNP members and the WBSP Board and Commissioning Executive. They will continue to reflect the critical role of Councillors as community leaders as it will be important to continue this momentum in light of wider government policy and continued developments in this area. As with the existing constitution there will be a core membership with some local flexibility so that LNPs are able to reflect the diversity and needs of their individual areas.

Background papers

- Report to Cabinet – 14 September 2003, Consultation on Local Governance Arrangements in Walsall
- Report to Council – 12 January 2004, Leader of the Council's Proposals for the Establishment of Nine Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Report to council – 19 April 2004, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Report to Cabinet – 12 May 2004, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) – Progress Update
- Report to Cabinet – 14 July 2004, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships: Guidelines on Selection Processes for Locally Appointed Partners (LAPs)

- Report to Cabinet – 19 January 2005, Implementing Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Report to Cabinet – 23 March 2005, Resources for Local Neighbourhood Partnerships

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Morris', is positioned above the 'Signed:' label.

Signed:

Executive Director: Jamie Morris

Date: 23rd February 2006