

30 July 2013

Devolution Through Area Partnerships - Update

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Ian Shires - Community Engagement and the Voluntary Sector

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on progress against the seven proposals contained within the approved Council report, on 22 May 2013, regarding devolution through Area Partnerships.

Reason for scrutiny:

This Scrutiny Panel has requested regular updates on the devolution proposals.

Recommendations:

That:

1. Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel note the progress against each of the seven proposals for devolution through Area Partnerships

Background Papers:

Devolution Through Area Partnerships - Report to Council on 22 May 2013

Resource and Legal Considerations:

This report further considers the development of Participatory Budgeting in the Borough which has implications for how resources are utilised.

There are no specific legal considerations to be brought to Members attention.

Citizen Impact:

It is anticipated that by devolving decision-making to a local level there will be an increase in opportunities for community engagement enabling the local citizen to be more involved in the decisions that effect their lives.

Environmental Impact:

None specifically to be highlighted other than the opportunities presented through the proposed participatory budgeting pilots that include street cleansing, grounds maintenance and highways maintenance including verge parking.

Performance Management:

Regular reporting of progress, against the seven proposals, will be made to Scrutiny Panel.

Equality Implications:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? Yes


The Area Partnership model, through which devolution of budgets will take place, exists to provide a robust and transparent method of engagement and delivery to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act by ensuring improved access to services through a broad partnership of delivery organisations.

Consultation:

A presentation was made to the Area Partnership Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting of 22 January 2013. Area Managers discussed the proposals within their Area Partnerships, including a range of partners. The proposals were also presented to this Scrutiny Panel, Cabinet and Council.


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Progress update as follows:

1. Devolution of Budgets / Resources and Participatory Budgeting

- 1.1 This initiative will be piloted in each of the six Area Partnerships, to empower local people to influence where resources are directed at a local level. Two service-specific pilots have been proposed – Clean and Green, focussing on street cleansing and grounds maintenance and Highways Maintenance, focussing on road safety, verge parking and maintenance.
- 1.2 It is proposed to undertake this process using ‘Participatory Budgeting’ (PB), which informs residents of what budget / resources they are able to have an influence on, discussing what services they would like to see delivered at a local level, these proposals being considered by services, presenting the proposals back to residents and then for residents to choose which services they want to be delivered. The most favourable option is chosen to be implemented, (following consultation and ratification by Elected Members at the relevant Area Panel) subject to ensuring full viability.
 - 1.2.1 It should be noted that these pilots will run alongside a set of core services that the Council undertakes to ensure the Authority meets its obligations to local communities.
- 1.3 It is proposed that there are a series of events across Area Partnerships, to engage residents to discuss potential options available and the implications of them, so that they are more able to make an informed choice of which services they want to see delivered. Consultation on the first service related pilot will take place during the summer, this will focus on the issue of verge parking considering where there are opportunities for grass verges to be converted to parking bays. It is anticipated that by the autumn, alternative service options, where decided, will begin to be delivered.
 - 1.3.1 Information to residents will include any statutory responsibilities the Council has to deliver and, therefore, what resources can be influenced.
- 1.4 A review of what events are already scheduled will be undertaken, so that any gaps (in terms of engaging with communities) can be identified. Where there is a gap, arrangements will be made to ensure that the community is engaged. Other opportunities will be utilised, for example, use of the First Stop Express. All opportunities for residents to engage will be promoted and officers from Area Partnerships and the relevant service areas will be available to discuss service options.
- 1.5 In late August/early September, an event will be held where residents can ‘vote’ on their preferred option for the first wave of Participatory Budgeting pilot work. A variety of methods will be used to ensure as many residents can take part in this process, including social media, telephone, e-mail, internet and in writing.
- 1.6 Preferred options for verge parking work will then be presented to the second round of Area Panels (early September / early October) for consideration and approval subject to ensuring full scheme viability. Following this work further

participatory budgeting exercises will be developed/delivered considering the other identified pilot service areas.

- 1.7 In addition to the above our Highway maintenance term contractor, Lafarge Tarmac, have offered access to supplies and services in order to deliver localised projects. Whilst there is no specific budgetary provision, they are able to provide a degree of labour, access to plant, and supplies in order to deliver projects that might otherwise be unaffordable. The contractor has already made contact with Area Managers in order to identify potential schemes.

2. Greater Alignment of Teams

- 2.1 At Council on 22 May 2013, 'The Walsall Plan 2013 - 2016' (the Sustainable Community Strategy for the Bough) was approved. This sets out a three year vision for Walsall as a "great place to live, learn, work and invest". The Walsall Plan identifies four strategic priorities:

- Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- Improving Health including well being and independence for older people
- Creating Safe, Sustainable and Inclusive Communities – reducing levels of crime and providing the right environment for people to live in
- Improving Safeguarding, Learning and the Life Chances for Children and Young People - recognising that a person's early years crucially help determine what kind of future they will have

For each strategic priority there is a theme lead who has had responsibility for drawing up a Delivery Plan to deliver the objectives agreed within 'The Walsall Plan'. This is further strengthened by the development of Area Partnership Delivery Plans, by identifying how the activity taking place at a local level is helping to deliver the strategic priorities and the vision for Walsall.

3. Strengthening Local Accountability and Support to Scrutiny Through Area Partnerships

- 3.1 With effect from 22 May 2013, Area Community Meetings are now 'Area Panels', with authority to approve decisions relating to funding that is delegated to the Panel and are a formally constituted Committees of the Council. Membership is made up of the Elected Members from the Wards that make up that Area Partnership area.

- 3.2 The agreed functions of Area Panels are:

- i) To make decisions on Area Partnership funding, where allocated to an Area Partnership area, by the Council. This is a change from the previous arrangement, where Area Managers had the authority to make such funding decisions
- ii) To agree Area Partnership Area Plans
- iii) To agree representation to bodies where an Area Partnership decision-making presence is required
- iv) To agree the outcomes of any participatory budgeting / resource exercise, as described earlier in this report

- 3.3 These functions will be reviewed in 12 months time, in line with the term of the Municipal Year.
- 3.4 Area Panels will provide support to the Scrutiny function by providing comments / feedback to Scrutiny and Cabinet on service delivery within localities.
- 3.5 The first round of Area Panel meetings has been completed, with all agreeing to the proposed funding processes and delegated authority to the Area Manager up to the value of £500 (£1,000 for North Walsall); approval of project proposal applications submitted; approval of the content of the Area Plan Summary Document and election of a community representative (councillor or other recognised community champion) to the Local Police and Crime Board.
 - 3.5.1 Following feedback, the Funding Report will include more detail regarding the projects, including a summary of the application and the organisation requesting funding. This will enable robust decisions to be made.
 - 3.5.2 The first meeting of the Local Police and Crime Board took place on Tuesday, 9 July 2013.

4. Community Hubs

- 4.1 Two pilot projects are currently under way - one in Moxley and the other in Ryecroft. The objectives of the Hubs are:
 - i) Build capacity within communities to improve services for residents
 - ii) Strengthen the sustainability of local community organisations and their ability to support Council objectives
 - iii) Reduce dependency on public services, by supporting self-sufficiency and independent living
- 4.2 Moxley
 - 4.2.1 A number of partners are already aligned to this pilot, including Public Health, Moorcroft Wood Primary School, Moxley Peoples Centre, Darlaston Surestart, Moxley Medical Centre, The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, local residents, Patient Particip-ation Group, and Walsall Housing Group.
 - 4.2.2 There are a few small projects in place, including development of youth activities in the area, developing Moxley People's Centre (MPC) to ensure that the revenue is robust, increasing activities on the site and increasing numbers of volunteers, discussion with Walsall College on delivering training and potential for students to act as mentors / volunteers, increased activities from the Moorcroft Wood site and a renewed chiropody services, which has been entirely taken up.
- 4.3 Ryecroft
 - 4.3.1 A consultation event was held on 24 April 2013, to identify what services local residents would like to see delivered - both sessions were well attended by residents and partner organisations.

- 4.3.2 The following priorities have been identified: Health, Crime, Children and Young People, Community and Elderly, Jobs and Enterprise.
- 4.3.3 Discussions are under way regarding moving from the Resource Centre to the Dartmouth Centre, as this has more up-to-date facilities.
- 4.4 For both pilots, a robust business case is being developed, which will also assist with applying for other funding sources.

5. Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC)

- 5.1 Local Area Coordination will be a key piece of work during 2013/14. Now that the principles have been agreed, three key phases to getting started are proposed for this municipal year:-

Phase 1 - Design

Early design, development and implementation of LAC in Walsall:-

- Understanding Local Area Coordination - developing a shared understanding and vision of LAC, strength-based approaches and reform.
- Development of a local “business case” and strategy.
- Governance - Supporting local leadership and accountability via a representative steering group (across service types) and project management arrangements.
- Building connections and joint working / shared responsibility and commitment across service types.
- With a local “Project Lead” co designing a local project plan
- Ensuring that the necessary policy and operational infrastructural issues are addressed and resolved.
- Considering choice of initial site(s) – getting started, planning for success and outcomes.
- Supporting the “Steering Group” to identify the range of options for long term funding and expansion of the LAC programme within existing resources.
- Contribution to reform – LAC as single, accessible point of contact (new “front end” of service system across service types and age groups).

Phase 2 – Citizen Led Recruitment

- Co design of job descriptions, person specifications, job evaluation (salary setting)
- Advert and shortlisting with Project Lead (and local citizens).
- Co design interview process and questions/approach with local citizens.
- Recruit LACs
- Linking with and contributing to other national LAC sites and developments.

Phase 3 – Implementation

- Building positive relationships with statutory and community partners

- Supporting development of induction and training
- Supporting Project/Line Manager through initial supervision processes
- Connecting with other developing or operating LAC sites – at LAC, Line Manager and Director / Leadership levels
- Problem solving
- Connections to LAC Network

6. Pilot Work to Enhance the Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

6.1 Three pilots are underway in Darlaston, Aldridge and Beacon and Willenhall.

Darlaston - A Community Lunch was organised for 28 June 2013, where a number of voluntary and community sector organisations were in attendance to discuss how they would like to see capacity building within the sector supported and what form of network they would like to see develop. Key partners were also in attendance.

Aldridge and Beacon - A series of networks have been developed based in each Ward. These have seen over 50 organisations (per Ward) identified and have attended a series of networking events to learn what services each provide and where they may work together.

Willenhall - A consultation event has taken place to begin to identify how the sector can work together locally and possibly have a Forum that brings organisations together locally.

6.2 Work to further strengthen central infrastructure support for the Voluntary and Community sector with key organisations such as Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) is progressing, alongside research that is considering the work of the sector, alongside Council support..

7. Support for Attracting Funding for Key Local Initiatives

7.1 On 15 April 2013, a Strategic Resource Officer (Alex Boys), joined Walsall to support the Council, its partners and the voluntary and community sector in identifying appropriate funding sources for projects / service delivery. The role is primarily looking at the larger funding streams, eg, Big Lottery. An external funding strategy is being developed.