

A review of the Resilient Communities Model



As presented to the Scrutiny Overview Committee – 28 July 2020.



Walsall Council

Foreword

A new model for resilient communities has been developed as part of the Walsall Proud Programme, which seeks to transform and improve the way Walsall Council works. This working group was set up following a special meeting of the Scrutiny Overview Committee where concerns were expressed about the model.

As part of its investigation, the working group has spoken to a range of individuals to understand their perspective and knowledge of the model. This has revealed that there has been a lack of formal consultation on the significant service redesign that it proposes. Consultation that the Council is legally required to undertake. This is a serious failing and the working group recommends that this must be addressed immediately; particularly as the model aspires to save over £1m.

It was felt that model lacked clarity. Reports mainly focused on community safety and the broader elements regarding the local community sector, whilst much spoken about, were not described in any depth in writing. We also found a lack of understanding of what the model was amongst the voluntary and community sector whom are expected to be a key component of the model. It is thought that this lack of depth and detail would have been identified during a consultation enabling it to be addressed.

Members also had concern about potential duplication as Walsall Together, a local health partnership of which the Council is a member, is also operating a resilient communities programme. Whilst it is focused on health, it is targeted at the same or similar individuals. Therefore, consideration should be given to merging the two projects. There seemed to be some confusion as to which areas the Walsall Together was responsible for and which areas the Council was trying to develop.

When speaking to the local voluntary and community sector it is clear that 'grant chasing' can have a detrimental impact on the focus and sustainability of organisations. The working group would like Cabinet to consider introducing infrastructure grants to cover basic costs of organisations so they can focus on support local communities. The working group are pleased that this has taken place as part of the response to pandemic and would like this to continue in the long term.

The reforms also envisage a new role for elected members at Community Forums but it is not clear what this will be. The Working Group accepts that there have been numerous iterations of locality working and committees during recent years and that the focus of the new model is on the community rather than elected Members. But, as democratically elected representatives of the local community, the Working Group still feel, elected Members should play a more significant role in these new bodies and urges the Cabinet to define it. Further to this, the Working Group feel that there is value in Cabinet considering how engagement in Borough-wide and regional strategic issues can be completed at a locality level. Should this be through Community Forums or is another body required?

Looking forward there is promise in the model but further details and consultation is required to develop it further before implementation.

I would like to thank the witnesses who gave their time and knowledge to the working group as well its support officers, Paul Gordon, Sarah Oakley and Craig Goodall for the roles they have played. Finally, I would like to thank the Members of the Working Group who looked at this issue with a non-political and constructive attitude.



***Councillor Aftab Nawaz
Lead Member, Resilient Communities Working Group***

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Introduction

A new model of Resilient Communities was approved by Cabinet in October and December 2019.

The Cabinet decision in December 2019 was called in by the Scrutiny Overview Committee and reviewed at a special meeting on 13 January 2020. This meeting set up a working group to consider the model and report back.

Terms of Reference

The working group met to agree its terms of reference which were approved by the Scrutiny Overview Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2020.

The full version of the Working Group's terms of reference can be found at Appendix 1 to this report.

The Working Group was supported by the following Council officers:

Lead Officers

Paul Gordon
Sarah Oakley
Craig Goodall

Head of Business Change
Voluntary and Community Sector Lead
Senior Democratic Services Officer

Membership

The working group consisted of the following Councillors:

Councillor Aftab Nawaz (Lead Member)
Councillor John Murray
Councillor Suky Samra
Councillor Ian Shires

Methodology

The working group held three meetings and met with a wide range of witnesses including partners, other organisations from the voluntary and community sector and Council officers.

Witnesses

The Working Group met and discussed issues or received evidence with the following witnesses:

Councillor Gary Perry	Portfolio Holder for Community, Leisure and Culture, Walsall Council
Stephen Gunther	Director of Public Health, Walsall Council
Alex Boys	Chief Executive, One Walsall
Andy Rust	Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group
Jan Davies	Brownhills Community Association and Walsall Community Network
Mark Welch	Streetly Sports and Community Association
Deb Mohammed	Frank F Harrison Community Association
Edwin Venables	The Watch
Bernard Cartwright	The Watch
John Morris	Locality Manager, Walsall Council
Michael Greenfield	Locality Manager, Walsall Council
Abdul Rahim	Locality Manager, Walsall Council
Vanessa Croft	Locality Manager, Walsall Council
Dr Irena Hergottova	Corporate Consultation and Equalities Lead, Walsall Council
Sarah Oakley	Voluntary and Community Sector Lead, Walsall Council

Report Format

This report is a broad summary of the Working Group's findings and conclusions.

Findings

A new model of Resilient Communities was approved by Cabinet in October and December 2019.

The model has four components:

- Enabling and supporting people to have personal responsibility;
- Community led solutions;
- Integrated services for the delivery of support to communities
- Integrated enforcement

Cabinet also decided to replace Strategic Locality Partnership Boards with Community Forums that are to be delivered by a voluntary and community sector partner.

The Cabinet decision in December 2019 was called in by the Scrutiny Overview Committee and reviewed at a special meeting on 13 January 2020. This meeting set up a working group to consider the model and report back before the end of April 2020. This report was subsequently delayed by the suspension of Council meetings due to the global coronavirus pandemic.

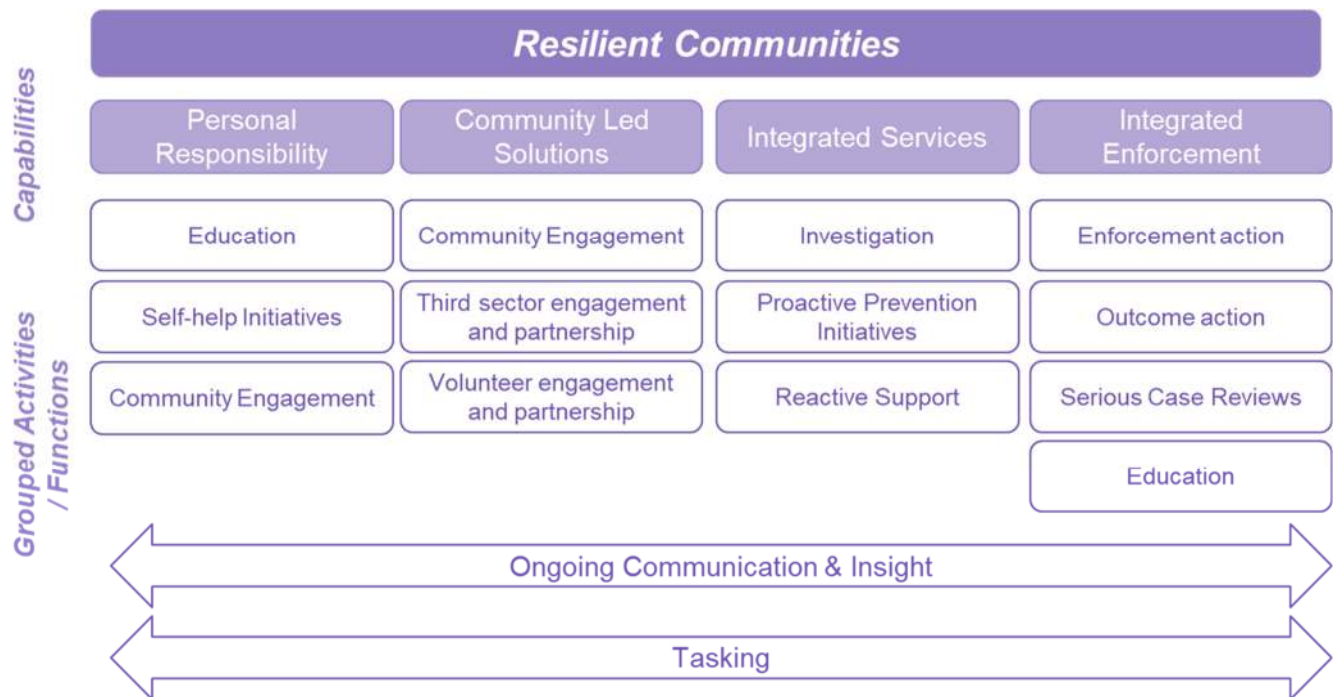
Following consideration of a range of evidence the working group has concerns about the following aspects of the Resilient Communities model:

- Lack of clarity
- Resources
- Capability
- Consultation
- Duplication
- Role of members
- Timing

Lack of clarity

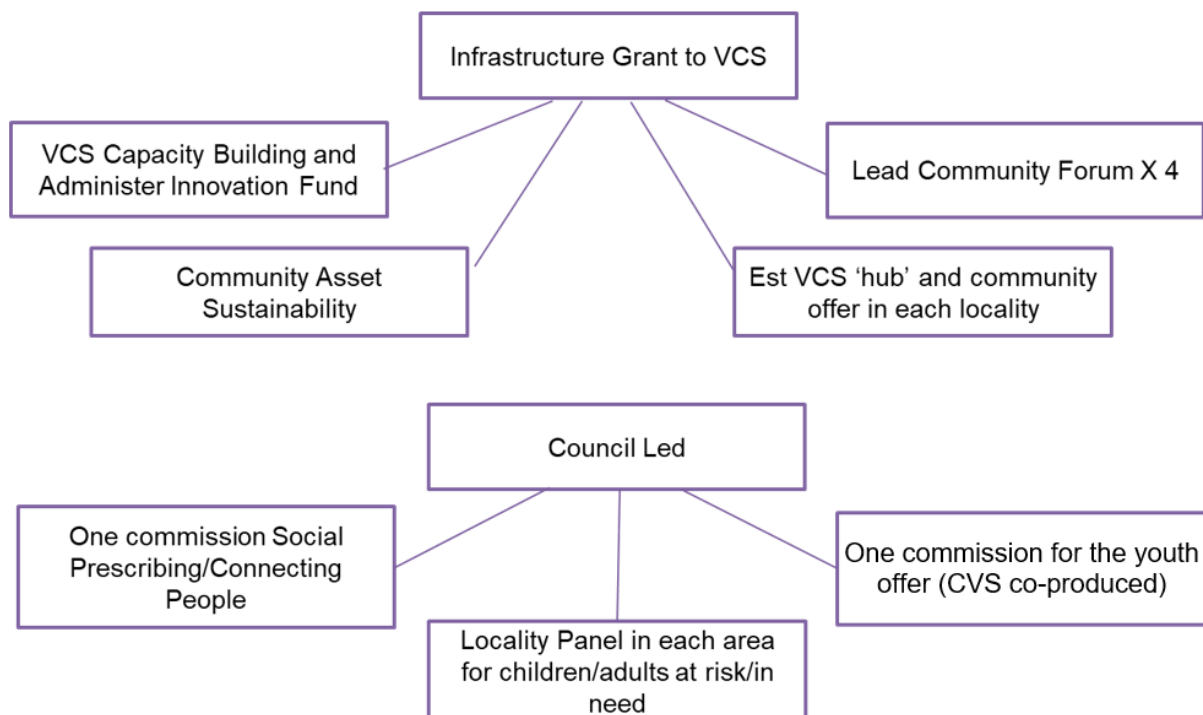
After reviewing the available evidence, primarily from the two Cabinet reports, the Working Group was of the view that the model, had a clear overall vision as set out below. However, many aspects of detail that are key to its success remain unclear or undeveloped. The majority of the existing information on the model currently focusses on community safety when its vision is much broader. The Working Group recognise the importance of local residents feeling safe but have concerns about the budget available to deliver the wholesale change anticipated.

Figure 1. Key functions of the Resilient Communities Model. (source Cabinet 18 December 2019)



A similar, well-intentioned, high-level description of support to the voluntary and community sector is also available as set out below:

Figure 2 - Council commissions and infrastructure grant to CVSs (source Cabinet 18 December 2019)



The Working Group broadly supports the high-level elements set out in the previous Cabinet reports but, after reviewing the available evidence, was of the view that the model as it stands, lacks sufficient clarity for it to be implemented.

Capability

Members felt that without further details and an implementation plan they could not be confident that the capabilities within the Council to implement the model are available. Whilst it is accepted that service redesign would be necessary, further details are required to inform any redesign.

With the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS) the Working Group were aware of the excellent work undertaken across the Borough by large and small VCS organisations and community associations. However, it was apparent that the different localities required varying levels of support to create truly resilient communities. For example, from the testimony of the witnesses the Working Group met, it was clear that it was easier to recruit volunteers in the East Locality than any other locality/area. A further lesson was that volunteers gave their service for enjoyment and were dedicated to their own areas. This meant it would be very difficult to export volunteer resources to other localities. Therefore other localities would need more support to develop the vision of resilient communities outlined in the Cabinet report. This is an extremely challenging issue that needs significant thought and investment to address.

Members recognised the role One Walsall plays in supporting the local VCS. Members had some questions on the organisation's capacity, as based on its existing role. These views were exacerbated by the forthcoming change of several of the key personnel at this organisation. The Working Group believe the organisation should be supported through this time and subsequently increase its focus on supporting the local VCS.

Financial Resources

Council

Compounding the challenge with the lack of detail on the model and how it would be implemented is the aim to reduce the existing £3.7m budget for resilient communities to £2.2m, i.e. a reduction of 40%. The Working Group was informed that this would be achieved through improved processes, technology and new ways of working so that services became more effective and responsive at the same time. This would be achieved by increasing staff skills, improving partnership working and an increased focus on prevention rather than enforcement.

It was the view of the Working Group that the existing vision did not provide sufficient detail for them to have confidence that it could be delivered at the reduced level of resources. The Working Group was informed that some other local authorities performed better with fewer public protection resources. However, the Working Group still felt that, at this point, there is insufficient detail about how this could be achieved in Walsall.

Voluntary and community sector (VCS)

From speaking to witnesses, the Working Group learned that further resources are required to fund the local VCS. Members established that, despite the existence of several strong organisations, the sector is still vulnerable to a lack of finance. Further to this, the focus of organisations is strongly influenced by the direction of funding streams. This means successful projects have to conclude because funding has ended, even when there would be a benefit to continuing them.

In order to create stability for the sector, consideration should be given to introducing grants that could cover, or contribute towards, the core costs of VCS organisations. This would make them sustainable and free them from 'grant chasing' and changing their focus from simply paying the bills.

The Council and its partners should consider providing further funding and support to assist areas where there is a shortfall of skilled volunteers. This would assist localities where there were shortages of skilled volunteers and allow those who did volunteer to focus on their passions and what they could contribute to creating resilient communities, rather than becoming bogged down in bureaucracy with the risk that they might subsequently cease volunteering.

The Working Group recognise and welcome the infrastructure funding that has been provided to the Making Connections and Community Hubs by Cabinet at its meeting on 19 May 2020 as part of the local response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Working Group also welcome and support the further investment that has been made to VCS infrastructure by Cabinet at its meeting on 15 July 2020 in preparation for a second wave of COVID-19 infections. The Working Group feels that it is critical that investment in the community can be maintained post the current situation with COVID-19.

Duplication

The Working Group learned that the Walsall Together alliance of local health partners, including the Council, has its own parallel 'Resilient Communities' programme. In a report to Cabinet in February 2019 the programme was described as:

'Resilient communities: building the capacity and understanding of what communities can do together, and for each other to keep people healthy, engaged and active. Integrated primary, long-term management and community services, where local access to support is coordinated around that community and health centres.'

Whilst the focus of this programme is health and wellbeing, the underpinning factor of supporting communities to support themselves is shared. The Working Group recognises the similarities and believe there is duplication between the two programmes. To prevent wasted resources and mixed messages, consideration should be given to significant collaboration between the two programmes.

Consultation

As a public body the Council is legally obliged to consult those likely to be impacted before making changes to services. Failure to do so renders the decision to change services or withdraw services unlawful. Our own guidance, set out in the council's [Consultation Protocol](#), explains that consultation must be carried out in a fair and lawful manner. To be fair and lawful, according to the Gunning Principles (the legal test of fairness) consultation must: *be undertaken at a time when proposals* are still at a formative stage and views can genuinely be taken into account. It must include sufficient information to allow those consulted to give intelligent consideration and allow an informed response. Adequate time must be given for the consultation process and the product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account prior to the ultimate decision being taken.

During the investigation, it became clear that despite significant service change being planned no formal consultation with affected groups, including staff and residents, had taken place.

When speaking to witness it was clear that there was some awareness of the resilient communities' model in the community but it was limited to the information in the Cabinet report and discussion in various forums. However, these discussions did not amount to formal consultation. It is the working group's belief that due to the significant service redesign that is planned and the large budget reductions anticipated that a formal consultation should have taken place. Moreover, no further work should now take place until a true and proper consultation, in line with usual Council practice, has taken place.

Role of elected Members

The role of elected Members requires clarification in the model. It is noted that in October 2019 Cabinet agreed to replace Strategic Locality Partnership Boards with Community Forums. However, there is little detail about what a Community Forum will be and what role elected Members will play at them.

The Working Group accept that there been numerous iterations of locality working and area committees during recent years and that the focus of the new model is on the community. But, as democratically elected representatives of the local community, the Working Group still feel that elected Members should play a role in these new bodies and urge the Cabinet to define it.

Further to this, the Working Group feel that there is value in Cabinet considering how engagement in Borough-wide and regional strategic issues can be completed at a locality level. This was something that was achieved at the former Strategic Locality Partnership Boards and Area Panels. The Working Group felt that if Community Forums were not going to engage with residents on issues of Borough-wide and regional significance then Cabinet should give consideration to whether another body is required to achieve this type of engagement with local communities?

Timing - Implementation of the model should be delayed

Due to the issues outlined above, it is the Working Group's view that the implementation of the model should be paused whilst the issues identified, in particular consultation, are completed.

Further to this, the implementation of the model should also pause during the current Coronavirus pandemic. The current circumstances require the Council to focus all resources to assist local residents. Therefore, this complex restructure of public facing services, including community safety must wait. The experience of the pandemic so far suggests that lifestyles will be different for some time. Therefore it is not unreasonable to think that the model may need some revision following the experiences of and the response to the pandemic. There may be changes to people's attitudes. An open and frank discussion will be required between the community and the Council as we all plan to build resilient communities so different from what was envisaged by Cabinet in October 2019.

Conclusions

Following consideration of a range of evidence, the Working Group has concerns about the following aspects of the Resilient Communities model:

- Lack of clarity
- Resources
- Capability
- Consultation
- Duplication
- Role of members
- Timing

Lack of clarity

After reviewing the available evidence, the Working Group was of the view that the model, as it stands, lacks sufficient clarity for it to be implemented. Whilst it provides a clear overall vision, many aspects of detail that are key to its success are unclear or undeveloped at this time.

The information on the model currently focusses too much on community safety when its vision is much broader.

Duplication

The Working Group learned that the Walsall Together alliance of local health partners, including the Council, has its own parallel 'Resilient Communities' programme. The focus of this programme is health and wellbeing but the underpinning factor of supporting communities to support themselves is shared. The Working Group recognises the similarities and believe there is duplication between the two programmes. To prevent wasted resources moving forward significant collaboration between the programmes should take place.

Resources

Members were made aware of the aim to reduce the existing £3.7m budget for resilient communities to £2.2m, i.e. to achieve a reduction of 40%. It was the view of the Working Group that the existing vision did not provide suitable detail for Members to have confidence that it could be delivered at the reduced level of resources. The Working Group was informed that some other local authorities performed better with fewer public protection resources. However, the Working Group still felt that, at this point, there is insufficient detail about how this could be achieved in Walsall.

Further resources are required to fund the local voluntary and community sector. Members established that, despite several strong organisations, the sector is still vulnerable to a lack of finance. Further to this the focus of organisations is strongly influenced by the direction of funding streams. This means successful projects conclude because the funding has ended, even when there would be a benefit from continuing them.

Capability

Members felt that without a detailed implementation plan they could not be confident that the capabilities required to implement the model are available.

With the wider sector generally, Members were aware of the excellent work undertaken in the community by voluntary groups and community associations. However, it was apparent that different localities required varying levels of support to create truly resilient communities. Further to this, there are challenges to recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Members recognised the role that One Walsall plays in supporting the local voluntary and community sector. Members had some questions on the organisation's capacity, as based on its existing role. These views were exacerbated by the forthcoming change of several key personnel at this organisation. The Working Group believe this organisation should be supported through this time and subsequently increase its focus on supporting the local voluntary and community sector.

Consultation

During times of significant service change the Council follows a consultation protocol based upon the Gunning Principles. During the investigation it became clear that despite significant service change being planned no formal consultation with affected groups or residents had taken place.

Role of elected Members

The role of elected Members requires clarification in the model. It is noted that in October 2019 Cabinet agreed to replace Strategic Locality Partnership Boards with Community Forums. However, there is little detail about what a Community Forum should do, and what role elected Members will play in them.

The Working Group accepts that there been numerous iterations of locality working and committees during recent years and that the focus of the new model is on the community rather than elected Members. But, as democratically elected representatives of the local community, the Working Group still feel the elected Members should play a role in these new bodies and urges the Cabinet to define it.

Further to this, the Working Group feel that there is value in Cabinet considering how engagement in Borough-wide and regional strategic issues can be completed at a locality level. Should this be through Community Forums or is another body required?

Timing - Implementation of the model should be delayed

Due to the issues outlined above, it is the Working Group's view that the implementation of the model should be paused whilst the issues identified, in particular consultation, are completed. Further to this, the implementation of the model should also pause during the current Coronavirus crisis. It is not unreasonable to think that the model may need some revision following the experiences of the response to the pandemic. There may be changes to people's attitudes. An open and frank discussion will be required between the community and the Council as we all plan to build resilient communities so different from what was envisaged by Cabinet in October 2019.

Recommendations

That:

1. The implementation of the Resilient Communities model should be paused during the Coronavirus crisis to allow all Council resources to be focussed on assisting local residents;
2. Once the coronavirus crisis has passed, the Resilient Communities model should not be implemented until formal consultation, in line with Council policy and practice, has taken place;
3. Cabinet explain why formal consultation, in line with Council policy and practice, on the Resilient Communities model did not take place and how the decision to not undertake consultation was made;
4. In order to avoid duplication, consideration should be given to significant collaboration between the Council's Resilient Communities model with the Resilient Communities model being developed by Walsall Together;
5. Significantly more detail on the Resilient Communities model is required, specifically on:
 - a. How the voluntary and community sector will be supported to achieve the vision including funding needs and an appreciation of the support needed in different localities;
 - b. How the proposed budget savings will be achieved, whilst maintaining service levels;
 - c. The role of elected Members at Community Forums;
 - d. How communities will be engaged in their localities on issues of strategic significance at Borough and regional level.

Work Group Name:	Resilient Communities Working Group
Committee:	Scrutiny Overview Committee
Municipal Year:	2019/20
Lead Member:	Cllr Nawaz
Lead Officer:	Paul Gordon
Support Officer:	Craig Goodall
Membership:	Cllr Murray Cllr Samra Cllr Shires
Co-opted Members:	None
1. Context	
	<p>The Walsall Proud Programme is seeking transformational change by creating Resilient Communities. Cabinet approved a model on 23 October 2019. The model has four components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling and supporting people to have personal responsibility; • Community led solutions; • Integrated services for the delivery of support to communities • Integrated enforcement <p>Cabinet also decided to replace Strategic Locality Partnership Boards with Community Forums to be delivered by a voluntary and community sector partner. An Innovation Fund will also be created to support community development.</p> <p>The Resilient Communities Working Group was established by the Scrutiny Overview Committee at a special meeting on 13 January 2020.</p>
2. Objectives	
	<p>What do you want it to achieve? It is important to have clearly defined outcomes at the start to give the working group direction and ensure it adds value.</p> <p>The working group wishes to gain clarity on the following aspects of the Resilient Communities model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall budget; • Effect of the new model on staff and responsibilities; • How will social capital be built? • How will capacity be created in the third sector? • What will the role of Elected Members be at community forums? • How will a third sector provider support community forums? • How will issues at a strategic level be dealt with and discussed at community level? • Where do partners fit in the model? • How will community views influence the direction of funding and resources? • What is the Innovation Fund? What is it for and how will it be allocated? • Understand what community assets exist in Walsall.

3.	Scope
	<p>What should be included and excluded?</p> <p>The focus of the working group will be on overall vision for the Resilient Communities Model, the support provided to local communities, the development and role of community forums, the allocation of funding and resources and role of partners.</p>
4.	Equalities Implications
	<p>There is a legal and moral obligation to ensure that, when undertaking a scrutiny review, the impact of policies; procedures; strategies and activities is considered within the 6 strands of equality (Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Religion or Belief, and Sexual Orientation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the working group consult with each of these six groups regarding this review and its outcomes? • If an EIA has been carried out for this service\policy then what were its outcomes? Can this be mapped into the review? If no EIA has been carried out by the service is one required and can this be reported to the working group? <p>Throughout its investigation the working group will ensure that residents with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged by any proposal in the development of the Resilient Communities model.</p>
4.	Who else will you want to take part?
	<p>Think about who else, other than lead officers and members, it would be useful to include either as part of the working group or to bring information at specific points. For example- partners, stakeholders, other authorities.</p> <p>Portfolio Holder for Communities, Leisure and Culture One Walsall Community Association Network Frank F Harrison Community Association Brownhills Community Association Streetly Community Association West Midlands Police Clinical Commissioning Group Council Assets Team Locality Managers Walsall For All</p>
5.	Timescales & Reporting Schedule
	<p>Needs to be completed within the same municipal year and so should be able to report to full panel by the last meeting at the latest but consider the subject- is there anything else that it may need to tie into (e.g.</p>

	<p>academic or financial year or to coincide with national/sub-regional developments)</p> <p>How often will update be provided to full panel?</p> <p>10 March 2020 – Working Group Terms of Reference to SOC</p> <p>28 April 2020 – Final report and recommendations to SOC</p>										
6.	Risk factors										
	<p>Are there any obstacles that can be predicted? For example, is it dependent on other organisations outside your control and duty to cooperate? Identifying these factors early and how they will be mitigated should help minimise their impact.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Risk</th><th>Likelihood</th><th>Measure to Resolve</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Short life span of working group</td><td>HIGH</td><td>Schedule of meetings organised.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Witnesses unavailable to attend on working group dates</td><td>HIGH</td><td>Substitutions and written submissions to be accepted.</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Risk	Likelihood	Measure to Resolve	Short life span of working group	HIGH	Schedule of meetings organised.	Witnesses unavailable to attend on working group dates	HIGH	Substitutions and written submissions to be accepted.
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Date Agreed:		Date Updated:	
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Timetable:

Date	Activity
25 February 2020	<p><u>Part 1</u> - up to 45mins</p> <p>Cllr Perry</p> <p><u>Part 2</u> - up to 45mins</p> <p>Community Associations listed plus Bloxwich Community Partnership and Black Sisters</p> <p><u>Part 3</u> – up to 30 minutes</p> <p>One Walsall</p>
12 March 2020	<p><u>Part 1</u> – up to 45 minutes</p> <p>Police</p> <p>CCG</p> <p><u>Part 2</u> – up to 45 minutes</p> <p>Locality Managers</p> <p><u>Part 3</u> – up to 30 minutes</p> <p>Walsall For All</p>
25 March 2020	Review evidence and formulate conclusions and recommendations
Report(s)	Assets