

**14 April 2016**

**Follow Up On the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Area Partnership Working Group**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolio:** Councillor A Harris – Portfolio Holder for Community, Leisure and Culture

**Executive Summary:**

This report provides the Scrutiny Committee with an update of the progress against the recommendations made by the Area Partnership Working Group, which was established on 6 January 2015, reported to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 9 April 2015 and to Cabinet on 29 April 2015.

**Reason for Scrutiny:**

Update on progress of the Area Partnership Working Group recommendations.

**Recommendations:**

**That:**

1. The Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress against the recommendations made by the Area Partnership Working Group

**Background Papers:**

None

**Resource and Legal Considerations:**

None

**Citizen Impact:**

Area Partnerships provide engagement opportunities with local organisations and residents in resolving and reporting local issues.

**Environmental Impact:**

None

**Performance Management:**

The Area Panels are informed of activity in each Area Partnership through the Area Manager's report to each meeting.

**Equality Implications:**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?    Yes – August 2011  
(Appendix 1)

**Consultation:**

None

**Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor A Harris

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel held on 6 January 2015, a cross-Panel working group was established to consider the future of the Council's Area Panels and how devolution to the Area Panels could be developed.
- 1.2 The Working Group engaged with a range of Council service areas and partners, including Walsall Voluntary Action, Walsall Housing Group, Police and Fire Service.
- 1.3 The findings and recommendations of the Working Group were presented to Cabinet, at its meeting held on 29 April 2015. Cabinet noted those recommendations and requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting.

## **2. Area Partnership Working Group Findings and Recommendations**

- 2.1 The full report is attached at Appendix 2, including the Terms of Reference of the Working Group.
- 2.2 The Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel requested that the following three questions be considered:
  - Should Area Panels take responsibility for budgets?
    - Should Area Panels take responsibility for managing mainstream budgets?
    - Should Area Panels commission work to deliver area priorities?
    - Should Area Panels influence mainstream service design?
  - Should Area Panels increase the role for holding the Council and partners to account?
  - How should Area Panels engage local communities to ensure they become part of the solution?

1.	That Cabinet be requested to consider a report detailing the feasibility of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Developing a formula for needs based allocation of mainstream service budgets, minus borough-wide core standard service costs</li><li>b) Establishing the cost of delivering core standard services and identify the availability of surplus budgets for allocation to Area Panels. Allocation of resources to Area Panels should be based on achieving the Marmot objectives</li><li>c) Establishing a mechanism for Area Panels to affect service delivery with a staged implementation</li></ul>
Progress:	The Council has to find £85million in savings over the next four years.

	There may be an opportunity to revisit this at some point in the future once financial and organisational stability has been restored.
2.	That a review of existing resources supporting Ward activity is undertaken to identify any cross over and duplication for potential more efficient use of resources
Progress:	<p>Opportunities exist to rationalise resources, not just within the Council, but also with partners. Indeed, bigger gains may be available through wider discussions. These discussions will commence shortly.</p> <p>There is a partnership review meeting planned for 19 July 2016.</p>
3.	That discussion take place with the Borough Management Team to establish whether it will be possible to develop a mechanism for Area Panels to contribute to partnership-wide target setting and monitoring of progress against service delivery at an area level
Progress:	The future of Area Panels is not clear so further work will be undertaken once clarity is achieved.
4.	That Cabinet request Executive Directors to identify a pilot project in each Partnership area, relevant to each Area's Area Plan priorities, to develop and test mechanisms for delivering, in partnership with local communities and voluntary sector groups
Progress:	<p>Initial work has been focussed on rebuilding a Voluntary Sector Infrastructure organisation to support this activity and this will continue. Rather than focus on a directorate level initiative the Council is currently developing a project around the greater use of volunteering. The pilot is in the Welfare Rights service area in Money, Home, Job, Walsall Council.</p> <p>Projects have been supported which involve various Council services and partners, for example, dog fouling campaign, grass verge parking, diabetes – raising awareness, on street sex workers, big spring clean / clean for the Queen, green pathways.</p>
5.	That Cabinet request the Executive Director of Regeneration with exploring whether Area Panels can be cited as consultees for any strategically significant planning matters affecting their areas
Progress:	The Site Allocation Document Publication Draft, Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan Publication Draft and Community Infrastructure Levy Draft Charging Schedule have been presented to each Area Panel during consultation stages in September / October 2015 and March / April 2016

6.	Area Plan priorities should become more focused
Progress:	<p>It is anticipated that Area Plans will be reviewed during 2016 / 17, in line with a review of the Walsall Plan 2013 – 2016, which will include consultation with stakeholders.</p> <p>The four priorities of the Area Plans reflect those of the Walsall Plan (see 7 below) and are similar to the Council's corporate priorities. This supports consistent reporting of activities.</p> <p>This also enables local organisations to identify where they are working to strategic priorities, which may also support funding applications.</p>

7.	That Area Panels increase their role in the drafting and approving Area Plan priorities and monitoring activity against these priorities, with the assistance of partners
Progress:	<p>The previous Area Plans were produced in 2013, when the Walsall Plan 2013 – 2016 was reviewed. The Area Plans reflected the four key themes of the Walsall Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting businesses to thrive and supporting local people into work</li> <li>• Improving health including well being and independence for older people</li> <li>• Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities</li> <li>• Improving safeguarding, learning and the life chances for children and young people</li> </ul> <p>Each Area Plan was presented to the Area Panel for approval.</p> <p>Any project applications need to meet at least one of the priorities to be considered for funding.</p> <p>The Area Manager report details activities under each priority.</p> <p>As stated above, it is anticipated that the Area Plans will be refreshed this year, using updated strategic needs assessment information.</p>

8.	That Area Panels focus on the development and delivery of a focused Area Plan to engage residents. This should include themed meetings on Area Plan priorities and holding meetings in venues in each of the Wards in each area, where possible
Progress:	Area Panels have held themed meetings, for example, presentations from public health, community safety, environmental health, economic regeneration, youth services, fly-tipping, environmental crime / CCTV

	<p>cameras, loneliness in older people, sex worker project, street calming / measures, grass cutting, anti-social behaviour tools and procedures that have recently been introduced (eg, public space protection orders, community triggers), infant mortality, clean and green issues, educational performance, car parking, housing, gully cleansing, urgent and emergency care proposals, scrap metal.</p> <p>It is at the Chair's discretion for agenda items to be included.</p> <p>For the majority of Area Panels, other than Walsall South which holds its meetings at Walsall Council House, the Area Panels are held at different venues across the Area Partnership boundaries.</p> <p>Area Panels have been requested to nominate a local representative to the Police and Crime Commissioner Board (July each year). Due to the uncertainty over the future of Area Panels, this process is under review.</p> <p>Area Panels have the option of having co-optees. To date, only one Area Partnership has taken this option.</p>
9.	That Area Panels hold an annual consultation event, as a minimum, to seek the views of local residents, businesses and local voluntary and community sector, on any significant challenges facing the area in the coming year and to feed back progress on Area Panel activity in the previous year
Progress:	A voluntary and community sector conference was held in May 2015, with over 130 organisations attending. The purpose of the event was for organisations to share the activities they provide and for networking opportunities.
10.	That greater co-ordination of the voluntary and community sector take place
Progress:	<p>Councillors will be aware that a review of the voluntary sector infrastructure organisation and partners, including Walsall Housing Group and the Clinical Commissioning Group are supporting its transformation.</p> <p>The priorities for the voluntary sector infrastructure organisation are:</p> <p>Improve leadership and co-ordination Volunteering Increased financing</p>
11.	That the voluntary and community sector play a greater role in strategic priority setting for the Council and its partners

Progress:	See 10. Above

12.	That a greater emphasis is put on community development work by the Council
Progress:	The Council recognises the importance of community Sector. The Portfolio Holder has instructed a review of how this can be made a reality and this will be completed in the second half of 2016.

13.	Voluntary and community sector faith groups should be more widely engaged by the Council
Progress:	See 10. Above  The Area Partnership and Community Development Teams work with the Community Cohesion and Equalities team to engage with organisations

14.	That Area Panels engage local communities more fully, taking account of the broad range of engagement tools available, including social media tools
Progress:	Area Managers have Facebook and / or Twitter accounts and also have distribution networks that are used to disseminate information, news, events, etc. These have been successful.  The Walsall Community Association Network has been re-established which enables information to be passed on to some of our local organisations.  If there are issues that need to be consulted on, the teams use their networks to disseminate information.  The Area Partnership and Community Development Team is a member of the Communications and Consultation group, to support key / shared messages, between organisations to be passed on and reach a wide network of contacts.

15.	That the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel monitor the outcome of the work undertaken to implement its recommendations in October 2015
Progress:	The Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel ceased to exist and the responsibility for Area Partnerships / Community Development has been transferred to the Corporate and Public Services Overview and

	Scrutiny Committee – this is the first report update to this Committee, therefore there has been a delay in reporting back to Scrutiny
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### **3. Future of Locality Working**

- 3.1 With the financial pressures all public sector organisations are facing further consideration is being given to how we can improve efficiency of partners' resources to be able to support partnership working across the borough.



## GENERAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

If you are doing an EqlA for Budget Setting please use the EqlA for Budget Setting form.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqlA) is a risk assessment tool aimed at improving the quality of services provided to customers of Walsall Council. They are an opportunity to ensure an inclusive and fair service delivery. All major council proposals that are likely to have an impact on people (residents or staff) need to have an EqlA undertaken. Officers responsible for preparing such proposals should fill out this form and discuss it with their Director. In this form 'activity' refers to the service, policy or procedure you are assessing..

<b>Activity Title</b>	<b>Area Partnerships Implementation</b>
<b>Department and Service Area</b>	<b>Area Partnerships, Neighbourhood Services</b>
<b>Name of person completing EqlA</b>	<b>Richard Bubb</b>
<b>Date of Assessment</b>	<b>25<sup>th</sup> August 2011</b>

### 1. Please describe the activity?

**Implementation of Area Partnerships activities including development and delivery of six Area Plans covering the whole of Walsall**

### 2. Who are your customers?

**All residents of Walsall**

### 3. How are they going to benefit from this activity?

**Area Partnerships are part of the Working Smarter programme aiming to reduce the overall costs of service delivery to Walsall residents as well as improving the quality of services**

### 4. Does the activity exclude any customers because of their 'protected characteristic'? (These are characteristics protected by Equality Act, which the law requests organisations to consider when making any employment decision). Reasons and evidence must be given for all responses.

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Yes/No unknown</b>	<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Age	No	Area Plans include workstream activities for children and young people as well as older people. Some projects aim to increase links	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website. The 'Growing Old in Pheasey' events have been held at locations

		between young and old people by developing intergenerational activities.	and times to allow as many older people to attend and contribute as possible.
Disability	No	Events are open to all residents and care is taken to ensure activities are accessible for people with disabilities.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website. We have promoted groups who provide support for various disabilities, including Aids and Adaptations and Centre for Independent Living.
Gender reassignment	No	There are no activities or workstream priorities identified that would exclude people undergoing or having undergone gender reassignment.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website.
Marriage and civil partnership	No	There are no activities or workstream priorities identified that differentiate between marriage or civil partnership.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website.
Pregnancy and maternity	No	There are no activities or workstream priorities identified that would exclude pregnant people.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website. The First Stop Express bus is used to take Area Partnership activities to various locations around the borough to make it easy to access.
Race	No	There are no activities or workstream priorities identified that differentiate between people of different races. Where race hostilities exist in Walsall they have been identified within Area Plans and actions implemented.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website. Current activities include tackling race hate crime in North Walsall and working with Muslim community leaders to address intimidation at mosques.
Religion or Faith		There are no activities or workstream priorities	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area

		identified that differentiate between different faiths.	Partnerships website. A number of cross-faith activities have taken place to increase awareness of all major faiths in Walsall.
Sex		There are no activities or workstream priorities identified that differentiate between different genders.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website.
Sexual Orientation		There are no activities or workstream priorities identified that would exclude people of any sexual orientation.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website. Where local groups exist promoting LGBT issues, they have been engaged into the Area Plan process, particularly in the Walsall South and North Walsall areas.
Human Rights in gener		Area Plans exist to improve the effectiveness of service delivery at a local and borough level. They aim to increase the ability of residents to influence service delivery and engage in delivery. As such, they will generally increase human rights across Walsall.	Area Plan priorities publicised on Area Partnerships website.

**5. If you have identified potential exclusion in your assessment or it is unknown, what actions are you going to take to prevent exclusion/discrimination in future?**  
(Please provide a plan with timescales and people responsible)

No exclusions have currently been identified although the Area Plans will be monitored regularly to ensure they respond to residents' concerns and are being implemented by the Council and other delivery partners. Monitoring details are shown below:

Action	Timescale	Responsibility
Area Community Meetings	Six meetings each year to share Area Plan progress with local ward members	Area Manager
Area Partner Meetings	Monthly meetings where	Area Manager

	delivery bodies share progress and concerns	
Area Plan review	Monthly update of Area Plans to identify new issues and remove completed issues – results shared with portfolio holder	Partnership Manager
Report to Borough Operations Group	Updates will be provided to new Borough Operations Group on issues arising from Area Plan implementation that require actions	Partnership Manager

**Please submit your completed assessment to the Executive Director responsible for your service.**

	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Officer completing EqlA</b>		
<b>Executive Director</b>		

For monitoring purposes send a copy to [equality@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:equality@walsall.gov.uk).  
You are advised to refer to the findings of the EqlA in any relevant Corporate Management Team or Cabinet report.

If you require this information in any other language or format or cannot access the additional guidance notes on the Walsall Inside Pages please contact

Equality and Diversity Team  
Human Resources and Development  
Walsall Council  
Civic Centre  
Walsall  
WS1 1DQ

Telephone 01922 655797  
Textphone 0845 111 2910  
Email [equality@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:equality@walsall.gov.uk)  
Intranet: <http://inside.walsall.gov.uk/equality.htm>

# Review of Area Panels



As presented to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 9 April 2015



**Walsall Council**

## Foreword

*Area Panels are an important part of the engagement of our communities by the local authority and utilised effectively will help to bring decision making closer to the residents of the borough.*

*There is broad agreement that Area Panels are not consistent across the borough. Area Panels can engage in a meaningful manner with residents but, on the other hand, many residents have no idea of their existence. In engaging with partners during consultation, the working group found differing views and levels of engagement that partners wished to be involved in. However, it was clear that all partners wished to work with the local authority to achieve a better and more engaged Walsall.*

*The findings demonstrate that 'one size fits all' approach is intangible. A level of autonomy is required for each Area Panel to decide how best to engage with residents and partners to ensure that work toward priorities is right for that particular area.*

*Pilot projects, engagement days, partnership working and a more holistic approach to delivering council services are areas where real improvements can be made with effective panel. The need for devolving decision making to Area Panels is an important aspect that members agreed should be explored and followed through where possible.*

*In all aspects of the discussion the issue of a decreasing financial resource from the Council and Partners was ever present. It is without doubt the case that the aim of achieving a more engaged, locally autonomous and effective area management model will not be possible without meaningful financial investment from the centre, both for the work of the panels themselves and for developing the capacity of the community, voluntary and faith sector that will be instrumental in making the aim a reality.*

*In commending the report to the scrutiny committee I would like to thank the elected members for their time, effort and input and I would also like to acknowledge the input of partners and officer contributors who were a crucial component of the work of the group. Finally I would take the opportunity in thanking the working groups support officers for their hard work in facilitating the meetings and putting together the report in such a short period of time.*



**Councillor Aftab Nawaz**

**Lead Member, Area Partnership Working Group**

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## Introduction

The Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel (the Panel) identified the opportunity to review Area Panels at its meeting on 6 January 2015.

To complete this task a small working group was established.

## Terms of Reference

Draft terms of reference were discussed and agreed by a meeting of the working group that took place on 16 February 2015.

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

The Working Group was supported predominantly by two Officers:

Kate Bowers	Interim Head of Communities and Partnerships
Craig Goodall	Committee Business and Governance Manager

## Membership

Due to the cross cutting nature of the topic the Panel decided to invite Members from other scrutiny and performance panels to participate in the working group. To this end invitations were sent to all scrutiny panels.

The working group was made up of the following Councillors:

Name	Panel Representing
Aftab Nawaz (Lead Member)	Neighbourhoods
Dennis Anson	Regeneration
Rose Burley	Social Care and Health
Allah Ditta	Neighbourhoods
Shaun Fitzpatrick	Neighbourhoods
Tina Jukes	Children's Services
Ian Shires	Neighbourhoods
Chris Towe	Neighbourhoods

## Methodology

The Working Group has held 6 meetings during its investigations taking into account the views of 13 witnesses.



## Witnesses

The Working Group met and discussed issues or received evidence relating to welfare reforms with the following witnesses:

Phil Griffin	Executive Director, Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group
Councillor Ian Robertson	Chair, Health and Wellbeing Board
Lyndon Parkes	Service Manager, Walsall Housing Group
Wendy Powell	Director for Transformation, Caldmore Accord Housing
Inspector Mandy McPhee	West Midlands Police
Mark Holden	Head of Clean and Green, Walsall Council
John Roseblade	Group Manager (Highways and Environment), Walsall Council
Barbara Watt	Director of Public Health, Walsall Council
Davina Lytton	Chief Executive, Age UK, Walsall
Alex Boys	Age UK, Walsall
Claire Foulkes	Citizens Advice Bureau
John Barnett	Walsall Multi-faith Forum
Mark Harland	Community Church

## Report Format

This report is a broad summary of the working group's findings and conclusion.

## Context

Area Partnerships were created in 2010 by Walsall Partnership. This created a model for neighbourhood management across the borough on two levels. One Member led through public facing meetings. The other, Officer led through 'tasking' meetings with partners.

Member led meetings have provided a focus for discussions to identify and address community issues. They have subsequently affected local service delivery in response and/or made decisions on funding applications from groups and organisations able to deliver a possible solution. In addition Members have acted as the focal point and decision making body for participatory budgeting.

At the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel meeting on 6 January 2015 Cabinet invited the Panel to establish a working group to consider how devolution to area panels could be developed.

Cabinet's priorities for Area Panels are:

- Effective delivery;
- More community involvement in matters affecting local neighbourhoods;
- A stronger role for community organisations.

As part of their review Scrutiny Members decided to tackle three key questions. They were:

1. Should Area Panels take responsibility for budgets?
  - a. Should Area Panels take responsibility for managing mainstream budgets?
  - b. Should Area Panels commission work to deliver area priorities?
  - c. Should Area Panels influence mainstream service design?
2. Should Area Panels increase the role for holding the council and its partners to account?
3. How should Area Panels engage local communities to ensure they become part of the solution?

This report will seek to address the working group's point of view towards the three questions above.

## **Should Area Panels take responsibility for budgets?**

One of the key questions Members wished to investigate was whether Area Panels should take responsibility for budgets? The working group recognised that there were different ways that responsibility could be given so broke the question down into three:

- a. Should Area Panels take responsibility for managing mainstream budgets?
- b. Should Area Panels commission work to deliver area priorities?
- c. Should Area Panels influence mainstream service design?

The financial situation of the Council and the need to save tens of millions pounds moving forward was recognised as a barrier to Area Panels managing mainstream budgets. Resources were reducing so the expectation was that there would be increased requirements for organisational efficiency controlled by the corporate centre. On the other hand Members considered the idea that potentially Area Panels, with their enhanced local knowledge, could improve service delivery and make money go further in these tough economic climes.

The working group discussed the possibility of Area Panels taking responsibility for budgets with representatives of Clean and Green, Highways and Transportation, Public Health Services and the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board from Walsall Council. The working group also spoke with partner organisations about the same issue, namely Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group, Walsall Housing Group, Caldmore Accord and West Midlands Police.

### **Should Area Panels take responsibility for managing mainstream budgets?**

The working group discussed this issue and found that, at the current time, it would be very challenging for Area Panels to take responsibility for mainstream budgets as a whole.

There was little evidence of other Local Authorities implementing mainstream budget disaggregation in the current economic climate. City of York Council are in the process of exploring mechanisms for some budget devolution, however, Birmingham City Council, whilst currently undertaking consultation on community governance moving forward are exploring integrated services rather than budgetary control at a local level.

At the Council, services, such as those operated by Clean and Green, were organised on a borough wide level to achieve maximum efficiency. In Highways, road maintenance was undertaken on a strict needs basis. In addition to this the Council had a long term contract with Lafarge Tarmac to undertake the work. Public Health commissioned service based on needs identified in the Joint Strategic Needs

Assessment. There was some scope to influence the operation of some services, such as street cleansing, but it was accepted that this would come at a loss of borough wide efficiency.

Taking responsibility for the budgets of partners was more challenging as they were separate organisations which the Council had no direct control of. In this instance the working group acknowledged that exerting influence over the priorities of partners was the best path to follow. Partners faced challenging financial circumstances too. It was anticipated that the Police would be required to manage annual budget reductions for the foreseeable future. Budget reductions further reduced opportunities for influence.

With the issues regarding reducing budgets and a likely need for centralised core services the working group wish to suggest that Cabinet undertake some investigation to establish the cost of delivering core-standard services and identifying surplus budgets for the potential allocation to Area Panels. Moreover the surplus budgets should be allocated to areas on a needs basis in line with the Marmot objectives.

### **Should Area Panels commission work to deliver area priorities?**

The working group considered the idea about whether or not Area Panels could commission work to deliver area priorities?

Commissioning services was linked strongly to control of budgets. If Area Panels had no money of their own to spend then they couldn't genuinely commission services. As it stood Area Panels could make recommendations to the Council and its partners about the work undertaken in an area but it was felt the level of influence on services was low.

The working group were advised of a new initiative engaging Area Panels in prioritising highways maintenance in their areas. A new scoring matrix to prioritise schemes was being developed and it was proposed that each Area Panel would be able to award points to potential highways maintenance schemes in their areas. Members were pleased with the idea and the potential influence being given to Area Panels but also noted that the Area Panel points were one factor amongst many.

### **Should Area Panels influence mainstream service design?**

As mentioned above Area Panels are able to make recommendations to the Council and its partners about the work undertaken in an area but it was felt the level of influence on services, particularly partners, was low.

Of those interviewed all were happy to attend Area Panels and provide Members the opportunity to comment on and shape upcoming plans and projects. All were happy to receive the views of Members and take them onboard. Despite this the working group felt that the level of influence Area Panels could exert was low. The working

group felt that, by the time plans and projects come to Area Panels, it was too late to genuinely influence them or even stop something happening.

The Council had operated a pilot to give Area Panels and local communities a greater say in service design through a participatory budgeting exercise regarding verge parking. Whilst this project had successfully delivered a series of parking spaces across the borough, and attracted additional funding from partners to pay for additional spaces, Members noted a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the scheme. This pilot scheme was designed to test the process and as such was implemented with limited budgets. This required each Area Panel to select only one area for a new verge parking scheme. This resulted in a solution that met the needs of a minority leaving a majority of local residents disappointed as their hopes of additional parking spaces were unfulfilled. Members accepted that in order to address the issues facing those in most need any future local decision making powers and responsibilities would come with this challenge.

### **Moving forward**

With the issues regarding reducing budgets and a likely need for centralised core services the working group wish to suggest that Cabinet undertake some investigation to establish the cost of delivering core-standard services and identifying surplus budgets for the potential allocation to Area Panels. Moreover the surplus budgets should be allocated to areas on a needs basis in line with the Marmot objectives.

The working group also recommend that Cabinet undertake a review of existing resources supporting ward activity to identify any cross over and potential for more efficient use of resources.

In terms of priority setting the working group felt that it would be better if Area Panels could play a greater role 'upstream' with the priority setting of the Council and its partners at an area level.

## **Should Area Panels increase the role for holding the council and its partners to account?**

The second key question the working group investigated was should Area Panels increase the role for holding the council and its partners to account?

The working group considered the current position and recognised that there were many good examples of Area Panels holding the council and its partners to account. For example, the Willenhall and Short Heath Area Panel has held local housing providers to account about the quality of local housing stock. The Walsall South Area Panel has previously invited local schools to meetings to discuss their performance. However, Members were conscious that these opportunities were reliant on the partners concerned agreeing to attend the meeting. To their credit, the key local partners were always willing to attend and contribute at Area Panel meetings.

The missing piece of the jigsaw, as seen by the working group, was a lack of influence. When undertaking the holding to account role as members of an Area Panel the working group often felt that the opportunity to truly influence the direction the council and its partners was taking was already lost. This frustrated Members as they wanted to play a stronger role in the direction the council and its partners took at an area level.

When speaking with partners it became clear that some had their own separate governance structures within which they preferred to be held to account. For example, the Police preferred to be held to account at an area level by the Local Police and Crime Board which included a representative from each Area Panel. There were similar independent governance structures in existence at whg.

This led the working group to conclude that the most effective way of holding the council and its partners to account was to contribute to priority setting. The idea is that this would ensure that each area panel's priorities were reflected across strategic partners. Whilst there is evidence of partners in other Local Authority Areas working to set priorities at a ward or area level this was often in relation to specific themes such as crime and grime, open spaces or housing. However, Members felt that local communities required and received wide ranging services and that their communities would be better served through Area Panels ability to influence a broader spectrum of provision. To this end the working group recommend that the Borough Management Team establish whether it will be possible to establish a mechanism for Area Panels to contribute to partnership wide target setting and monitoring at an area level.

It could be argued that this is happening, in part, already but the working group believe that the existing priorities in each Area Panels Area Plan are too broadly in line with the strategic priorities for the borough. The working group wish to recommend that Area Plan priorities become more focussed and specific to each area rather than be set broad priorities. Further to this Area Panels should increase their role in the drafting, approving and monitoring of Area Plans and their priorities with input from a wider range of partners.

The working group believe that the combination of these top down/bottom up changes will greatly increase the connectedness of the partnership approach, give Members and residents more ownership of their priorities and allow them to genuinely hold others to account for delivery of the chosen priorities.

Further to this Members recognised the importance of involving local communities in the drafting and influencing of Area Plans and their priorities. To this end the working group recommends that each Area Panel holds at least one annual consultation event to seek the views of local residents, businesses and the local voluntary and community sector on significant challenges facing the area. This information can be used to inform the Area Panel which Members and the local communities can comment on in draft form at a future Area Panel meeting prior to the Area Plans approval by Members. The delivery of the Area Plan will then form the focus of Area Panel meetings throughout the year through a series of themed meetings based on the priorities in the Area Plan.

## **How should Area Panels engage local communities to ensure they become part of the solution?**

During their investigations the working group was conscious that a key role of Area Panels is to engage with local communities. The working group believe that Area Panels could expand this role and better engage with the local voluntary and community sector to build local capacity.

### **Area Panel Meetings**

With regard to Area Panel meetings, the working group suggest that it would be of benefit for Area Panels to re-focus on their role and purpose. Area Panels should play a greater role in the drafting, approving and monitoring of Area Plans which should be specific and targeted in setting out priorities for the local area and ways in which they could be addressed.

It is suggested that meetings are themed around Area Plan priorities and that Area Panels shape activity taking place to achieve each priority. In doing so, Area Managers and partners would be expected to work together in terms of delivery of the local priorities and be prepared to provide regular updates at panel meetings. Further to this Area Panel meetings should hold meetings across the wards in their local patch. If particular priorities were specific to a certain area then the Area Panel meeting should take place in the relevant neighbourhood.

### *Engagement*

The working group suggested that Area Panels could do more to engage local communities at meetings. Attendance at meetings across the borough by members of the public is typically very low. Members believed that it was important to initiate something to improve this situation. It was hoped that involving local communities in the development of Area Plans would be one step towards greater engagement but it was clear that further ways to engage local people were still required.

Social media is ever more present in society and so Area Panels could make a greater use of social media tools. Not everybody is able to attend an Area Panel meeting and so it is suggested that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were good tools for engagement. Discussions on agenda items could be managed online in the build up to meetings and the views of local residents could then be fed into Area Panel meetings.

### *Strategic planning matters*

A further opportunity to engage local communities would be citing Area Panels as consultees for strategically significant planning matters in their areas. This would give Members and local people the opportunity to comment and shape important matters for their area.

### **Voluntary and community sector**



It is widely known that the budgets of all local authorities are going to diminish heavily over the course of the next five years. Simply, the Council will not be able to maintain current levels of service moving forward. In order to maintain some important services it is hoped the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) could take on services the Council can no longer afford to run or help increase efficiency so that services can be maintained for the benefit of the local community. There is already good work taking place to engage with local communities in services by the Council such as litter picking exercises, snow champions and maintaining public rights of way. Whilst this is a good start it is clear that there is a need to further develop the role of local communities and the VCS in Council activities.

The working group met with a selection of VCS organisations. All were of the opinion that greater co-ordination and engagement with local VCS groups was required to unlock the potential of local groups. There was a consensus that Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) had been ineffective in this role and that change was required in the way the VCS was supported.

As well as more co-ordination, VCS groups explained that more community development was required to increase capacity in the third sector. A way of increasing capacity would be for increased support to be provided to the VCS with funding applications and evaluation work.

Volunteers wanted to use their energy for direct community work and bureaucracy was a barrier to expanding the VCS.

Further to this, the working group strongly believed that whilst the VCS is an under-utilised resource in Walsall it was not a panacea to the Council's funding problems. In order for the VCS to function adequately it would require long term sustainable funding. The working group believed that the VCS could operate more efficiently but recognised that it would need funding to succeed.

It is clear that if some services are to survive moving forward the VCS will need to play an increased role. With this in mind the working group believed that it would be beneficial for the Council to develop and implement a range of pilot projects in partnership with local communities and the VCS across the borough. This would give all sectors the opportunity to build relationships and test mechanisms for co-delivery in the future.

In addition to involvement in delivery VCS groups want to be involved in strategic planning and priority setting. The working group have already recommended the involvement of the VCS in developing Area Plans and so would also recommend that VCS groups are involved with strategic priority setting undertaken by the Council and its partners. This will help build strength in the VCS who, at the current time, only feel involved at an operational level.

The working group also met with faith groups. A great deal of good work is undertaken by faith groups across the borough and the working group believed that more should be done by the Council and its partners to work with local faith organisations. The faith groups involved in the working group discussions recognised that there were challenges around the mistrust between the faith sector and other organisations. It was suggested to the working group that the Council

adopts the 'Covenant for Engagement' between local authorities and faith groups as set out of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society. A copy of this covenant is included at Appendix 2 to this report.

After speaking to representatives the working group felt that the faith sector in particular was underutilised and the working group recommend that increased engagement take place in this area

## **Conclusion**

It is the working group's view that Area Panels are an important part of the Council and have a crucial link to local communities and their priorities. Whilst there has been a loss of direction for Area Panels over recent years, this can be renewed by increasing focus on developing and approving priorities within the area plans and by taking a more central role in monitoring performance against those priorities. It is important that local residents, businesses and the voluntary and community sector are meaningfully involved with this work.

In terms of influencing priority setting with the Council and its partners the working group felt that it would be better if Area Panels could play a greater role 'upstream' with the priority setting at an area level. In addition to this the voluntary and community sector should play a greater role in strategic priority setting.

The financial situation of the Council and the need to save tens of millions pounds moving forward was recognised as a barrier to Area Panels managing mainstream budgets. Resources were reducing so the expectation was that there would be increased requirements for organisational efficiency controlled by the corporate centre. On the other hand the working group considered the idea that, potentially Area Panels with their enhanced local knowledge, could improve service delivery and make money go further in these tough economic climes.

In light of the impact of reducing budgets and the need to maintain centralised core services Members accepted the complex nature of establishing any surplus budgets for potential allocation to Area Panels. However, they felt that taking account of the complexity, an exercise to test the viability of such a model should be undertaken. Members also accepted that a model of this nature would need to be targeted at those communities and individuals in most need and that following the identification of any surplus budgets these should be allocated in line with the Marmott objectives.

The working group also concluded that a review of existing resources supporting ward activity was required in order to identify any cross over and duplication in case there was potential for efficiencies.

The working group also concluded that the voluntary and community sector in Walsall is an underutilised resource. The faith sector could be more widely engaged by the Council. The voluntary and community sector as a whole lacks co-ordination at a strategic level and further work needs to take place to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector. Despite being an underutilised resource the voluntary and community sector is not a panacea to the Councils funding problems. In order to function effectively the voluntary and community sector will require long term sustainable funding.

As part of building capacity in the voluntary and community sector, and as a potential means to preserve services, the working group concluded that the unique offer in each area could be tested through the development and implementation of pilot projects with the authority working with local communities and the voluntary sector. This would provide opportunity to build relationships and test mechanisms for delivery in partnership.

## Recommendations

1. That Cabinet be requested to consider a report detailing the feasibility of:
  - a) developing a formula for a needs based allocation of mainstream service budgets minus borough-wide core standard service costs.
  - b) establishing the cost of delivering core standard services and identify the availability of surplus budgets for allocation to Area Panels. Allocation of resources to Area Panels should be based on achieving the Marmot objectives.
  - c) establishing a mechanism for Area Panels to affect service delivery with a staged implementation.
2. That a review of existing resources supporting ward activity is undertaken to identify any cross over and duplication for potential more efficient use of resources.
3. That discussion takes place with the Borough Management Team to establish whether it will be possible to develop a mechanism for Area Panels to contribute to partnership wide target setting and monitoring of progress against service delivery at an area level.
4. That Cabinet request Executive Directors to identify a pilot project in each partnership area, relevant to each areas area plan priorities, to develop and test mechanisms for delivering in partnership with local communities and voluntary sector groups.
5. That Cabinet request the Executive Director of Regeneration with exploring whether Area Panels can be cited as consultees for any strategically significant planning matters affecting their areas.
6. Area Plan priorities should become more focussed.
7. That Area Panels increase their role in the drafting and approving Area Plan priorities and monitoring activity against these priorities with the assistance of partners.
8. That Area Panels focus on the development and delivery of a focussed Area Plan to engage residents. This should include themed meetings on Area Plan priorities and holding meetings in venues in each of the wards in each area where possible.
9. That Area Panels hold an annual consultation event, as a minimum, to seek the views of local residents, businesses and local voluntary and community sector on

any significant challenges facing the area in the coming year and to feedback progress on Area Panel activity in the previous year.

10. That greater co-ordination of the voluntary and community sector take place.
11. That the voluntary and community sector play a greater role in strategic priority setting for the Council and its partners.
12. That a greater emphasis is put on community development work by the Council.
13. Voluntary and community sector faith groups should be more widely engaged by the Council.
14. That Area Panels engage local communities more fully taking account of the broad range of engagement tools available, including social media tools.
15. That the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel monitor the outcome of the work undertaken to implement its recommendations in October 2015.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

<b>Work Group Name:</b>	Area Partnerships Working Group
<b>Panel:</b>	Neighbourhoods
<b>Municipal Year:</b>	2014/15
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor A. Nawaz
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Kate Bowers
<b>Support Officer:</b>	Craig Goodall
<b>Membership:</b>	D. Anson (Business, Employment and Local Economy Rep) R. Burley (Social Care and Health Rep) A. Ditta S. Fitzpatrick T. Jukes A. Nawaz I. Shires C. Towe
<b>Co-opted Members:</b>	None

<b>1.</b>	<b>Context</b>
	<p>Area Partnerships were created in 2010 by Walsall Partnership. This created a model for neighbourhood management across the borough on two levels. One Member led through public facing meetings. The other Officer led through 'tasking' meetings with partners.</p> <p>Member led meetings have provided a focus for discussions to identify and address community issues and they have subsequently affected local service delivery in response and/or made decisions on funding applications from groups and organisations able to deliver a possible solution. In addition Members have acted as the focal point and decision making body for participatory budgeting.</p> <p>At the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel meeting on 6 January 2015 Cabinet invited the Panel to establish a working group to consider how devolution to area panels could be developed.</p> <p>Cabinets priorities for Area Panels are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective delivery;</li> <li>• More community involvement in matters affecting local neighbourhoods;</li> <li>• A stronger role for community organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
	<p>Following an invitation from Cabinet the working group will review the current duties and responsibilities undertaken by Area Panels and to explore how they could increase these to provide a more bespoke response to community issues and challenges and therefore ensure more</p>

	<p>effective delivery in the future. Members will look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should Area Panels take responsibility for budgets? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Should Area Panels take responsibility for managing mainstream budgets?</li> <li>○ Should Area Panels commission work to deliver area priorities?</li> <li>○ Should Area Panel influence mainstream service design?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Should Area Panels increase the role for holding the council and its partners to account?</li> <li>•</li> <li>• How should Area Panels engage local communities to ensure they become part of the solution?</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Scope</b>
	The focus of the piece of work is exploring the potential range of duties and responsibilities and the Member led arrangements required at an area level to implement them.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Equalities Implications</b>
	Effort will be made by the working group to ensure that its findings and recommendations do not unfairly disadvantage and person on the grounds of their age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Who else will you want to take part?</b>
	Other Council Services Other local authorities, for example: Sheffield. Walsall Voluntary Action Walsall Housing Group Police Public Health Health and Wellbeing Board Clinical Commissioning Group Other Voluntary and Community Organisations
<b>5.</b>	<b>Timescales &amp; Reporting Schedule</b>
	<p>A final report and recommendations will be presented to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 9 April 2015.</p> <p>If the work needs to continue beyond the 2014/15 municipal year then the working group will consider making an interim report before the end of April 2015.</p>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Risk factors</b>


Date Agreed:		Date Updated:	
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**Timetable:**

Meeting	Activity
16 February	Scene setting and terms of reference
24 February	<p>Should Area Panels increase their role for holding the council and its partners to account?</p> <p>How should Area Panels engage with local communities to ensure they become part of the solution?</p>
11 March	Meeting with health and housing partners.
16 March	Meeting with West Midlands Police and Council services.
23 March	Meeting with voluntary and community sector organisations.
31 March	Conclusions