Cabinet – 14 January 2009

Community Action Tasking

Portfolio: Councillor Perry, Communities and Partnerships

Service: Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes

Wards: All

Key decisions: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary of report

1.1 This report sets out a response to the feedback received to date from Local Neighbourhood Partnerships about the need to improve the responsiveness of public services in the locality. LNPs are an essential vehicle to hear the views from Walsall's communities about ways in which services delivered by the Council and its partners could be improved and changed to better be able to meet local need, whilst highlighting the role of Councillors as community leaders and advocates in their community.

1.2 A new approach to local tasking has recently been introduced in each LNP area called Community Action Tasking (CATs). This follows on from the successful pilot in the Blakenall and Bloxwich LNP and offers a sound platform for the newly established Borough Tasking Group to gain community intelligence and ensure matters relating to crime, community safety and the local environment can be appropriately addressed and in a timely manner.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet support the implementation of community action tasking in each of the 9 Local Neighbourhood Partnership areas in order to improve the responsiveness of public services in the locality.

2.2 That Cabinet agree the proposed reporting arrangements between CATs and LNPs to formalise the relationship between the two groups and establish a mechanism for LNPs to hold service providers to account.

3. Background information

National Policy Context

3.1.1 The development of LNPs in Walsall has coincided with growing interest nationally about how local people should be involved in decisions affecting their area. Locally, community influence over public services is seen as important and it is acknowledged across the UK that local residents need a stronger voice. A national Action Plan for Community Empowerment was published in 2007 which reflects many of the approaches that have been in place in Walsall since 2004. Following this the Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities issued the White Paper "Communities in control: real people, real power", which sets out proposals to strengthen community empowerment and encourages local authorities to embrace this agenda.

Local Context

3.1.2 Safer Walsall Partnership (SWBP) has recently introduced a new approach as part of its updated delivery structure to reduce crime and disorder across the borough. This is known as the Borough Tasking Group and its membership consists of senior representatives with appropriate decision making powers to agree and implement tasks identified at each meeting of the group. Representatives are from across a broad spectrum of agencies and include Police, Fire, Probation, housing associations, health and Council (Youth service, Street Pride, Green Spaces, Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes).

3.1.3 The aim of the Borough Tasking Group is to:

(a) Share information in order to detect, prevent and reduce crime and disorder and substance misuse.

(b) Co-ordinate and task intelligence-led multi-agency activities to address crime and anti-social behaviour and public perceptions of crime in high crime areas across the borough to meet agreed local targets

(c) Direct activities to address identified issues

(d) Escalate issues and blockages across the partnership for consideration by the Safer and Stronger Communities Board.

3.1.4 The group meets monthly and is chaired by the Head of Public Protection from the Council. It receives an overview of trends in reported incidents of crime and disorder data, and intelligence from each agency's nominated single point of contact (eg, noise nuisance, recorded (but not reported) tensions). This is collated by the Police crime analyst into a report which analyses the data and intelligence and recommends key areas for action. At the end of each meeting a tasking document is agreed with nominated agencies responsible for identified actions. These are reviewed at each meeting alongside updated intelligence and statistics.

3.1.5 The Borough Tasking Group operates at 3 levels:

Level 0 – issue can be solved through dialogue between 2 or more agencies/groups in the area/neighbourhood.

Level 1 – issue needs wider involvement, and will be considered at the Community Action Tasking meeting.

Level 2 – issue is beyond the resource available locally, and will be considered by the Borough Tasking Group.

3.1.6 At the inaugural meeting of the Borough Tasking Group it was recognised that LNPs offer the infrastructure to enable community action tasking to operate in support of their work.

3.1.7 The majority of LNPs have in place Community Action Groups (CAG) that primarily work to deliver the pledges for that area (as set out in their Neighbourhood Agreements) and in addition offer a drop in facility for the local community to log their issues. In Blakenall and Bloxwich the LNP decided to set up community action tasking to explore how this model could work in bringing agencies together to collectively tackle issues raised by the community and in parallel bring about a level of local accountability by the service providers. This group, chaired by the Sergeant from the Neighbourhood Police team, successfully tackled a number of local issues and concerns in parallel with the CAG meetings.

3.1.8 The monthly Community Action Tasking meetings comprising of representatives at an operational level from all key agencies (Police, housing, health, a range of Council services, fire) and chaired by one of the agencies will:

(a) Offer the opportunity for LNPs to hold agencies to account about what they are doing to change and improve services in response to issues raised about their area.

(b) Share information (both statistical and from umbrella and community groups) in order to tackle concerns and issues about crime, disorder, substance misuse and the local environment.

(b) Co-ordinate and task intelligence-led multi-agency activities to address the issues identified and direct available resources.

(c) Escalate issues and blockages across the LNP for consideration by the Borough Tasking Group and to inform future pledges in the LNP Neighbourhood Agreements.

(d) Provide progress reports to each LNP meeting explaining how issues have been tackled, with direction from the LNP about future issues they should be considering.

3.1.9 The Borough Tasking Group members have given their commitment to attendance at and input to the Community Action Tasking Group meetings. They will monitor this on a regular basis.

3.1.10 The LNP will consider and agree at each meeting the issues of concern that they wish the CAT to consider. This will build upon the public forum sessions at LNP meetings and formalise both the relationship between the two groups and create a sense of accountability by the service providers to the LNP. The LNPs will receive a progress report at each meeting from the CAT about issues they have tackled and the impact this has had on the local community.

4.   Resource and legal considerations

4.1   **Financial**

4.1.1 The resources required to tackles issues and concerns logged by the CAT will, in the first instance, be expected to be met from within existing budgets. Where this is not possible, the CAT will be required to

(a)   Demonstrate that sufficient challenge has been made to "bend" current mainstream provision to meet locally identified need.

(b)   Explore a range of local solutions to include partners and agencies outside of the core membership.

(c)   Engage the voluntary and community sector to help deliver local solutions that are outside of the scope of mainstream provision.

(d)   Consider other funding opportunities that may be available or may be able to be secured to pick up single issues.

4.1.2 After exhaustion of the above options, the CAT can escalate issues to the Borough Tasking Group to request resource and assistance to solve the locally identified problem.

4.2   Legal: There are no relevant legal considerations at this stage.

4.3   **Staffing** The Community Action Tasking meetings are facilitated by the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships team. It is the responsibility of the LNP officer to organise a venue and invite the partners to the meetings, which are held at the same time and venue each month. All actions and updates are monitored and maintained by the LNP team and regular updates are distributed to the partners of the tasking team. The resource requirements in this regard can be adequately met from within the current staffing structure for the LNP team.

5.   Citizen impact

5.1   The council is striving to create safer and stronger communities with a key priority as part of the Local Area Agreement being to increase the number of people able to influence decisions made by public sector agencies about the way they deliver their services in neighbourhoods. The LNP structure brings key agencies into a locality to engage with local groups and residents. This offers a unique opportunity to influence and shape the way these agencies plan for and deliver their services in neighbourhoods.

5.2   The aspirations of the new Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act and the expectations from the Community Empowerment White Paper are that local communities need to be involved in place shaping in order to offer opportunities for their quality of life and perceptions about public services to be significantly improved.

5.3   The LNP team will continue to support community engagement and involvement and ensure local issues and concerns are fed into the Community Action Tasking meetings. This will be through a variety of means such as road shows, bus tours/ ward walks, meet the public sessions, visits to identified community groups in the area, and use of the "Back the Box" campaign similar to that used in the Darlaston LNP area.

5.4   Regular community feedback sessions will be organised in each LNP area to let the community know what is happening in their area and to give feedback on what has been done since the issue was raised. Individuals raising or passing on an issue will be contacted direct by the LNP team. This form of feedback and involvement proved to be very successful in the pilot CAT in Blakenall and Bloxwich.

6.   Community safety

Safer Walsall Partnership (SWP) has developed the Borough Tasking Group as part of its delivery structure to reduce crime and disorder across the borough. The Community Action Tasking meetings underpin and support the work of this group operating within similar parameters to that of the Borough Tasking Group but with a focus on the relevant LNP area.

7.   Environmental impact

The Council engages regularly with LNPs either via the main meetings, at Community Action Tasking meetings, and through specific organised events to raise awareness about reducing energy consumption, choosing, using, re-using and recycling materials, and producing less waste and recycling. LNPs undertake a range of local initiatives and projects aimed at improving their environment and encouraging residents to participate in these activities.

8.   Performance and risk management issues

8.1   **Risk**: A risk management action plan is also in place as part of the service plan for Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes.

8.2   **Performance management**: A project plan is in place as part of the Council's project management structures. The key control mechanisms of Walsall Partnership Board and the Chairs Forum will be utilised to keep progress on track. A grant agreement with Walsall Partnership for the grant received to deliver LAA targets requires monthly performance reports to be submitted with exceptions reported to the partnership's executive.

9. Equality implications

The LNP structures offer the opportunity to engage in different ways with different communities. There is an equality action plan in place to improve and widen engagement of different communities. This is currently being refreshed this year. In addition, LNPs are playing a wider role in celebrating Walsall's diversity by organising events in their area and bringing communities together to understand each other better and create a platform for cohesion.

10. Consultation

10.1 A report was presented to the board of Walsall Partnership at its September meeting putting forward broad ideas to explore a number of key questions around the future strategy for LNPs and what needs to be done to improve their effectiveness. The report and accompanying paper were shared at the LNP Chairs Forum in October.

10.2 The Chairs Forum and the Borough Tasking Group have received information about and been involved in the initial formation of and dissemination of information about the Community Action Tasking meetings. It is proposed to take formal reports to the December/January LNP meetings and to the next meeting of the board of Walsall Partnership.

10.3 Walsall Partnership has recently appointed a local liaison improvement adviser from Government Office West Midlands to lead on the wider consultation about the future strategic direction for LNPs. A questionnaire will be used to ensure a coherent and comprehensive approach is taken and to provide a basis for consulting with partners, including LNPs.

Background papers

- Report to Cabinet – 14 September 2003, Consultation on Local Governance Arrangements in Walsall
- Report to Council – 12 January 2004, Leader of the Council's Proposals for the Establishment of Nine Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Report to council – 19 April 2004, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Report to Cabinet – 12 May 2004, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) – Progress Update
- Report to Cabinet – 14 July 2004, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships: Guidelines on Selection Processes for Locally Appointed Partners (LAPs)
- Report to Cabinet – 19 January 2005, Implementing Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Report to Cabinet – 23 March 2005, Local Neighbourhood Partnership Plans
- Report to Council – 24 April 2006, Proposal to consider revised governance arrangements for Local Neighbourhood Partnerships.
- Report to Cabinet – 19 December 2007, LNP Development

Author

Julie Gethin
Head of Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes
☎ 654706
✉ gethinj@walsall.gov.uk

Jamie Morris   Councillor Garry Perry
Executive Director   Portfolio holder

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