

Cabinet – 4 February 2015

Community Hubs – Shaping a Fairer Future

Portfolio: Councillor K Hussain - Community, leisure and culture

Related portfolios: All portfolios

Service: Neighbourhood Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek cabinet agreement to a policy statement describing the cabinet's ambitions for more localised service delivery through a network of community hubs, and to a proposed approach to develop this model through area partnerships.
- 1.2 The purpose of community hubs is to provide locally-based focal points for the delivery of services. They will encourage greater community involvement in decisions about what services should be provided and how they are designed.
- 1.3 Engaging with local residents, partner organisations and the voluntary sector will help to inform the design of the community hubs. To this end it is intended to invite the six area partnerships to consult locally on the right configuration of community hubs for their area and to prepare a business case which will be brought back to cabinet for approval.
- 1.4 A project team has been established to support the work to be done in area partnerships.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the policy statement 'Community Hubs – Shaping a Fairer Future'.
- 2.2 That Cabinet invite each area partnership to prepare proposals for community hubs in their area, and for these to be considered by cabinet.

3. Report detail

3.1 The policy statement 'Community Hubs – shaping a fairer future' is attached as **Appendix A**.

3.2 Following discussion with cabinet members the policy statement has been created to reflect the vision and ambition of the council to improve services for residents by promoting a stronger focus on localities.

3.3 The policy statement identifies five closely related objectives:

- How we make better use of physical assets to co-locate services (council and partners) for the benefit of residents
- How we involve local people more in the design of services provided in their community
- How we encourage more innovation in delivery models using the voluntary sector where appropriate
- How we devolve more responsibilities to local levels
- How we improve access more generally across all channels.

The area partnerships' business cases for community hubs in their localities will need to demonstrate how these objectives will be achieved.

3.4 A project team has been identified to co-ordinate the development of community hubs. In particular it will be preparing information and other practical assistance for area partnerships to identify the need for community hubs in their locality.

3.5 This project will also draw on the experience of the two community hub pilots agreed by the council in Moxley and Ryecroft, the evaluation of which will be reported to the next cabinet meeting.

3.6 The project will also learn from the wide variety of experience of the council, partner organisations and community groups in providing locally based service access in Walsall. There is a rich legacy and the intention of the project is to learn from what works rather than to impose any uniform model.

4. Council priorities

4.1 The design of community hubs will reflect the emerging corporate plan and help address the following priorities:

- Support with Cost of Living
- Creating Jobs and helping people get new skills
- Improving Educational Attainment
- Helping local high streets and communities
- Promoting health and well-being
- Helping create more affordable housing

The proposal to consult will impact across all portfolios.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 Failing to engage with communities and partner organisations prior to designing community hubs could lead to a disjointed approach to service delivery, with missed opportunity to help those in most need within the local community.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The financial implications of any redesign of council services resulting from this initiative will be considered as part of the business cases which will be developed by area partnerships and brought back to a future cabinet meeting for decision.
- 6.2 The attached policy statement explains that community hubs will not necessarily lead to immediate savings. However they should enable services to be more closely tailored to local needs which would be a more efficient use of resources than a standardised “one size fits all” for the whole borough. Moreover if community hubs are effective at helping people and local communities to be more resilient, then they will help prevent the need for higher cost services in the future.
- 6.3 The cost of the consultation will be funded from existing budgets.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications, however any likely impacts will be considered in the report on options and consultation outcomes.

8. Property implications

- 8.1 One of the key objectives of this project is to optimise the efficiency of council assets. There are likely therefore to be significant property implications once specific proposals are developed for community hubs across the borough. In the meantime there are no direct property implications associated with the consultation.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1 The design of community hubs is intended to help improve health and wellbeing for communities and ways to achieve this will need to be reflected in any business case.

10. Staffing implications

- 10.1 Additional resources will need to be provided to area partnerships to support this project. The intention is to meet this requirement from within existing staffing levels across a number of service areas within the council.

11. Equality implications

11.1 Any final proposals would be subject to an equality impact assessment.

12. Consultation

12.1 The consultation is intended to reach as wide an audience as possible from within the community and voluntary sector organisations known to the council, as well as engagement with partner organisations.

Background papers

None

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26 January 2015

Councillor Hussain
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26 January 2015

Community Hubs – Shaping a Fairer Future

The purpose of community hubs is to provide locally-based focal points for the delivery of services. They will encourage greater community involvement in decisions about what services should be provided and how they are designed. The outcome we want to see is better access to all services and more localised delivery. This does not just cover council services and is not just physical access to buildings.

From this definition it is clear that community hubs are intended to support several distinct but closely related objectives:

- How we make better use of physical assets to co-locate services (council and partners) for the benefit of residents
- How we involve local people more in the design of services provided in their community
- How we encourage more innovation in delivery models using the voluntary sector where appropriate
- How we devolve more responsibilities to local levels
- How we improve access more generally across all channels.

We want to ensure that people can access services in ways that are suitable and convenient for them. This will involve a combination of self service, web access, telephony, post and face to face. What people access by travelling to Walsall town centre will be different from what they access in district centres which in turn will be different from what they can access in their local neighbourhood or their own home.

It follows from the above that there may be different approaches in different parts of the borough. This could result from different local needs and demands from the community and/or it could result from the different types of buildings we currently provide services from in different areas. Variation is to be expected and indeed welcomed, provided it is soundly based and reflects genuine community involvement in the design.

It is essential that local residents are involved in the design of community hubs in their area. Area partnerships offer an important way to enable this to happen but care will need to be taken to ensure that the community engagement is broad based and inclusive. We will ask area partnerships to prepare business cases for community hubs in their areas and sign these off locally prior to consideration by cabinet.

The development of community hubs will need to link closely to the parallel piece of work concerning devolution. Scrutiny Panels will be exploring whether decisions about services should be made more locally, for example through area committees, and to report to cabinet on this. This may well result in changes to what is provided at a local level and the level of decision making about services.

What is delivered at a community hub will be developed over time and as we gain a greater understanding of need. It is expected that different hubs will deliver different

services, however the core service is likely to involve a mix of:

- Library Services
- Community space for community meetings, events,
- Community cafe
- Adult learning activity
- Space for partner organisations and voluntary groups
- Support for online access to Council Services
- Ability to access other services e.g. consumer services, Clean and Green
- Cash payment technology (although there will be security issues)
- Benefits and Welfare Rights support and advice
- Support for independent living
- Drop down space for Council staff

We recognise that community hubs will not necessarily lead to immediate savings. However they should enable services to be more closely tailored to local needs. This would be more efficient than a “one size fits all” for the whole borough. If community hubs are more effective at helping people and local communities to be more resilient, then they will help prevent the need for higher cost services in the future.

The involvement of partner organisations will be critical. Many of our key partners such as the police, registered social landlords and Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust already have locally based outlets for their services. We know that co-locating services together is popular with residents and increases footfall (Pelsall centre and Brownhills centre are good examples of this). We will explore the potential with partner organisations to do more of this either in our premises, or theirs or different premises.

Schools could provide an ideal venue for community hubs because they are recognised as important facilities at the heart of local communities. Opening up schools to wider community use presents safeguarding issues which would need to be addressed. The possibility of providing more community use of school facilities will therefore need to be discussed with head teachers and governing bodies.

If community hubs are to provide a lasting change to the way we provide services and engage local communities, then we will encourage support and commitment from partners and from all political groups. The process to consult with councillors, partners and other stakeholders starts now.