

## Council – 8th April 2013

### Community Engagement and Voluntary Sector Progress report of Councillor I. Shires, Portfolio holder

The Community Engagement and Voluntary Sector portfolio offers a significant opportunity to support the Council in better meeting the needs of local people in these austere times. I am especially pleased to be able to present a report which highlights the change activity which is taking place within the portfolio, through Area Partnerships and Community Development, including highlights of where these services and this way of working is making a real difference to local people's lives within our Borough.

Before discussing potential future changes I wish to present some highlights of activity in each of the Borough's Area Partnerships' and I also wish before doing this to thank my fellow Cabinet Portfolio holders and Members of the Council for their support, recognising their efforts within Area Partnerships are crucial in making Area Partnerships a success.

I think it's fair to say there is no part of community life that Area Partnerships do not touch. In terms of health we are seeing lots of activity through Area Partnerships, for example a series of Health Workshops which were supported by the Local Government Association, NHS Walsall and Walsall Council, entitled "Health is everyone's business" have taken place in each of the six areas. The workshops attracted good attendances from a range of public and voluntary sector organisations and considered a wide range of socio-economic factors, documented through detailed health and area profiles, that contribute to health inequalities across the Borough. The events focused on the potential for solutions to be found through the use of community assets such as community centres, health centres etc. As an outcome from this work each Area Partnership is now developing and co-ordinating action plans which seek through multi-agency support to tackle the key health issues for their area. Diabetes for example has been identified for **Walsall South**, recognising the ingrained nature of these issues will require new innovative ways of working to make a difference.

Sticking with Walsall South Area Partnership and new ways of working, this Area Partnership is trail blazing a new problem solving method developed by the Jill Dando Institute, in order to tackle the issue of Street Sex Workers. Within this project Operation Scarlet is a police initiative tackling the illegal sex industry. There is a team of dedicated officers working to stop street prostitution and sexual exploitation. The team work closely with sex workers, to establish what support they need, to help them to leave the industry. Since the operation started earlier this year, approximately 90 people have been confirmed as sex workers in Walsall. Police have issued 197 warnings to sex workers throughout this period.

The **Brownhills, Pelsall, Rushall and Shelfield Area Partnership**, is working with over 50 shopkeepers and local business in Pelsall who have joined forces with Walsall Police and local agencies to create a radio scheme aimed at reducing shop lifting and anti-social behaviour - the Pelsall Village Radio Scheme supplies members of the scheme with walkie talkies to pass on information between themselves about shoplifters and other matters in order to help reduce crime in a cost effective way which is facilitated through the business community themselves.

Area Partnerships are also helping support a vibrant voluntary and community sector with in **Aldridge and Beacon Area Partnership**, the establishment of the Streetly Network which brings together community groups who share resources, ideas and support each others events to raise their organisations profile within the community and make themselves more sustainable. The same theme for promoting a vibrant third sector is also being picked up in **Willenhall and Short Heath Area Partnership** where pilot work is looking to establish a voluntary and community sector hub between third sector organisations who are interested in further sustaining their organisations by maximising their collective skills and abilities in order to potentially bid as consortia for public sector contracts should they be available in the future. In **Darlaston and Bentley Area Partnership** and in **Walsall North Area Partnership** Community Hubs are also being supported at Moxley People's Centre and Ryecroft Neighbourhood Resource Centre which again build on the potential for better outcomes for local people by local agencies working together in a specific geography, sustained by maximising the potential of a network of existing community assets.

Scrap Metal theft in **North Walsall** has continued over the past year to be a focus for this Area Partnership. Campaigning from North Walsall Area Partnership helped support the introduction of cashless transactions into legislation which kicked in on 3rd December, 2012, only permitting scrap metal dealers to receive electronic payment or payment by cheque for scrap metal. West Midlands Police are locally leading on enforcement.

So what for the future? Over the past year a review of Area Partnerships has revisited the commitment Council made on 28th January, 2010 to promote locality working, to have multi-agency plans that focus on the things that matter to local communities, to engage communities more in decision making and in matters such as the allocation of resources/budgets, and to support the model for Area Partnerships through external support. Our own experience and intelligence gained from visits to Stockport, Sheffield and Derby have established Area Partnerships are working, and that through **Area based working and devolution** more can be achieved.

The Area Partnership model continues to be supported by resources from Walsall Housing Group and NHS Walsall to facilitate the provision of Area Managers. The model that is now being consulted on through Scrutiny, Political Groups and within Area Partnerships is considering the introduction of constituted Area Panels, participatory budgeting/resource allocation, Local Area Co-ordinators and further support to the third sector.

To be successful it is clear we need to better engage with our communities to understand their need and to empower them in order to be able to do more for themselves. The Plans that will be going to Cabinet on 24th April, 2013 and then to Council will strengthen our Area Partnership model. The process is clearly one of evolution not revolution.

**Councillor Ian Shires**  
**Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Voluntary Sector**