

3 April, 2014

Devolution through Area Partnerships

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Ian Shires – Community Engagement & Voluntary Sector

Executive Summary:

This report considers the agreed objectives for Area Partnerships, as set out at Council, on 28 January 2010, and provides a progress report on the seven proposals for devolution, as set out in the Cabinet report of 24 April 2013. The views of the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel is sought on the work to date and the further development of Area Partnerships. It is proposed to include Scrutiny feedback as part of a report on this matter scheduled for Cabinet Executive on 30th April, 2014.

Reason for scrutiny:

To feedback on Devolution through Area Partnerships and seek the views of the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel on this matter prior to consideration at Cabinet Executive.

Recommendations:

1. To feedback on progress to date with respect to the programme of work described within this report as “Devolution through Area Partnerships.

Resource and legal considerations:

Each Area Partnership has an allocation of funding to support local activity to deliver against the priorities within the Walsall Plan.

For Participatory Budgeting, the resource remains the responsibility of the service area, however, decisions devolved to a local level will be made against a criteria agreed with the budget holders and relevant Portfolio holders. If the scope for the delegation is wider, then there would need to be robust financial advice, with any increased autonomy, to ensure that decisions did not have wider impact.

The Area Panels form part of the Council’s Constitution, vested with any executive statutory powers delegated to them by the Executive (Cabinet). This means the full

rigour of Local Government Law applies to these Area Panels, including access to information requirements, publishing of agenda, notice of meetings, formal decision making and public records of the same. In addition to the Standards regime and Members Code of Conduct, which also applies to non-elected members.

The relevant legislation is:

- Section 102 (1A) Local Government Act 1972 – power for Council to set up an Area Committee for the purposes of discharging executive functions, delegated by the Executive to the Area Committees
- Section 9E (9(b)) Local Government Act 2000 – Councillor membership of the Area Committee (Area Panel) is to be made up of Councillors for the Wards covered by the Area Committee
- Section 103 Local Government Act 1972 – non-Councillors may sit on the Area Committee
- Section 13 (1) Local Government and Housing Act 1989 – Non-Councillors do not have voting rights
- Section 15 Local Government and Housing Act 1989 – Duty to allocate seats to political groups
- Section 9E Local Government Act 2000 – Delegation of executive functions by the Executive to an Area Committee functions

Area Panels were established at the Cabinet meeting held on 24 April 2013.

Citizen impact:

The Area Partnership model and the “devolution” activities described in this report are designed to support citizen engagement and support improvements in the quality of life experienced by local people.

Environmental impact:

There are no key matters to report, noting that Area Partnerships involve multi-agency activity in order to resolve local issues. These activities include seeking solutions to environmental problems.

Performance management:

The Area Partnership model directly contributes to addressing the priorities within the Walsall Plan:-

- Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- Improving health, including well-being and independence for older people
- Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities – reducing levels of crime and providing the right environment for people to live in
- Improving safeguarding, learning and the life chances for children and young

people, recognising that a person's early years crucially help determine what kind of future they will have.

Equality Implications:


An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be reviewed. It is worth noting that there is continued acknowledgment of two key views on resource allocation – one based on all areas receiving equal resources, the other reflecting there are greater demands in some areas, as opposed to others.

Consultation:

The Area Partnership Chair and Vice Chairs meeting of 24th March, 2014 have been consulted in the preparation of this report.


Contact Officer:

John Leach, Head of Communities & Public Protection

 01922 653702

leachj@walsall.gov.uk

Jo Lowndes, Partnerships Manager

 01922 653703

lowndesj@walsall.gov.uk

1. Report

1.1 The Walsall Plan 2013 – 16, was approved by Council on 8 April 2013, and has four key priorities:

- Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- Improving health, including well-being and independence for older people
- Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities – reducing levels of crime and providing the right environment for people to live in
- Improving safeguarding, learning and the life chances for children and young people, recognising that a person's early years crucially help determine what kind of future they will have.

1.2 Supporting the delivery of the Walsall Plan, there are six Area Partnerships in the Borough, which are supported by multi-agency activity, at a local and strategic level, dealing with issues such as anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping, through to dealing with issues such as health inequalities, support for children and young people and older people.

1.3 Each Area Partnership has an Area Manager, who is responsible for developing an Area Plan, which addresses community issues. The role of Area Partnerships was set out in a report to Council on 28 January 2010:

- Focus on areas that people identify with and that partners can logistically operate in
- Create proper accountability for results, with an Area Manager for each of the six areas
- Produce an Area Plan for each area, which will combine the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy (Walsall Plan 2013 – 16), with other local priorities
- Give people a forum to discuss the utilisation of mainstream budgets in their area
- Increase community engagement – Walsall needs to improve its performance in terms of people believing that they can influence decisions affecting them, in their area
- Adopt a partnership approach, with the partners jointly resourcing the staff team, including some Area Managers being employed by partner organisations
- Recognise the role of Elected Members, as leaders within their communities – Elected Members leading and empowering others to lead through community meetings
- Localise tasking, by convening Area Partner meetings on a monthly basis

1.4 The proposals put forward to Cabinet on 23 April 2013 were informed by Walsall's experience of local area working to date and research in to what worked well in other Local Authorities, including Sheffield, Stockport and Derby. Now operating for a further 12 months, Area Partnerships are in their next stage of evolution, through trialling a number of new initiatives. This programme of work has been described as "Devolution through Area Partnerships."

2.0 Review / Update on Devolution

(A) Devolution of Budgets / Resources and Participatory Budgeting

- 2.1 The principle behind this proposal is to enable local people to be empowered to make certain choices about where resources that relate directly back to service budgets are used. Participatory budgeting/resources have been trialled during 2013/14.
- 2.2 An initiative to devolve a budget of £250,000 for **grass verge parking**, to test the process, has been undertaken, whereby each Area Partnership had an allocation of £41,600. Through Engineering and Transportation, a number of schemes had already been identified across the six areas. Each of these were assessed for viability / costings, as to which could be considered for a participatory exercise. A short list was put forward to each Area Panel for consideration and an exercise was undertaken in each of the short listed areas, for residents to comment on and vote. Voting took place through a variety of methods, including telephone and e-mail. A number of residents took part in the process and six schemes were prioritised. Four are in progress, with the other two to conclude in the next financial year.
- 2.3 **Other PB schemes** have taken place through Willenhall/Short Heath Area Partnership agreeing that £10,000 should be made available for a PB exercise in that locality. This funding was allocated to encourage voluntary and community sector organisations to bid for, against the priorities within the Area Plan and also further data being provided around criteria relating to inequalities. Those who applied for the funding presented their ideas to an Area Panel meeting in early March. These were then posted on-line for people to make comment / support. The projects were approved at the Area Panel meeting held on 20 March. It is anticipated that a further exercise will be undertaken during the next financial year, which will include further community consultation.
- 2.4 In addition to the above a PB approach has also taken place in Walsall South Area Partnership, where a housing provider wanted to work through such an exercise when deciding on how to deliver a scheme that would provide enhanced community benefit following new housing provision being made available. A Participatory Budgeting exercise was undertaken with local schemes being put forward and supported at a specific event.
- 2.5 Learning from all this work will inform any further PB activity. It is proposed this is accommodated within intended trials through Engineering and Transportation and Clean and Green to identify where Area Partnerships are able to have a say on proposed highways schemes and street cleansing.

(B) Greater Alignment of Teams

- 2.6 During 2013/14 there has been progress towards greater alignment of teams against the Area Partnership model. This commenced with the development of a new Walsall Plan which has informed new partnership infrastructure and the development of Area and Thematic delivery plans. The Walsall Plan has also informed the Council's Corporate Plan and a launch event was held on

19 December, 2014 where up to 80 people from a range of organisations heard about progress against the Walsall Plan. Operationally examples of greater team alignment include where both Children Centres and Troubled Families Support Teams have now aligned their service to Area Partnerships.

2.7 It is important to note that in each Area Partnership, there are Confidential and Non-Confidential partner meetings that identify local tasking issues that can be resolved on a partnership basis. Furthermore, there are topic specific groups, for example Walsall South Area Partnership leads on the sex worker project.

2.8 **(C) Strengthening Local Accountability and Support to Scrutiny through Area Partnerships**

2.9 Six Area Panels been established and operational for nearly 12 months. The functions set out in the report to Cabinet in April 2013 were:

- To make decisions on Area Partnership funding, where allocated to an Area Partnership area, by the Council
- To agree Area Partnership Area Plans
- To agree representation to bodies, where an Area Partnership decision-making presence is required
- To agree outcomes of any participatory budgeting / resource exercise (as described above)

2.10 Area Partnerships have nominated representatives to the Local Police and Crime Board, providing information on the work of Area Partnerships relevant to the LPC Board and reporting back to the Area Panel on LPC Board discussions.

2.11 Recently, the Children and Young People's Partnership Board has requested attendance at each of the Area Panels to inform them of the work of the Board and how Area Partnerships can support the delivery of its priorities within the Children and Young People's Plan 2013 – 16. .

2.12 A number of projects have been approved through the Area Panels, that support a range of local service delivery and community organisations, based on the criteria within the Area Plans and the Walsall Plan.

2.13 It is recommended that the above functions of the Area Partnerships continue.

2.14 The option for local co-optees was made available with the introduction of Area Panels. Only Brownhills / Pelsall / Rushall – Sheffield have taken this option, with a number of co-optees being part of the Area Panel for nearly a year.

(D) Community Hubs

2.15 The Community Hubs initiative was established through a report to Cabinet Executive on 25th July, 2012. The objectives are:

- Build capacity to improve services for residents
- Strengthen the sustainability of local community organisations and their ability to build Council objectives
- Reduce dependency on public services, by supporting self-sufficiency and independent living

2.16 A report was presented to Cabinet on 19 March 2014, setting out the learning from each of the areas – Moxley and Ryecroft. Both are different in their approach – Moxley is using a multi-agency approach to developing the, whereas Ryecroft is being led by the Neighbourhood Resource Centre, whilst drawing in partners to operate for there.

2.17 Funding for the Project Manager post has been extended for a further 12 months.

Moxley

2.18 Year 2 of projects are now being commissioned. There has been excellent success in terms of the job club operating from Moxley People's Centre, with some local residents securing employment.

Ryecroft

2.19 Recently moved to the Dartmouth Centre – taking on both the Centre and the Youth Club. Facilities at the Youth Club have been improved, with the Club now being open for 30 hours a week. The Dartmouth Centre is being refurbished. A number of partners have already committed to operating a service from there.

(E) Local Area Co-Ordinators

2.20 Originally developed in Western Australia in 1988 to build individual, family and community self-sufficiency. It has a strong person-centred value base and works alongside individuals and families in communities. To support them to become more able to engage with civil society. By enabling people to become more independent, they will be less reliant on public services.

2.21 Two learning zones were identified, using a range of data – the areas chosen were Darlaston North and Bentley and the Brownhills Wards.

2.22 We are currently in the process of recruiting to two posts, with interviews due to be held in early April, which will be held within the community and involve local residents.

2.23 This initiative will be for a 12 month period, with an evaluation being undertaken to assess impact.

- 2.24 An action plan and framework have been developed, along with a Leadership Group to ensure that the project remains on track, meets its objectives and provides support to the two posts.
- 2.25 A peer network also provides support, from other Local Authorities who either already have Local Area Co-Ordinators or are in the process of establishing them.

(F) Work to Enhance the Role of Voluntary and Community Sector

- 2.26 A recent review of the voluntary and community sector within Walsall has been undertaken. The recommendations are:
- Devolution Strategy – Support cross-sector collaboration, by providing continuous updates / feedback to the sector on progress with the new devolution strategy; Harness the sector's involvement and commitment in key activities, eg, Area Panels, Area Plans, Community Hubs; Use the central structure to disseminate key messages and facilitate engagement in the delivery of devolution; Carry out some easily evaluation of the pilot work being undertaken to support the this area of work, to support local activities and enhance the role of the sector
 - Financial Information – Review the design of management information systems, to ensure they are 'fit for purpose' and enabling access to accurate information; Review the range and suitability of management information data and sources available to support external funding bids
 - Staffing – Carry out an audit of actual and 'in kind' staffing resource to the sector, in order to analyse what support exists and how this can be strengthened or re-aligned; Review the roles and job descriptions of the existing Voluntary Sector Support Officers, to ensure they are more enabling and facilitative; Provide training to the Voluntary Sector Support Officers, with regard to an appropriate model for capturing social value
 - Strategic Approach to Commissioning – Revise the commissioning cycle (and accompanying documentation) and ensure a whole Council approach is employed by each Directorate when providing grants to and engaging services with the sector; Introduce a threshold of £30,000 – after which, a formal tendering process needs to be enacted; Re-write the current grant form, aligning it more clearly to Council objectives; Use the expertise of the Joint Commissioning Unit / Procurement teams to train commissioners and the sector in any new approach to commissioning, looking at specific training modules, to provide business support to existing organisations and small to medium enterprises
 - Supporting a Lead Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation – Review current funding arrangements with Walsall Voluntary Action, taking in to account the case studies from neighbouring Boroughs; Identify an appropriate level of core funding over a three year period,

which will enable the necessary financial stability to attract in external funding; Commission appropriate activity in line with the recommendations of this report, especially with regard to access to external funding, developing volunteerism and facilitating local community engagement

- Volunteerism – Develop a Volunteer’s Charter to encourage greater volunteerism and civic participation; Draw on the expertise (eg, Adult Services) and external (eg, Walsall Voluntary Action), to draw up a the Charter and roll this out; Adopt a social value methodology that can begin to capture the level of volunteering across the Borough, in order to measure future growth
- New Ways of Working – Host an interactive event between all statutory partners and the sector in Walsall to draw up a Walsall Compact; The Compact to agree shared principles and values to promote the key themes of better working, relationships, engaging the sector in service delivery, encouraging volunteerism and civic participation; Hold a ‘signing event’ with partners
- Development Frameworks – Map current sector activity via a short questionnaire to groups; Develop internal conversations about what additional services could be provided by the sector in Walsall, that is currently delivered via the public sector, identify areas of collaboration, etc; Five development frameworks were provided and these should be used as tools to self assess the current situation and progress, in order to better understand the value of interventions and activities, track return on investment and ensure activities are aligned to key plans and objectives

2.27 A report was presented to Cabinet on 19 March 2014, which identified additional funding support to Walsall Voluntary Action, to enable the organisation to increase its capacity and provide additional support to the sector.

2.28 In addition to the above, Voluntary and Community Sector networks have been developed for example, within the Aldridge and Beacon Area Partnership, a series of networking groups have been established on a Ward basis. These meet and a virtual network has also been established to provide information and support. A range of communications is being used to promote the services / activities offered by these groups, with initial feedback that the groups have seen an increase in take up.

2.29 Finally on this area, working with Public Health colleagues, Area Partnerships are undertaking a community assets based approach to resolving local health issues. Each Area Partnership has established health profiles and has developed an action plan to tackle the “wicked health issues” in localities. For example in Walsall South diabetes is being targeted.

(G) Support for Attracting Funding for Key Local Initiatives

- 2.30 Since the appointment was made in April 2013, the Strategic Resource Officer (SRO), Alex Boys, has worked directly with over 60 voluntary and community organisations (VCSOs), providing support to increase access to external funding and ensure ongoing sustainability. Support has included drafting development plans for existing organisations and business plans for new ventures, providing advice to inform effective project evaluation and identify impact, and support to identify and bid for external funding.
- 2.31 To date, the SRO has supported VCSOs and Council Service areas to secure over £675,000 in external funding. Applications for a further total of £2.4m are currently in development or awaiting decision from funders. Key successes include support to Steps to Work to secure over £450,000 for the Bloxwich shop, and securing £100,000 from Cabinet Office to support investigation of an independent Walsall and Adult Community College.
- 2.32 Alongside direct support Alex has:
- Worked collaboratively with Area Managers, funders, internal and external networks to deliver external funding and project planning workshops.
 - Worked with colleagues across the Black Country to establish a forum for VCS and statutory funding practitioners and funding organisations to communicate on a sub-regional basis.
 - Supported sub-regional efforts to developing the £30 million social inclusion strand of the European Investment Strategy.
 - Worked with cross-service teams to develop internal projects in preparation for external funding.
- 2.33 In accordance with the expectations of the role, Alex has attempted to focus support on established organisations looking to increase sustainability through larger funding streams (£50,000 and above) over multiple years, where their services are aligned to delivering the priorities of the Walsall Plan.
- 2.34 Whilst good progress has been made, Alex has identified some external challenges that should be addressed in order to further increase positive outcomes from the role:
- **Reduced focus on community sector/small grants** – The role of Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) in supporting small grants could be strengthened through additional and designated resource for a small grants officer. This would remove the time-consuming but less impactful aspect of supporting modest community groups with small grants, and help the SRO focus on the more strategic outcomes delivered by the larger voluntary sector. A specified WVA Grants Officer post would also provide additional support required to deliver a Borough-wide funding event.
 - **Clearer priorities** – Greater internal clarity on the priorities of role would support a sharper focus on the most pertinent groups/funding opportunities.

At present it is not clear what priority is should be given to external groups requesting support, leading to a 'first-come-first-served' provision with less strategic impact.

- **Greater collaboration between the SRO and Economic Regeneration's External Funding Team** – there are clear links to be exploited in order to further enhance Walsall's external funding success but attempts to capitalise on these have been unsuccessful to date.

Background papers

The Walsall Plan 2013 -16

Walsall Council support to the Voluntary & Community Sector by Chris Allen & Bernie Wilde.