

22nd April, 2013

Devolution through Area Partnerships

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Ian Shires Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and the Voluntary Sector

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on feedback provided on the seven proposals for devolution as outline to the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 14th February, 2013. It provides a further opportunity for Members to comment on the proposals prior to the Cabinet Executive on 24th April, 2013.

Reason for scrutiny:

To respond to the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panels request to further feedback on the seven proposals for devolution through Area Partnerships following consultation with the political groups.

Recommendations:

That the Scrutiny and Performance Panel note the update provided and provide their final comments prior to Cabinet on 24th April, 2013.

Background papers:

"Area Partnerships: A developing Model for Neighbourhood Management." report to Full Council on 28th January, 2010

Resource and legal considerations:

The proposals seek to further develop an Area Partnership approach to locality working. Resource and legal considerations were previously noted within the proposals. This report provides further information on strengthening local accountability through Area Panels as constituted committees of the Council.

Citizen impact:

The proposals within this report seek to build on the success of Area Partnerships through "devolution", thereby enabling communities and the citizen to have a greater say/role in the decisions and services that impact on their lives.

Environmental impact:

There is no environmental impact to be drawn to Scrutiny's attention.

Performance management:

This report seeks Scrutiny's view on proposals for "devolution" which seek to improve the Council and partners work with citizens, leading to better outcomes for local people/local communities.

Equality Implications:


An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out. It is worth noting there is acknowledgement that there are two key views on resource allocation one based on all areas receiving equal portions, the other reflecting there are greater demands in some areas as opposed to others.

Consultation:

Consultation work has taken place through the Area Partnership Chair and Vice Chairs meeting of 22nd January, 2013, the Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 14th February, 2013, the Area Managers in discussion with their Area Partnerships and the political groups. The Scrutiny meeting of 22nd April, 2013 has been arranged to provide an update and as an opportunity to gather any final feedback before Cabinet on 24th April, 2013.

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1. Report /Matters for Consideration

1.1 The Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 14th February, 2013 were previously consulted on seven proposals for devolution through Area Partnerships. The proposals covered were:-

- (a) Devolved Budgets/Resources and Participatory Budgeting
- (b) Greater Alignment of Teams
- (c) Strengthening Local Accountability and support to Scrutiny through Area Partnerships
- (d) Community Hubs (Please note this proposal is already progressing following Cabinet's decision of 25 July, 2012).
- (e) Local Area Co-ordinators
- (f) Pilot work to enhance the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector
- (g) Support for attracting funding for key local initiatives

1.2 The proposals have been developed to further develop Area Partnerships in line with the Council's agreed objectives of 28th January, 2013:-

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

1.3 Since Scrutiny previously considered this matter in the report of 14th February, 2013, proposal c which considered strengthening local accountability has been further developed through the concept of Area Panels, described below:-

Area Panels/Committees

1.4 It is intended that by putting "devolution" into practice, as illustrated by proposal (a) (Devolved Budgets/Resources and Participatory Budgeting), that local accountability will be strengthened. However, under the current Area Partnership model such decisions would require ratification at Cabinet. This effectively may be seen as undermining the purpose of the proposals. It is therefore proposed that Area Panels that would have the functions of a constituted Committee, whose

membership would be the elected Members from the wards that make up that Area Partnership Area, be established based on the six Area Partnership areas. Effectively, it is suggested that Area Partnership Community Meetings become such Area Panels.

- 1.5 Full Council has the power to set up Area Committees (referred to as Area Panels in this report), that comprise of those elected members for the wards covered by the Area Committee and such non voting non elected members as Full Council decides. Cabinet has the power to delegate to those Area Committees (Area Panels) such powers as they wish as long as they are Cabinet Executive Functions, and are within budget and policy of the Council. Further Area Committees cannot have a scrutiny role that in any way replicates the statutory Scrutiny Function but can of course refer any issues as appropriate, to any Scrutiny Committee for review.
- 1.6 The Executive (Cabinet) has authority to delegate any of its powers to Area Panels which are area committees (along with subcommittees of those committees) established to discharge executive functions in respect of part of an area of the authority.
- 1.7 At this point in time the functions suggested to be carried out by Area Panels are:-
 - To make decisions on Area Partnership funding where allocated to an Area Partnership area, by the Council. This would be a change from the current arrangements where Area Managers have the authority to make such funding decisions.
 - To agree Area Partnership Area Plans.
 - To agree representation to bodies where an Area Partnership decision making presence is required. For example, the emerging new format for the Borough's Community Safety Partnership which is developing into becoming a Local Police & Crime Board.
 - To agree the outcomes of any participatory budgeting/resource exercise as described through proposal (a) of this report.
- 1.8 It is proposed that the above functions will be reviewed after twelve months which will also be the first term for Area Panels, proposed to commence in the new municipal year. A recommendation to Full Council from the Cabinet, to create the Area Panels (Area Committees) as discussed in this report will be required to seek an amendment to the constitution accordingly.
- 1.9 In addition to the above it is also suggested that such Area Panels would not be Scrutiny Committees of the Council but they could support the Scrutiny function by providing comments/feedback to Scrutiny and Cabinet on service delivery within localities. This would assist local people in their ability to influence improvements in services.
- 1.10 The proposed model would therefore be as follows:-
 - a) The establishment of Area Panels covering each of the six Area Partnerships. The membership of which would consist of the Elected Members of the wards contained within the Area Partnership area. Chairing arrangements would be agreed through appointment at Annual

Council or in the first year of their being, the most suitable Council following that meeting.

- b) The Panels would have the ability to make decisions as described in section 1.7 of this report.
- c) Area Panel meetings are proposed to be every eight weeks at which members of the public can attend.
- d) Separate to the above there will be Partnership Tasking Meetings for officers of the different agencies involved in the Area Partnership to deal with operational matters in accordance with the Area Plan as agreed by Members.
- e) In addition to the above there will be timetabled meetings/events to enable progress against specific matters in support of the proposals contained within this report. For example the proposals relating to Participatory Budgeting/Resources at which members of the public will be encouraged to be involved in.

Feedback

1.11 Feedback from consultation through the Area Partnership Chair and Vice Chairs meeting of 22nd January, 2013, the Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 14th February, 2013, the Area Managers in discussion with their Area Partnerships and the political groups include the following points:-

- a) In order for Area Community Meetings to make certain decisions they would need to become Council Committees.
- b) Wider and more inclusive engagement of the public would be required to gain the views of local people. This would require the design of events to encourage local people to get involved.
- c) Links to local democracy and local decision making are positive.
- d) The community may be reluctant to get involved in decision making due to the consequences of those spending decisions and the communities priorities may be different to those of Street Pride or Highways especially if criteria for spend is tight.
- e) Details of the services provided are needed by the public. For example, for Street Pride how often is the grass cut, how often are pathways maintained etc?
- f) If devolution is going to support capacity building then services provided by the local voluntary sector central infrastructure organisation will need to assist.
- g) There was some concern around duplication through the role of Local Area Co-ordinators and costs at a time of reducing budgets. They would need to add value alongside other initiatives and they should not be in conflict with the role of Area Managers.
- h) It was noted that often Area Partnership boundaries and work routes, for example litter picking, were not co-terminus and in the devolved budgets/resources proposal new arrangements would need to be considered as appropriate.

- i) The appointment of a Grants Officer to assist local voluntary and community sector groups apply for external funding was welcomed.
- j) There was a request for greater consultation on the proposals and to channel this through each political group as requested by the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.
- k) Equality of resources/funding and the size of Area Partnership areas has been raised as an issue for consideration as the proposals for devolution further progress. The difference between areas is a characteristic of Walsall and this is suggested as a factor to be considered where there is an approach that ensures each area receives the same. This needs to be considered within the context of "Proportionate Universalism" (Marmot Review) and how this will be used to help tackle inequalities.
- l) The locations where the Community Hubs initiative is being progressed provide a wider community assets base than focussing on individual buildings.
- m) Elected Members would like a greater say on Area Partnership funding decisions.
- n) The opinions of the community will need to be listened to by Members on the Area Panels to show empowerment in practice.
- o) Area Partnership meetings need to meet sufficiently to progress matters. It has been reflected that further meetings may be required?

Progress to Cabinet

- 1.12 Members final views prior to consideration at Cabinet on 24th April, 2013 are sought through this report.