

Cabinet – 25 July 2012

Strengthening Community-Based Services

Portfolio: Councillor Shires, Community Engagement and Voluntary Sector

Related portfolios: All

Service: Communities and Partnerships

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1 Summary of report

The report sets out proposals for strengthening the role and contribution of community based organisations to deliver council objectives. This will involve greater devolution of responsibilities and resources to community organisations, including greater use of existing community assets, in order to deliver services which better meet the needs of local communities.

The report sets out a proposed model of community hubs - community-based organisations delivering a variety of service through local venues. The council will invest in these where they can evidence demonstrable impact on local residents. This will encourage self sufficient, independent living thereby reducing reliance on council services and longer term costs. The objectives of the community hubs are that they will:

- build capacity in local communities to improve services for residents
- strengthen the sustainability of local community organisations and their ability to deliver council objectives
- reduce dependency on public services by supporting self sufficiency and independent living.

In order to develop the model further the report proposes initial pilot work with the Moxley Peoples' Centre and the Ryecroft Neighbourhood Resource Centre (NRC). There will be further report back to the cabinet on the learning from this pilot work and how it will inform the roll out of the policy across the borough.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet approves the principles of community hubs and the process for supporting these as set out in section 3 of the report
- 2.2 A pilot project is undertaken with the Moxley Peoples' Centre and Ryecroft Neighbourhood Resource Centre (NRC), to develop the concept and to inform a report back to cabinet after the results have been evaluated.

3 Report Detail

3.1 Context

Walsall Council faces a number of key challenges to deliver services that provide public value - matching the needs, aspirations and priorities of local communities. These challenges include:

- substantial reduction in financial resources for the foreseeable future requiring major changes to how the council operates
- the need to improve the life chances of residents and to help overcome the inequalities that exist in and between different areas of the borough
- the need to redesign council services around the needs of customers and to take out wasteful activity that does not contribute towards this.

There is a potentially major role for community organisations to play a much more prominent part in addressing this agenda. National and local evidence suggests that community organisations can demonstrate a number of strengths over state organisations. For example they can be:

- more adaptable and flexible
- more effective and locally credible in engaging local people
- more efficient and entrepreneurial in their use of resources
- more understanding of, and therefore more responsive to local community needs.

3.2 Community Organisations in Walsall

Walsall has a rich history of community organisations reflecting the diversity of the borough including community associations, residents groups, charities and other voluntary groups, faith-based organisations and many others. The council interacts with this sector in a wide variety of ways including:

- commissioner of services
- provider of premises
- partner in service delivery
- involvement in area partnership
- consultee
- provider of grant and/or other resources.

We know through the Working Smarter programme that the life chances of residents are fundamentally determined by their ability to lead independent and healthy lives, to get into and stay in paid employment and to access the skills and knowledge to enable them to achieve these goals. It follows that the aim of the council should be to maximise these opportunities, thereby reducing future dependence on state services such as health and adult social care.

Many of these organisations are already engaged in working with the council and providing important and valuable services to their local communities. Many of them also face a difficult and uncertain future as reliance on public sector financial support becomes less feasible.

3.3 *The Concept of a Community Hub*

Against this background there is the opportunity to develop a coherent model of support to the sector. This envisages a network of community organisations, operating from multi-purpose facilities and providing a range of services to the local community using a single building or a cluster of community based facilities. The community organisations would provide multi-agency, multi-service facilities, providing opportunities for youth services, space for adult social care, health and family support services, adult learning, advice and facilities for sport and physical activity– in short the type and range of services required to help people lead self sufficient and independent lives, thereby avoiding future costly support from the local authority, NHS or other part of the state sector.

There are a number of community organisations which are already active in the above ways (The Collingwood Centre is a good example of a multi service operation which is having an increasing local impact). The difference between this vision and the current situation is largely one of scale - but it is a significant gap. The local authority is not, and will not be in a position in the future, to provide general financial support to many community organisations in the hope that they will grow and thrive and play a larger part in service delivery. There needs to be a process to provide the local authority with reassurance that scarce resources will only be invested in strong and effective community organisations with the leadership and capacity to make a significant difference to life chances of local residents.

3.4 *Process for Developing Community Hubs*

To achieve this, the following process is proposed:

1. the council (and other partner organisations) would need to assess the type of services and activities which, if offered at local community scale, would have maximum impact on achieving significant change to key outcomes
2. community organisations wishing to become a community hub carry out a scoping exercise to review what change they would need to make to their activities and services to make substantial impact on outcomes for residents
3. a detailed business case is prepared by the community organisation setting out the investment needed, and the voluntary effort available, to achieve this substantial and measurable change
4. the business case should reflect the priorities of the local area plan

5. the council decides what, if any level of investment is merited on the basis of the business case
6. the council and the community organisations enter a contract specifying the service provision and level of grant and the arrangements for measuring and evaluating impact.

3.5 *Criteria for Assessing Business Cases*

The criteria which the council would use to evaluate business cases from community organisations would need to be developed in consultation with the sector but is likely to include:

- the provision of activities and facilities which will make a demonstrable impact on improving self sufficiency and independent living
- the provision of activities and services that are likely to reduce future demand on council (and other public sector) resources
- equitable access to services, making use of a range of local assets rather than over-reliance on one venue
- strong engagement of local people in the organisation including increased volunteer activity
- the acumen to identify and access a range of financial resources thereby reducing reliance on council funding
- active engagement of the community organisation with the area partnership and contribution towards the aims and objectives in the area plan
- an enterprising and entrepreneurial approach to business development
- the opportunity to transfer assets into community ownership
- the ability to support the transformation of public services
- the potential for placing council services within community organisations where this is justified on grounds of improving customer service or greater efficiency.

The council would also be seeking to ensure that community organisations understood the objectives set out in the Marmot review into Health Inequalities as these will in future be underpinning the work of the council through, for example. Its corporate plan and area plans for the six area partnerships (see report elsewhere on this Cabinet agenda). Community organisations will be expected to set out in their business case how they could contribute to achieving these goals.

3.6 *Pilot Work*

This is a major change agenda for the local authority (and for community organisations) which cannot be achieved overnight. Moreover it is also recognised, through the application of Working Smarter principles, that piloting or testing new approaches can also help support improvement work across the whole system.

It is therefore proposed to conduct pilot work with two community organisation to develop the model outlined and provide the learning necessary to inform a wider roll-out. It is important to choose suitable organisations which offer some

contrast in approach, whilst recognising such a choice would not preclude activity elsewhere at a later point in time. Council has already resolved at its meeting on 9 July that the Ryecroft (NRC) be included as a pilot centre for this work. In addition the Moxley Peoples Centre have also volunteered to work with the council as part of an initial pilot to develop a business case that supports their work, not only in the Centre itself but also potentially out in the wider Moxley community. Both centres offer a range of activities and services for local people and are considered by officers to offer a suitable pilot sites. Both premises are owned by the council but whereas Moxley People's Centre receives grant for community development and premises management costs, the Ryecroft Centre is financially independent of the council.

Officers would work with both management committees to develop a sustainable business model that could be replicated elsewhere across Walsall, and as appropriate within other centres/community organisations. To do this quickly and effectively, additional resources would be needed to provide:

- business advice to help the community groups prepare a business case
- community development resource to help map community assets in the area and to work with local community to develop project proposals
- advice on external funding to supplement any council resource to help ensure sustainability.

The initial step would be to identify a project manager to co-ordinate the project and to work closely with local council members. The manager will need to produce timelines, in consultation with the management committees. It will also be necessary at an early stage to identify the measures that will be used to evaluate effectiveness and ensure processes are in place to capture this information. It is proposed that the pilot would run for six months after which there would be a report back to cabinet on the learning achieved and the implications of the community hub model for the wider borough.

4 Council Priorities

The proposed approach offers the potential to make a major contribution towards each of the council's priorities of:

- **Communities and Neighbourhoods** – community hubs are local models run by local people. This will provide greater access and responsiveness to the needs and requirements of local communities.
- **The Economy** – community venues could offer more advice, learning opportunities and other facilities to help individuals find and keep employment.
- **Health and Wellbeing** – the community hubs will be expected to provide services and activities that will assist residents lead more self sufficient and independent lives. Crucially this will require greater emphasis on health and wellbeing to avoid alternative and costly demands on the health and social care systems.

5 Risk Management

A risk assessment of proposed activity through the suggested pilot work will be required.

6 Financial

There would be an additional cost of providing a resource to help each of the community organisations with developing the business case (analysis, community development work, preparation of business plan, support on fund raising, project evaluation and reporting). There would also need to be some funds set aside for project costs (venue hire, consultation etc). It is estimated that these can all be contained within £50,000 which can be accommodated by aligning existing resources.

It is anticipated that the work highlighted through this report will ultimately generate efficiency savings but it is not possible at this stage, until the pilot work has been completed, to estimate what the level might be. It would be appropriate to review the suggested activity through the Council's Annual Budgeting Setting Process.

A number of areas in the Borough (including the Darlaston South ward, of which Moxley is a part, and Blakenall ward, of which Ryecroft is a part) are currently benefiting from Community First, government funding for voluntary and community activity in deprived areas. This work in each ward is being co-ordinated by a local panel which has been established by the local area partnership and which comprises local councillors among others. It would be the intention to ensure that this work is co-ordinated with the pilot project in community hubs.

7 Legal

None arising from this report.

8 Property Implications

Many of the community organisations that the council could support through this process, including the Moxley Peoples' Resource Centre and Ryecroft NRC, occupy buildings that area owned by the council. Few of these have leases with the council and one of the aims of this initiative would be to ensure that the occupancy of community organisations was properly regularised. This could be by the adoption of formal leases (as is the case recently with the Willenhall CHART). This would have the benefit of enabling the community group to apply for other external funding for which the absence of a long term lease can often be a barrier.

An alternative model would involve the transfer of the building to community ownership. The council has been exploring the possibility of community asset transfer and community enterprise for some while. However organisations using council owned community buildings are often reluctant to take on maintenance responsibilities, even when the condition of the building has been improved. The potential for asset transfer could be one of the criteria used to assess business cases as set out in paragraph 3.5 above.

9 Staffing Implications

There are no key matters at this stage relating to human resources. However, this work may later inform future decisions on the delivery of services with potential implications for employees.

10 Equalities Implications

An impact assessment has not been carried out as yet on the concept of community hubs. This will be done as part of the evaluation of the pilot work in Moxley and Ryecroft and used to inform cabinet about the potential roll-out to other areas of the Borough.

The proposed approach is for locally responsive and resident-driven organisations to take the lead in developing local services. Typically these organisations will be better placed to engage traditionally hard to reach groups such as minority ethnic communities, faith based communities, disabled groups and individuals, young people and people on low incomes.

11 Consultation

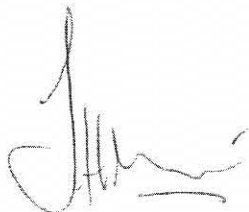
The development of the pilot will involve substantial consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including the local community, customers of council services, service providers, partner organisations and potential funders.

Consultation on this current report has been carried out within relevant council services, the three local ward members in Darlaston South Ward and the management of the Moxley Peoples' Centre.

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