

25, NOVEMBER 2010

Engagement and Utilisation of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Z. Ali (Communities and Partnerships)
Councillor C. Towe (Finance & Personnel)

Executive Summary:

The purpose of the report is to advise the panel on progress with the creation of The Big Society, the possibility of transferring assets into community ownership, the use of volunteers to add value to mainstream work and National Indicator 7 (NI7 – Environment for a Thriving Third Sector) data.

Reason for scrutiny:

This report is for information only.

This report has been requested by Councillor Harrison as Chair and behalf of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel. The matters considered by this paper are directly relevant to the purpose of the panel.

Recommendations:

The panel is requested to note the report.

Background papers:

All separate reports and documents referred to are attached.

Resource and legal considerations:

Delivering The Big Society will mean an unprecedented shift of resources and this will fundamentally and radically change people, money, time and partnership issues.

If blockings to the transfer of assets to communities could be overcome, this could result in less ongoing to the council, greater potential to draw in external funding and more sustainable community organisations.

Citizen impact:

A flourishing voluntary and community sector and transfer of assets into community ownership are likely to have a positive impact on the community.

Environmental impact:

A flourishing voluntary and community sector and transfer of assets into community ownership are likely to have a positive impact on the community.

Performance management:

The Scrutiny exercise is likely to enhance the council's performance on the issues targeted by highlighting them and providing a clear focus on progress. In some cases, particularly the transfer of community assets, progress has stagnated.

Equality Implications:

No equalities impact assessment has been carried out as the report is an update on progress only.

Consultation:

The following have been consulted:

- Carol Mason, Community Development Manager
- Councillor Chris Towe
- Paul Milmore, Working Smarter Director

Contact Officer:

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1 Purpose

The Chair of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel Councillor Harrison has requested this report to advise the panel on:

- 1.1 Creation of The Big Society
- 1.2 Community ownership / management
- 1.3 The use of volunteers to add value to mainstream work
- 1.4 NI7 data

2 The Big Society

- 2.1 Creating The Big Society is the vision of our government. There are three key pillars of The Big Society:
 - 2.1.1 Freedom – from bureaucracy and government intervention
 - 2.1.2 Fairness – making the system fair for everyone
 - 2.1.3 Responsibility – being responsible for ourselves and for others
- 2.2 A number of national policy changes have already been made that provide examples of how government is shaping the future based on the above pillars:
 - 2.2.1 Freedom – A number of quango agencies, including regional government, have been abolished. Planning systems will be referred so that local people can decide on development.
 - 2.2.2 Fairness – The welfare system has been reformed so that it pays to work. Limits are to be applied to housing benefit.
 - 2.2.3 Responsibility – The principle of ‘no rights without responsibility’ is being applied in welfare reform. Those not taking available jobs will lose benefit.
- 2.3 The underlying thinking behind The Big Society is that the State has got too big and needs to be reduced. A balance needs to be re-established between Liberty (individual), Equality (State) and Fraternity (social relationships). Fraternity now needs to be bolstered. To achieve this, there is a bigger role to be played by voluntary organisations, social enterprises and charities. These are now known as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).
- 2.4 In Walsall there are many existing examples which could be described as delivering The Big Society and so the concept is not entirely new. However, it is clear that there is an opportunity to strengthen and develop voluntary organisations and other initiatives. In the future, there should be

an increasing number of former council services delivered by CSOs or social enterprises.

2.5 In Walsall there are several examples of an appropriate direction of travel being developed to deliver The Big Society:

2.5.1 Parks could be run locally

2.5.2 The meals for Meals on Wheels could be prepared locally

2.5.3 Volunteers could be used to operate local libraries

3 Community Ownership / Management

3.1 The last government provided some encouragement to transfer assets, particularly property, into community ownership.

3.2 So far in Walsall, the CSOs approached have been reluctant to take ownership of the council buildings they occupy. A significant factor in this is the condition of these buildings and the organisations concerned not wanting to become responsible for what they may perceive to be the council's liability.

3.3 The cost of conditions surveys has also been prohibitive. So far three conditions surveys have been undertaken as follows:

3.3.1 Old Hall People's Partnership (People's Community Centre, Wing Close), cost of works established from the Property Condition Survey 2009-13 to be £7,915.40

3.3.2 Bentley Youth and Community Centre, Wilkes Avenue, cost of works established from the Property Condition Survey 2009-13 to be £115,178.74

3.3.3 Brownhills Community Association (Brownhills Activity Centre), cost of works established from the Property Condition Survey 2009-13 to be £335,926.08

3.4 Where conditions surveys have been undertaken, significant costs to remediate buildings have been identified. This has proved to be a further barrier to the transfer of buildings from the council into community ownership as there has been insufficient capital budget to enable works required to be carried out.

4 The Use of Volunteers to Add Value to Mainstream Work

4.1 The Big Society promotes volunteering and individuals becoming involved through the 'responsibility' pillar. (See 2.1.3)

4.1.1 Until now, most volunteering has occurred in the voluntary sector rather than in public services. Part of the reason for this is that it is assumed that most people volunteering are willing to offer their time

and effort to a worthwhile cause, whereas they expect the council to deliver public services. This perception is largely untested, but there have been recent cases where the council has offered individuals work experience, with mutual benefit both to the council and those taking up these opportunities. In the future, there could be opportunities to develop volunteering further by including volunteers in mainstream services or outsourcing services or parts of services to volunteers. As described above, one example of such a development is the potential use of volunteers within the library service. (See 2.5.3)

5 Working Smarter

- 5.1 Councillors will be aware of the Working Smarter programme, which will change the way in which the council does business. (Appendix 1)
- 5.2 All of the workstreams of Working Smarter have potential to deliver the agenda described above. Some key issues include:
 - 5.2.1 The extent to which the council will outsource as an outcome of its system and service redesigns, including the extent to which volunteering is built into future delivery.
 - 5.2.2 The extent to which the community ownership of buildings has been factored into the Asset Management 2010 workstream.
 - 5.2.3 The extent to which Area Partnerships will engage local people, enabling them to take responsibility to solve problems in their locality.

6 NI7 Data

- 6.1 NI7 – environment for a thriving third sector – measures the contribution that local government and its partners make to help independent third sector organisations operate successfully. In Walsall an indication of the importance of this indicator can be gauged by the fact that it was included in the last Local Area Agreement.
- 6.2 Data for NI7 was first collected in 2008 by a nationally administered survey of third sector organisations through the question ‘how do the local statutory bodies influence your organisation’s success?’ 16.8% of Walsall’s organisations rated the influence of the statutory positively which was slightly better than the national average.
- 6.3 The survey, now renamed the national survey of charities and social enterprises, has recently been re-run and results are due to be published early in 2011.

Author

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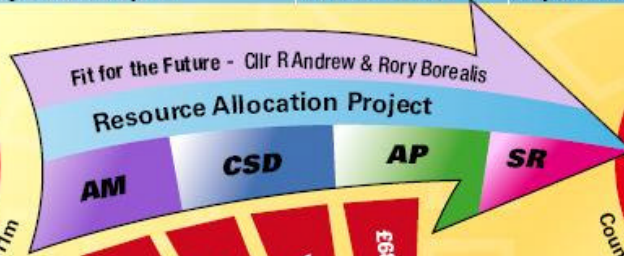
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Working Smarter Programme

Councillor Bird & Paul Sheehan – Executive Owners

Asset Management 2010	AM	Reduce property portfolio and costs	Cllr A Andrew	Tim Johnson
Council System Design	CSD	New ways of working and operating	Cllr McCracken / Cllr Arif	Pauline Pilkington
Area Partnerships	AP	Locality focus and flexible service delivery	Cllr Ali	Jamie Morris
Service Re-Design	SR	Lower costs and improve customer service	Cllr Ansell / Cllr Harris	Paul Davies
Resource Allocation Project	RAP	Set budget over next 5 years	Cllr Bird / Cllr Towe	Rory Borealis



Walsall Council Purpose

Maintain and improve the physical and economic environment for the health and wellbeing of all our residents within financial constraints. Operate efficiently and collaboratively within a one council model and with partners to ensure value for money for tax payers and other funders.

Working Smarter Objectives

- (1) Take out waste and spend less
- (2) Improve customer service
- (3) Change the way we do our business

Working Smarter Principles

- (1) Right first time
- (2) Devolved problem solving
- (3) Accountability for your actions
- (4) Take personal responsibility
- (5) Control exercised at the lowest possible level
- (6) Unity of purpose – one council
- (7) We only exist to serve residents
- (8) Innovate to improve
- (9) Mutual trust and integrity



August 2010