

Information Briefing

Report from: Chris Jordan
Report to: Housing & Neighbourhoods O & S
Committee

Date: 24.10.19

Update on Local Neighbourhoods

1. Background

- The Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods Policy Statement (attached as an appendix) was passed by Cabinet in January 2019. It outlines our commitments to neighbourhoods and the policies we will take forward to improve neighbourhood working more generally and to help those areas that are interested in creating new neighbourhood organisations or parish councils.
- This Policy Statement develops further the Localism in Birmingham: A Framework for Future Policy of March 2018 which set out the framework and principles of our localism work based on the work of the Assistant Leaders.
- The Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods Policy Statement sets out a range of commitments and objectives. Progress against key objectives is reported below.
- The work on these objectives continues to be supported by the Community Governance Cross Party Working Group (CPWG) which meets every other month. The focus of the Group is now to:
 - Monitor the progress of actions included in the White Paper
 - Act as a review body for neighbourhood governance proposals
 - Provide capacity to address obstacles and newly emerging issues.

2. An update on progress on implementation of Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods White Paper

Communicate the new approach to working with neighbourhoods

The 'working together' approach continues to be actively communicated. After the initial consultation events and feedback, and the subsequent adoption of the policy all of the reports and background information has been included on the Council's website. More recently there has been 'localisation week' and the celebration event on the 25th September. The event was attended by 80+ groups who engaged in a Q&A session with the Cabinet Member, Pioneer Places and the Big Lottery and participated in various workshops, including those on good practice, influencing decisions and parish councils.

Identify Pioneer Places

A call for Nominations and Proposal Forms were distributed citywide in May 2019 to both community organisations and local councillors with groups asked to show evidence in 4 main areas

- Current practice in neighbourhood working
- Inclusive and Co-produced good practice
- Examples of how there has been an attempt to do things differently to make a better place to live
- Completed Ward Plan and Priorities 2018-22 (pre-requisite if proposal from ward councillor)

There were 18 submissions with 10 finally chosen in the first tranche by the Community Governance Cross Party Working Group in July 2019

The successful 10 are:-

- Balsall Heath Strategic Partnership (Community Nominaton)
- Birchfield Big Local Partnership(Community Nomination)
- Glebe Farm and Tile Cross Ward (Member Nomination)
- Moseley Regeneration Group (Community Nomination)
- North Edgbaston Coalition (Community Nomination)
- Northfield Stakeholders Group (Community Nomination)
- Perry Barr – 3Bs (Member Nomination)
- Stirchley Ward (Member Nomination)
- Sutton Vesey Ward (Member Nomination)
- Pioneer Group (Community Nomination)

The 10 chosen cover all parts of the City and were good mixture of community and local councillor nominations

There has been on City wide introductory and network session held on September 12th with a formal launch as part of the Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods Event on September 25th

The first tranche of Pioneer Place status will run for a period of 18 months until March 2021.

Strengthen ward partnership working and ward planning

Ward Forum Meetings have been established across the city following the local elections in May 2018 and the formation of 69 new wards. Member Information and Development sessions on the new Community Governance Arrangements were held in June and July 2018 and a basic level of resource has been provided to support the meetings taking place. The agreed resource is support for 4 regular ward forum meetings plus 2 for the development and review of ward planning and priorities per Municipal Year. This support is provided by the Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU). In the 2018/19 Municipal Year 23 out of 69 wards met 4 or more times whilst 27 wards met twice or less.

Wards have throughout the year been sent a range of good practice information and the Pioneers will also start sharing examples of innovative ways of working with other areas. Public Health has engaged in local conversations through the ward based structure but Members continue to report challenges with regard to local engagement and attendance more generally.

Progress on Ward Plans and Priorities 2018-22

Ward Plans and Priorities were introduced at the same time as the new Ward Forum Meetings. Support, Member Development and Information sessions were run in June/ July 2018 as detailed above and the NDSU also provided standard Templates that could be used

by Wards for the completion of their plan and priorities. Much of the background information for inclusion into plans was also provided and assistance was available at Ward Planning sessions if requested. The documents were originally requested by the end of March 2019 which was subsequently extended to the end of June. To date (as of 14/10/19) NDSU have received 30 out of 69 completed documents. As agreed with the Cabinet Member the completed Ward Plans and Priorities 2018-22, along with Ward Section 106 documents have been uploaded onto the BCC Website – the link is https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1997/ward_plans_and_priorities (direct link)

Develop on line resource

The intention is to create a platform where organisations and individuals can share their experiences and create opportunities to learn from one another, network and gain support. This has not been progressed beyond a small number of exploratory conversations. The Communications Team have however set up a Facebook page as a temporary measure following the recent celebration event. Further discussion is required as to what the community sector will see as beneficial in galvanising support and sharing information and the next step is to have a discussion with the Pioneers and BVSC to scope out possible options for a way forward.

Partnership base review (using the PINCh group) of resources to support neighbourhood working

There are no longer any generic ward based budgets. Wards have been advised of the financial resources that are subject to local influence via the individual ward plan templates.

PINCh – Partners Investing in Neighbourhoods and Communities (a city-wide partnership of public agencies, external funders and community infrastructure organisations) has been shaping the agenda regarding locally accessible funds and organisations such as Big Lottery now have more flexible, place based approaches to funding. This was partially responsible for the significant increase in funding being allocated to groups within Birmingham. PINCh have committed to running two joint funding information and support sessions each year.

To further strengthen capacity building 30 groups linked to the “Pioneer Places” will become members of the national organisation Locality providing them with both individual support and greater networking opportunities.

Work on community hubs continues. The ambition is to create a network of locally based organisations and facilities which are an integral part of the wider public hubs programme. Their programme of work and service offering will be promoted as a network offer with the council’s partnership support coming through facility CAT transfer or grant support around benefit/debt advice or library functions.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Review

CIL is split 85% for strategic investment and 15% within the ward. Under the current policy only a small number of wards have any local CIL allocation. The scope to run a pilot to enhance the local CIL resource through crowdfunding to deliver on priorities identified within ward plans is being explored. Meetings planned in October and November will hopefully enable a formal proposal to come forward.

At the same time the city wide policy approach to CIL is being reviewed through the Inclusive Growth Directorate. The cross party working group on localisation has requested an update on this particular review.

A cross service review and actions to make services more responsive to neighbourhoods

There has been a meeting at which senior officers, representing services from across the council, set out to the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods how their Directorates were contributing to the 'Working Together' policy. We will now use this as the basis of a more permanent group tasked with identifying ways in which services can become more responsive to neighbourhoods.

This groups' work could also cover the consideration of how relevant officer roles can be designed to allow for greater flexibility and responsiveness to neighbourhoods.

The role of senior managers and cabinet members with regard to neighbourhoods also needs further consideration.

We have also identified some functions in which we feel processes can be improved to provide greater support to neighbourhoods. Initially these were ensuring conditions of grant aid are proportionate and the requirement for public liability insurance for all organisations. We have not made progress in either of these areas but community groups have also asked us to look at taking action with regard to more supportive processes through the Safety Advisory Group and the Business Rates rebate process.

Relationship Managers

Appropriate officers have been identified across key services and meetings held with them to discuss the role and to obtain any feedback. In the last year the police have also identified Neighbourhood Sergeants for inclusion within the list of local contacts.

At the last CPWG meeting it was agreed that a survey would be conducted to obtain member feedback on this role.

Review the council's procurement services

We have identified a need to review existing processes to enable flexibility in future contracts to adapt to local circumstances. Work is yet to commence on this.

Improve the council's support to Community Right to challenge and Community Right to Bid

This service regarding Assets of Community Value has not been fully maintained as staff have left the organisation. Neighbourhoods Directorate will oversee the Assets of Community Value this in future and as result it has been subject to a submission within the 2020+ budget process.

Work with existing Parish Councils

Agree a devolution deal with Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council (RSCTC)

An officer working group continues to respond positively to specific requests made by RSCTC. The Town council has recently updated its formal request for items within a Devo Deal and will be re-submitting this formally. In the meantime specific projects are being assessed and

progressed on an individual basis (through appropriate governance routes) with the composite position being drawn together into a potential Devolution Deal. As was agreed early in this process the timing of a Devolution Deal Prospectus is not preventing the current requests from RSCTC being reviewed and where appropriate progressed. RSCTC will act as a test bed for that prospectus.

Set up process for working with New Frankley Parish Council (NFPC)

There is now direct and regular engagement between the Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods and NFPC. The parish council are also a member of the cross party working group. More recently we are working with them to develop their 'ask' under a Devolution Deal.

Develop a prospectus for devolution deals

A draft prospectus has been developed following meetings with key service areas. This draft was presented to CPWG on 3rd September. Some additional work is required to develop this further, including engagement with senior managers and Cabinet Members. We then intend to test it out through our work with existing parish councils and those organisations interested in taking on greater responsibility regarding services. It will therefore be a "draft for community engagement" prior to being finalised next year.

Create new parish councils

Since the launch of the consultation document officers have engaged with different parts of the city that wanted to understand the potential for a parish council. At this point in time officers remain in discussion with groups in Balsall Heath and Moseley and there has also been interest from the Perry Barr area. Where appropriate visits to other parish councils have taken place and the National Association of Local Councils brought in to provide more detailed information.

There are no active proposals at this stage, with groups continuing to consider the information that they are gathering.

3. Final evaluation of the Local Innovation Fund

The Final External Evaluation Report for Local Innovation Fund was commissioned by NDSU to Lynxs. Councillors and participating organisations all had an opportunity to participate in the Evaluation with the final document being distributed to all in May 2019. There were a number of important conclusions and recommendations within the Report that are relevant not only to any future BCC funding regimes but also within the WTIBNs future actions. A further session to discuss these in more detail with Members has been organised for November 5th 2019.

Contact Officer:
Telephone:
E-Mail:

Chris Jordan, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods 0121 3036143, Mobile: 07766 923600 chris.jordan@birmingham.gov.uk
--