



District and Ward Arrangements

Corporate Resources O&S Committee

1 Today's Session

Purpose

- 1.1 At the start of this municipal year, your Committee agreed to undertake some inquiry work into the new arrangements for district and ward committees, agreed at the May AGM.
- 1.2 Since then, the new Leader of the Council has indicated his intention to revisit those arrangements, with a view to "prioritising a radical new approach to devolution within the city".¹
- 1.3 Therefore this session has been designed to include both a reflection on the district and ward arrangements put in place this year – what has worked well, and what has not worked so well – and to gather views on the future of devolution in Birmingham.
- 1.4 Appendix 1 to this note sets out some background information to support members in their discussions. Appendix 2 contains a short note on the future of devolution.

Outcomes

- 1.5 This session will form part of the ongoing development process of devolution in Birmingham, to facilitate local members being able to consider key local issues and local needs, as well as involving the communities they represent in the decisions that affect them.
- 1.6 Alongside this, the Neighbourhood & Community Services O&S Committee are doing some inquiry work on Neighbourhood Challenge.
- 1.7 Following the discussion, the Committee will:
 - Write to the Leader with the findings from the session;
 - Consider taking a discussion paper to City Council (jointly with Neighbourhood & Community Services O&S Committee) on devolution options.

¹ Key Priorities for 2016, Report of the Leader of the Council, submitted to Corporate Resources O&S Committee on 19th January 2016



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Appendix 1: Context

1 The Framework: Local Leadership

- 1.1 Following the Kerslake report of December 2014 and the City Council's resulting Organisational Improvement Plan, the *Local Leadership* sub-programme of the Future Council Programme developed a vision of local leadership for the city, which was agreed by City Council on 1st December as part of the Council Vision 2020².
- 1.2 This set out the triple devolution framework for the future of city government in Birmingham and the city region:
- The city region – with fiscal and policy-making powers devolved from central government and exercised collectively by the member councils. The initial focus of the West Midlands Combined Authority will be on economic development, transport, regeneration and skills. Support resources in the fields of economic intelligence, investment planning, skills and local regeneration will be pooled. The Combined Authority will also be part of future public service reforms, potentially including employment and skills, integration of health and social care around individual needs and further reducing elements of youth offending;
 - The city – with a more strategic role to oversee the integration of local services and provide leadership to the city itself. Partnerships will be developed with other public bodies a “whole place” budget for the city so that spending priorities can be aligned across the public sector. A core City Council resource will be needed to support strategic planning and leadership (policy, research, commissioning, performance management, financial planning) and the council's regulatory functions (planning, licensing, consumer and environmental protection) and there will also be an integrated, efficient support services function (finance, human resources, legal advice, payment and revenue systems, contact centre);
 - The neighbourhood – where elected representatives will work with others in the community to provide community leadership and where most local services will be provided in new ways. New local service hubs will be developed to provide integrated neighbourhood services in a responsive, efficient way, focused on the needs of different local places in the city. There will be an integrated place management approach, which brings together housing, environmental and other services. Housing will be central to this vision because it is the bedrock of people's lives and their communities.
- 1.3 This will be delivered in three stages:
- 2015/16 – implementing and embedding a number of constitutional, policy and structural changes in line with commitments in the Council's Improvement Plan including relevant actions

² Birmingham 2020 - Forward Together: A contribution to a future vision for the city; City Council meeting, 1st December 2015



in the area of local leadership including the Combined Authority / Devolution Deal, the Boundary Commission proposals on warding and councillor numbers and the establishment of the Town Council in Sutton Coldfield;

- 2016 to 2018 – focussed on the further work and changes to local leadership that will be shaped across the city region, city and neighbourhood domains and moving into a delivery phase where sound local leadership will drive effective corporate governance and improved outcomes for Birmingham;
- 2018 to 2022 – embedding the new ward, member and electoral cycle changes, implementing a potential further refinement to the Council’s devolution arrangements at neighbourhood level, informed by the first two years of the Sutton Coldfield town council and other developments at neighbourhood level.

- 1.4 This programme is being supported by member development and cultural change programme across the lifetime of the programme with emphasis on strengthening the local leadership role of councillors.

2 District and Wards in 2015/16

Kerslake Report and Improvement Plan

- 2.1 The Kerslake report³, published in December 2014, recommended that the City Council should “establish a new model for devolution”, said that the:

“ten District Committees should not be responsible for delivering services or managing through service level agreements. Instead they should be refocused on shaping and leading their local areas through influence, representation and independent challenge of all public services located in the District including those of the Council.” Furthermore, the report recommends that “Councillors should concentrate on regular, direct engagement with the people and organisations in their wards and role as community leaders”.

- 2.2 In March 2015, the City Council published its Organisational Improvement Plan, which set out the constitutional and structural changes to be made to satisfy these recommendations. At the May 2015 AGM, the City Council agreed major changes to the remit of District Committees and Ward Committee/Forums.
- 2.3 The constitutional changes in May 2015 were designed to provide a framework for further developments over the period to 2018. New Terms of Reference were created for district committees, which changed their role from being responsible for budgets for a number of local

³ The way forward: an independent review of the governance and organisational capabilities of Birmingham City Council, Sir Bob Kerslake, December 2014



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services to a new role of identifying and communicating local priorities through Community Planning and Neighbourhood Challenge.

- 2.4 Ward Committees now have very few delegations and can be called “Forums” – recognising their role to engage citizens, communities and local stakeholders rather than to make formal decisions.

Changes to the Constitution

- 2.5 The redefinition of District Committee and Ward Committees/Forums in the May 2015 Constitution emphasised the leadership responsibility for ‘place’ matters within the area.
- 2.6 In summary, District Committees “will promote democratic accountability and support councillors in their community leadership role”. This is done via:
- Adopting and reviewing a Community Plan;
 - To exercise the duty of “Neighbourhood Challenge” – to investigate, review and gather data on the performance of all local public services, working in a collaborative but challenging way with all service providers and seeking out and promoting new ways of improving services;
 - Duties to ensure tenant engagement, promote safer neighbourhoods, promote cleaner neighbourhoods, promote effective neighbourhood management, promote and support active citizenship, community empowerment and a diverse and dynamic civil society, and to ensure effective ward level governance arrangements;
 - Advising or making representations to the Council, the Executive or an Overview and Scrutiny Committee on all matters affecting community interests (including attendance at Cabinet meetings to voice local matters and attendance at Overview and Scrutiny to account for delegated responsibilities);
 - Discharge devolved functions, including enforcement of litter prevention, fly-posting, placarding, graffiti and fly-tipping; local community safety; local decisions on street cleansing including working with local communities and social enterprises to encourage additional services such as community clean ups and anti-litter campaigns.
 - To consider and respond to consultations on planning briefs and frameworks and major development proposals;
 - To consider the performance, integration and co-ordination of public services in the district and make recommendations to the Executive and to the council’s partners as appropriate.
- 2.7 Ward Committees/Forums were constituted to encourage and facilitate dialogue, between the Council and local people within their Ward.
- 2.8 The operation of new arrangements at the district and ward level had to take into account the dramatically reduced resources for local governance and services. The model was therefore refined to focus on “the key priority of protecting front line service delivery, whilst also helping to shape



new approaches to service delivery at a local level through partnership working and co-production”.⁴

- 2.9 The new model demands a particular set of cultural, organisational and individual behaviours, values and technical competencies. A member development programme for Executive Members and Deputy Chairs of District Committees was put in place to cover the detail and mechanics of the constitutional changes and what this means in taking forward the remit of the remodelled District Committees. A final session brought Executive Members for Districts and Deputy chairs together with Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Deputy Chairs to look at how the proposed Neighbourhood Challenge function for District Committees can work to deliver effective accountability of public services. Two sessions were held for Ward Chairs in September.
- 2.10 Alongside this, stage one of the electoral review has been completed with the decision that the council will reduce to around 100 members in 2018. Proposals for stage 2 (ward boundaries) are being consulted on and the initial proposal is for 77 mostly single member wards and 101 members.
- 2.11 The Community Governance Review was concluded with the consultative ballot in Sutton Coldfield and the parish (town) council will be established from May.

3 What do Other Local Authorities do?

- 3.1 To inform the discussion further, outlined below are some of the approaches taken by other local authorities.
- 3.2 **Leeds City Council** has introduced Community Committees to “promote and improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Committee’s area”. They have functions with regards to community centres, CCTV, Youth Activity Fund, Parks and Countryside, neighbourhood management co-ordination, street cleansing and Environmental Enforcement Services.
- 3.3 The aim of the Committees is to be more locally responsive, more accountable to local members and local people and to improve locality outcomes. They also administer some funding: the Wellbeing Budget and Youth Activities Fund, providing funding for local communities (a combined budget of £2m is to support initiatives and activities that will benefit the local area and address local priorities). In March 2015, the Executive board agreed to delegate investment into local parks and associated facilities to community committees.
- 3.4 A report to Leeds’ Executive Board in June 2015 reported that:

The new arrangements for community committees and community engagement have been a significant step towards a more inclusive, more responsive and smarter approach to decision-making in local areas. Community committees have given local elected members the opportunity to look at key local issues,

⁴ Birmingham City Council Constitution, Updated June 2015



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local needs, aspirations and potential. They have been challenged to genuinely involve the communities they represent in the decisions that affect them. They have made a good start. For example, by engaging with –

- Young people on the local activities offer in their local areas.
- Older residents on the local action needed to tackle social isolation.
- Residents concerned about the impact of domestic violence on the range of responsive multiagency services.
- Business on overcoming barriers to the labour market

- 3.5 Community Committees sometimes have co-optees on the community committee, to seek an in-depth understanding of the key issues affecting poverty in their area and co-designing local solutions for local issues
- 3.6 **Bristol City Council** has 14 Neighbourhood partnerships, set up to enable local residents and community groups to work together with Bristol City Council, the police and local businesses to shape and influence their neighbourhood. Each partnership has a Neighbourhood Partnership Plan stating what they want to do to make their area a better place to live.
- 3.7 Each neighbourhood partnership is made up of either two or three electoral wards. The membership of each partnership includes residents, organisations and the local councillors from the wards within the partnership area.
- 3.8 The main decision making NP meetings usually happen four times per year, with additional public forums, subgroups and other conversations taking place throughout the year. Neighbourhood partnerships are supported by staff from Bristol City Council.
- 3.9 Within the neighbourhood partnership, local councillors from the area form a Neighbourhood Committee. The Mayor has delegated the following executive functions relating to the following:
- a. Expenditure of well-being budget;
 - b. Expenditure of budget for environment projects;
 - c. Highways maintenance (ie. road surface dressing/renewal and footway reconstruction/resurfacing);
 - d. Minor traffic schemes;
 - e. Expenditure of monies paid to the council pursuant to a section 106 agreement and decisions relating to prioritising site specific schemes to be funded from those monies;
 - f. Expenditure of any other budget allocated to the NP by cabinet or by any strategic director.
 - g. Take decisions in relation to the disposal (or retention) of green space sites within their area which have been declared surplus to Council requirements, within the protocol for surplus sites which was previously agreed by the Cabinet.



- 3.10 In **Manchester City Council**, under the Constitution, the Council and the Leader “may appoint Area Committees as they think fit, if they are satisfied that to do so will ensure improved service delivery in the context of best value and more efficient, transparent and accountable decision making.” Currently there is one: Wythenshawe Area. The role of this committee is to fulfil the role as the primary vehicle for consultation with the local community on all issues affecting the Wythenshawe area and to represent the views of the area on problems, needs and deficiencies which ought to be dealt with and to which the Council should direct its attention. The Committee can:
- Review and report to the Executive on the means by which the Council's assets in Wythenshawe can be channelled to meet community objectives;
 - Make comments to the Planning and Highways Committee on major development proposals as they relate to the area.
 - Refer to the Planning Committee individual development proposals within Wythenshawe where members of the Area Committee are minded to vote against the recommendation of the Head of Planning, Building Control and Licensing in the report.
 - Oversee and advise the Executive on the input of the various Departments into management of Wythenshawe Forum and the Civic Centre area.
- 3.11 **Sheffield City Council** had a strong area committee model but, in July 2013, a decision was taken to reshape the Council's current local partnership arrangements and community engagement work. Instead of Area Committees, a ward-based approach was taken. Sheffield's wards are grouped into seven Service Delivery Areas, each made up of four wards. Each Area has a Local Area Partnership (chaired by a lead Elected Member), which will encourage partnership work between Councillors, the public sector, the private sector and the voluntary, community and faith sector.
- 3.12 Each Local Area Partnership focus on tackling three or four key priorities, which have been informed by the ward plans. The aim is that, to address these priorities, service providers will become more integrated and efficient and will work with communities to ensure they become stronger and more resilient.
- 3.13 **Nottingham** has eight Area Committees, to which are delegated a combination of executive and non-executive functions, including:
- To approve, ensure the delivery of and monitor ward action plans;
 - To lead and co-ordinate regeneration and renewal activity at an area level;
 - To be consulted on, approve and monitor delivery of the area capital programme and other area based budgets;
 - Within budgetary limits, to be empowered to undertake any measures to achieve the following objectives:



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- the promotion or improvement of the economic wellbeing of their area;
- the promotion of improvement or improvement of the social wellbeing of their area;
- the promotion or improvement of the environmental wellbeing of their area;
- To agree priorities, work programmes, and variations in performance standards, including through Transforming Neighbourhoods processes, for services such as, but not limited to:
 - footpath replacement;
 - street lighting;
 - patch maintenance;
 - grounds maintenance on community parks and playgrounds;
- To be part of the process for monitoring and scrutinising the performance of local services (provided by the Council and other bodies) and provide feedback and recommendations on their effectiveness to the Executive Board, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Tenant and Leaseholder Congress

- 3.14 Ward Councillor Budgets are allocated at the start of the financial year to be spent on supporting ward initiatives. Area Committees divide their overall Ward Councillor Budgets between
- Individual Ward Support Budgets (up to £5,000), to fund initiatives recommended by the relevant Ward Councillor; and
 - Area Allocation Budget, to fund grants to community and voluntary sector organisations and inter-ward initiatives.
- 3.15 Area Committees are accountable to Council and the Executive Board and there are usually four meetings per annum for each Area Committee.
- 3.16 This is supplemented with a delegated decision making process whereby local members can authorise Ward Councillor Decisions. Ward Councillor Budgets are allocated at the start of the financial year for spend on ward initiatives and we have delegated powers to certain officers (up to a certain value) to authorise these decisions in between area committees. These decisions are then reported for note at the next available meeting.
- 3.17 **Cornwall Council** has Sub-Area Planning Committees (West, Central and East) which are responsible for functions relating to town and country planning and development control. Local members can make a written request for a particular 'Major' or 'Minor' application to be considered by the relevant Sub-Area Planning Committee providing sound planning, policy and other area reasons are provided setting out why committee consideration is necessary.

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