

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC REPORT

Report to: CABINET
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director Place
Date of Decision: 31 July 2018
SUBJECT: ESTABLISHMENT OF A CROSS-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE
Key Decision: No
If not in the Forward Plan: Relevant Forward Plan Ref: 005297/2018
Chief Executive approved ☐
(please "X" box) O&S Chairman approved ☐
Relevant Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods
Relevant O&S Chair: Councillor Penny Holbrook, Chair of the Housing and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Wards affected: All

1 Purpose of report

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to the creation of an informal working group to enable elected members to engage on a cross-party basis on matters to do with community governance, as recommended by the report of the Corporate Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the City Council in December 2017.

2 Decision(s) recommended

2.1 That Cabinet approves the creation of the Cross Party Working Group on Community Governance, with the terms of reference and membership indicated in the appendices to this report.

2.2 That the Working Group meets for an initial period up to the end of 2018, at which point it will be reviewed and may be extended by a further decision of Cabinet.

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3 Consultation

3.1 Internal

The proposal for Working Group emerged from the scrutiny review referred to above. The Leader and relevant Cabinet Member as well as the opposition leaders have been consulted on the membership and purpose of the group.

3.2 External

Potential external co-optees to the Working Group have also been consulted to ascertain their willingness to participate.

4 Compliance Issues

4.1 Are the decisions consistent with the City Council's policies, plans and strategies?

The Working Group will enable members to engage with the next stage of the council's evolving policy on community governance, in particular the consultation on the Working Together in Neighbourhoods green paper, approved by Cabinet in March 2018 and the potential further development of parishing in the city. This is consistent with the approved Vision and Forward Plan which recognised the importance of neighbourhoods and place in shaping the lives of citizens and the city and the policy statement on Localism in Birmingham, also approved by Cabinet in March 2018.

4.2 Financial implications (will the decisions be carried out within existing finance and resources?)

The operation of the Working Group will be supported using existing resources. As this is an informal working group, all matters relating to resources will be passed on as appropriate to Cabinet and Cabinet Members.

4.3 Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications from this report. As an informal working group, the Group will have no decision making powers and accountability for this policy area will rest with the Cabinet and the relevant Cabinet Members.

4.4 Public Sector Equality Duty

No specific equality implications arise from this report. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 will be fully taken into account in the development of the policy areas that the Group will consider, including Impact Assessments where appropriate.

4.5 Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

No specific Social Value implications arise from this report. The requirements and opportunities of the Act may be relevant to consideration of the future provision of local services and these will be noted as appropriate.

5 Relevant background/chronology of key events

5.1 The City Council's approach to engaging with neighbourhoods and localism in service provision has been evolving in recent years. It has moved away from the model of devolved district committees with budgets and service management responsibilities towards a more ward focused approach, which is intended to provide for stronger local engagement, partnership working and influence over services to increase their responsiveness.

5.2 The district committees were disestablished in 2018 and the transition to a new four year election cycle with more and smaller wards but fewer councillors has now taken place. Sutton Coldfield Town Council was also established in this period, to add to the Frankley in Birmingham parish council already in existence and this represents one positive option for future community governance.

5.3 In response to this the O&S review referred to above looked at the relationship between the City Council and these two parish councils and the potential for further local councils in the future. It made a number of recommendations, many of which were taken forward in the draft green paper "Working Together in Neighbourhoods" approved by Cabinet in March 2018. The consultation on the green paper is due to take place over the summer.

5.4 The O&S report also recommended that:

*"[the policy for community governance] should also be developed with **cross-party support**; we would therefore suggest adopting a cross-party working group approach (similar to the Community Governance group set up to consider the proposal for a Sutton Coldfield Parish Council)."*

6 Evaluation of alternative options

6.1 As pointed out by the O&S report, it is important that there is cross-party input to matters related to how members and services engage with citizens and service users in their local neighbourhood. The informal approach of a Working Group is preferred to a formal Cabinet Committee because it provides for greater flexibility and requires less resource in terms of support and administration.

7 Reasons for decision(s)

7.1 The decision recommended enables the Working Group to be set up, in line with the recommendation of the O&S report, whilst retaining proper Cabinet accountability for policy decisions in this area.

Signatures**Date****Cabinet Members**

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Councillor Sharon Thompson
Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

Chief Officers

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Jacqui Kennedy
Corporate Director, Place

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Jonathan Tew
Assistant Chief Executive

List of background documents used to compile this report

Report of the Corporate Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, December 2017: Partnership Working: BCC and Parish/Town Councils

Report to Cabinet, 6 March 2018: Policy Framework: Localism in Birmingham

Report to Cabinet, 6 March 2018: Draft Green Paper: Working Together in Neighbourhoods

List of appendices (if any)

Appendix 1: Terms of reference of the Cross Party Working Group on Community Governance

Appendix 2: Proposed Membership of the Group for 2018

Appendix 1:

Terms of Reference

Cross-Party Working Group on Community Governance

Status of the Group

The Working Group will provide for the necessary cross—party engagement in the development of policy on community governance. At the same time it is essential that clarity of accountability on this agenda, through appropriate Cabinet Members is maintained.

The Working Group will be an informal advisory body, rather than a decision making committee. Matters for decision will be referred to Cabinet Members or Cabinet.

Frequency of meetings and term of operation

The Group will meet every two months or at the discretion of the Chair. It will initially meet until December 2018, when its work will be reviewed and can be extended through a further Cabinet report if this is thought necessary.

Purpose and coverage

The purpose of the Group is to enable cross-party engagement on the matters addressed in the Overview and Scrutiny report “Partnership Working: BCC and Parish/Town Councils”, with the aim of achieving consensus on relevant democratic and constitutional issues and on how members work with local partners and communities in their wards.

The focus of the Group will be the green paper on “Working Together in Neighbourhoods” – covering:

- The framework for working with neighbourhoods and parishes
- Neighbourhood charters
- The process for creating new parish/neighbourhood councils
- Local devolution deals.

The Working Group will consider the response to consultation and make an input to the proposed white paper, through providing advice to officers and Cabinet Members.

Appendix 2:

Membership

Cross-Party Working Group on Community Governance

The membership of the Working Group shall consist of councillors in the proportion 5 Labour, 2 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Green.

The following councillors will serve on the Group during 2018:

Cllr Sharon Thompson	Labour	Chair
Cllr Penny Holbrook	Labour	
Cllr Saddak Miah	Labour	
Cllr Karen McCarthy	Labour	
Cllr Rob Pocock	Labour	
Cllr Robert Alden	Conservative	Substitute: Ewan Mackey
Cllr Simon Morrall	Conservative	
Cllr Jon Hunt	Liberal Democrat	
Cllr Julien Pritchard	Green	

Co-opted, non-voting Members

At the discretion of the Chair, the Group will be able to appoint external experts as non-voting members, such as parish councillors from Birmingham and elsewhere or professional experts.