

Appendix 2: Scrutiny Discussion Paper

Devolution within Birmingham: experiences from 2015-16 and the challenges

February 2016

PURPOSE

This paper sets out some key issues that the O&S Committee may wish to address related to the next stage in the development of our local devolution arrangements. . As set out in the strategic approach to Local Leadership that has been presented to the Improvement Panel, this will be taken forward in stages over the period 2016-2018, ahead of the planned changes in ward boundaries and the switch to a four year election cycle .

This discussion is one of many that will take place – with scrutiny, party groups and the reconvened cross party Corporate Governance Group – alongside public engagement and consultation. Steered by the views of members, council officers will work with partners to bring forward a new approach for local leadership.

Any constitutional changes that are necessary (such as the structure of committees and delegations) will be made at the City Council AGM in May 2016 or 2017 though culture change and action are more important than articles and terms of reference in our governance and constitutional frameworks.

CONTEXT

The background to the constitutional changes is set out in Appendix 1 of your report.

The Future Council programme and the 2020 Vision discussion paper which went to full council in December also provides a new context for these changes. The overriding theme **is a shift to a partnership based approach**, recognising that wider outcomes for the city will only be achieved by working with others and that the role of the council will be to lead the city but not run the city. In terms of governance and democracy this implies a shift from a constitutional and internal focus, based on direct service delivery (top down) to an external and partnership focus (bottom up and outside in).

At the Corporate Resources O&S Committee on 19th January 2016, the Leader of the Council set out his key priorities for 2016. Within his report¹, he stated:

I will also be prioritising a radical new approach to devolution within the city. The focus will be on empowering people and giving them influence over local services, not on council structures and budgets. I want this to be a bottom up process, with new smaller wards (neighbourhoods) where councillors work with the community through open, inclusive meetings, neighbourhood management and an active civil society. There is the potential for a diversity of forms of governance in local areas, such as parish or neighbourhood councils. We may have to move on from the District model – wards across larger areas will collaborate and new forms of joined up, localised service delivery will emerge. I am looking at new Assistant Leader roles to lead this activity. Discussion will take place in the Labour Group and will be extended to the other groups. Only after that will more detailed policy be developed.

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

During the discussion at Committee, he further outlined his thinking, stating:

- How citizens and Councillors work together in their areas is the lifeblood of democracy and council services being delivered efficiently;
- There has to be an evolution of devolution and not one size fits all solution; different parts of the city will want to work with Councillors and deal with services in different ways;
- The current devolution offer, based on districts and Parliamentary boundaries, is no longer sustainable and leadership must be neighbourhood and ward based;
- He suggested that a small number of Assistant Leaders could have the role of providing leadership to local governance and partnerships across larger areas of the city;
- Cross-party engagement is essential, so work on this area by the Corporate Resources O&S Committee would be welcome;
- It will also require a fundamental reshaping of how we do things as a City Council. Many basic services that most people associate with the council are caught up in contracts – waste management, pavements, roads, parks, trees, lighting. The Corporate Resources could look at how we go forward in this;

CHALLENGES

There are some significant obstacles to a new approach which need to be considered and addressed. They include:

- The fact that service management and delivery, across many agencies will be at a much wider geographical level than the ward or neighbourhood in which we can effectively engage with the public
- Resource limitations, for example in supporting local engagement with the community and activities such as neighbourhood management or neighbourhood tasking across potentially 77 wards;
- The fact that single member wards will require an end to the Ward Committee arrangements
- The need to adopt new formats and ways of working for local engagement;
- The practicalities and logistics of enabling collaborative working between councillors, partners and the local community at a very local level to influence or “commission” services to meet local needs and preferences;
- Partner agencies may also have difficulty resourcing very local models of engagement, e.g. neighbourhood tasking by the Police in the models we have worked with to date;
- The challenge of taking forward city wide strategies whilst building in local variation and choice – one size doesn’t fit all and the Leaders emerging vision around working to make every neighbourhood and locality in Birmingham a good one to live, work and recreate in;
- The challenge of cultural change and working in new ways.

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