

## APPENDIX 1

Title of proposed EIA	Balsall Heath Proposed Neighbourhood Council
Reference No	EQUA1190
EA is in support of	New Function
Review Frequency	No preference
Date of first review	01/03/2024
Directorate	City Operations
Division	Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU), and Policy Executive (Partnerships and Strategy)
Service Area	Localism
Responsible Officer(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Claire S Hardwick
Quality Control Officer(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Karen Cheney
Accountable Officer(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Chris Jordan
Purpose of proposal	BCC's consideration of a proposed Neighbourhood Council in Balsall Heath
Data sources	Consultation Results
Please include any other sources of data	<p>Community Governance Review (CGR) - which included consultation via BCC's Be Heard, Email, Phone and and community based discussions (using the BeHeard questions as a basis for Group discussions with the feedback / summary of discussion being summarised by group facilitator and emailed into NDSU to be included in the CGR initial stage consultation).</p> <p>Two independently held Consultative (postal) Ballots - initial ballot held Autumn 2022 and a Re-Ballot June 2023.</p>
ASSESS THE IMPACT AGAINST THE PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS	
Protected characteristic: Age	Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community
Age details:	<p>Balsall Heath has a relatively young population.</p> <p>The 2011 Census data showed that the majority of people living in both Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath East Ward and in Balsall Heath West</p>

Ward were aged between 10 - 59 years. With aged 18-44 years being the largest age group/s in both Wards.

All residents living in the proposed Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Council area would be impacted upon by a Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Council (NC). All Balsall Heath residents living in the proposed NC area who are over 18 years of age and eligible to vote in local and general elections were sent a postal ballot paper and additional information about the proposal and encouraged to use their vote and have their say - whether they supported a proposed NC for Balsall Heath or not. The results of the two consultative ballots that have been held were then considered by BCC Officers. We do not have an age breakdown from Civica Election Services as to who voted and their age - as the vote was anonymous.

Please note: in the Cabinet report re the result of the re-ballot and recommended next steps, the recommendation to Cabinet is that a NC is not formed in Balsall Heath at this stage as the voter turnout did not meet the 25% threshold currently required by BCC Policy for this result to be seen as valid.

Protected characteristic: Disability

Disability details:

Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community

We do not have this information for the specific area of Balsall Heath covered by the proposed Neighbourhood Council.

However, based on what we know from working in Balsall Heath NC area - we believe there is a higher than average (taking the average for Birmingham and UK) level of disabled people living in Balsall Heath - this is across all age groups.

Protected characteristic: Sex	Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community
Gender details:	We do not have this information breakdown for the area of Balsall Heath covered by the proposed NC.
Protected characteristics: Gender Reassignment	Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community
Gender reassignment details:	As above, we do not have this information for the area of Balsall Heath covered by the proposed NC.
Protected characteristics: Marriage and Civil Partnership	Service Users/ Stakeholders; Wider Community
Marriage and civil partnership details:	As above - we do not have this info.
Protected characteristics: Pregnancy and Maternity	Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community
Pregnancy and maternity details:	As above - we do not have this info.
Protected characteristics: Race	Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community
Race details:	<p>Balsall Heath is a culturally diverse area of Birmingham, with a majority Muslim population.</p> <p>In Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath East - the ethnicity breakdown (in 2011 Census) was as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>66.7% Asian</li> <li>12.1% White</li> <li>9.2% Black</li> <li>8.8% Other</li> <li>3.4% Mixed</li> </ul> <p>In Balsall Heath West Ward, the ethnicity breakdown (as in 2011 Census) was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>43.2% Asian</li> <li>21.2% White</li> <li>15.2% Other</li> <li>15.1% Black</li> <li>5.3% Mixed</li> </ul>

BCC's role in the CGR and NC Consultative Ballot processes was to remain neutral - but to provide clear, accessible, accurate information about the CGR and proposed Neighbourhood Council so that all residents were able to be informed about what was being proposed and could make their decision about whether they wanted a NC in Balsall Heath, or not.

It was also BCC's role to encourage residents who were eligible to vote to use their vote and have their say. This included: Governance contracting with CES / Civica Election Services to conduct the postal ballot and re-ballot; clarifying the postal consultative ballot process and how a decision would be made by BCC; providing clear info to accompany the postal ballot forms sent to each eligible voter by CES / Civica Election Services; ensuring that all BCC Communication and information (hard copies of info leaflets and posters, pull up banners, online - BCC website info - overview and detailed info including FAQs, social media posts. email replies to queries, phone replies to phone queries were fully accessible for the Balsall Heath residents who were eligible to vote in the consultative ballots).

Before developing the Comms materials for the CGR in 2022, we met with reps of the Equalities Team to seek their guidance about appropriate comms and potential translations of all our planned written comms materials into the relevant community languages for Balsall Heath NC area. The Equalities Team advised us that we did not need to translate our materials into the relevant community languages as they have found that this does not actually ensure the communications materials are inclusive and accessible - as many of those who speak other

languages in Balsall Heath, and similar areas, cannot actually read in those languages. They advised us to focus on providing clear plain language engaging and accessible information in English - and that those who did not read English would usually be able to ask someone who did to read it to them.

We worked closely with BCC Comms and Marketing to develop engaging clear information and comms materials for the CGR and the NC Consultative ballots. This included links to the BCC website section for more detailed info. They produced a QR code for us which we used on every piece of BCC printed comms materials - enabling people to use their camera on a smart phone to click on the QR code and be taken straight to the relevant section on the BCC website. This was important as it can be hard to find information on the BCC website even if you know what you are looking for. We ensured we regularly updated the BCC website with all relevant information, and that more detailed info and all relevant reports were available on our BCC website for those who wanted more detailed info.

In addition to the BCC website info, we included an NDSU phone number and email address which anyone could contact if they had a specific query or wanted to discuss any points in more detail. All emails and phone queries were individually responded to by NDSU. It was actually through emails received through the NDSU email and phone number, as well as queries from the BH Steering Group, that enabled us to alert Governance that a whole area of Balsall Heath proposed NC area had not received their postal ballot papers. Governance explored this with CES and a major CES error was identified and remedied as a result. The postal ballot window was extended to take account

of this delay in ballot papers being received and the impact of the postal strike in returning ballot papers.

BCC NDSU sent a letter / email and the BCC info leaflet and FAQs out to local community groups and stakeholders across BH, including via the BH Steering Group and the Ward Contact lists via the BCC Governance Managers. BCC NDSU staff also attended relevant Ward meetings online and in person to update re the CGR and proposed NC, encourage people to find out more and use their vote, and answer any queries.

Having this range of methods to contact BCC and find out more information seems to have worked well and been well received by residents. Printed materials were: A5 four-sided information leaflet; A4 and A3 posters, pull up banners - all left a key locations around Balsall Heath with leaflets also being sent with the ballot paper to every eligible voter, as well as posted through doors in BH. Bus Stop ads were also used in the initial consultative ballot. Social media posts developed by NDSU with the BCC Media Team were also used before and throughout the CGR and each consultative ballot reminding eligible residents to 'Have their Say and Use Your Vote Post your Vote!', the voting deadline, and to post their votes in good time. BCC also took part in BBC Midlands Today feature on Balsall Heath NC (initial ballot) and supported BH Steering Group to arrange this coverage.

In addition to BCC's own communication and information, BCC funded the Balsall Heath Steering Group who were proposing the NC for

Balsall Heath through two grants of £5,000 each from the Localisation Grant held by NDSU. The aim of this Grant is to enable local communities to actively explore the Localism options outlined in BCC's 2019 White Paper - Working Together in Birmingham's Neighbourhoods.

£5,000 was paid at the start of the campaign and awareness raising period for the first consultative ballot and again for the re-ballot. BCC NDSU agreed with the BH Steering Group what they would use the funding for as it had to meet the aim of raising awareness amongst the local community affected by a possible NC re what a NC was, why they were proposing it and enabling the Steering Group to promote it locally and encourage people to use their vote and have their say.

BH Steering Group used the Grants to:

- develop a website with clear info about them and why they were proposing a NC and how to contact them and find out more, plus links to BCC website
- develop a number of short films, targetted at different age groups, raising awareness re NC and why they are proposing it and wanted everyone to vote Yes
- employ a community outreach team to raise awareness accross the community of BH / proposed NC area
  - through doorknocking every household in the area, leafletting and disrtibuting posters and info, attendance at Mosques and other places of worship locally, attending local activities and groups to raise awareness, link with schools (inc sending BCC info leaflets out via the

schools in partnership with BCC), appearances on local media... The community engagement team were employed on a sessional basis via St Pauls CDT in Balsall Heath, and were all local BH residents - the majority of whom spoke the local community languages and so could also communicate with residents who did not speak or understand English.

BCC NDSU and Policy Executive worked closely with the BH Steering Group since they proposed the NC, through the CGR and NC Consultative Ballots - to provide clarification and ensure a co-ordinated approach (although BCC remained 'neutral' re the possible NC throughout). This included attending all the BH Steering Group meetings to rep BCC and clarify any queries and enable the BH Steering Group to explore a NC for BH. We continue to work with and liaise with the BH Steering Group.

Protected characteristics: Religion or Beliefs

Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community

Religion or beliefs details:

Balsall Heath has a majority Muslim population. People of other faiths, and none, also live and / or worship there.

Protected characteristics: Sexual Orientation

Service Users / Stakeholders; Wider Community

Sexual orientation details:

We do not have this info for the area the proposed Balsall Heath NC would cover.

Socio-economic impacts

Balsall Heath is one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas of Birmingham and the UK.

The 2011 Census showed that both Balsall Heath West and Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East Wards were in the top 10% most deprived areas of Birmingham and England.



Both Wards are in the top 10% most deprived Wards in Birmingham and England re Income Deprivation affecting Children, and also Income Deprivation affecting Older People - aged 60 years and above. (2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation).

As a result, the cost of living crisis is impacting Balsall Heath residents particularly hard. The proposed NC could have charged a Precept - which most Balsall Heath residents would not have to pay as they are not paying Council Tax due to being on such low incomes. The proposers of a NC for Balsall Heath may suggest that a NC would provide additional support re socio-economic issues for the community and residents. Those who do not support a NC may suggest that a Precept charge on those who do have to pay a NC Precept (if a NC was formed) would be unaffordable and a negative impact of a NC.

Additional socio-economic impacts to be considered by BCC as part of it's NC Policy review include: the significant variations in the level of potential NC income that can be raised by a Precept. If a household income is so low that they do not pay Council Tax, they will not have to pay a NC Precept. This means that, in areas such as Balsall Heath - where the majority of people do not pay full Council Tax, the amount a NC can raise from a Precept will be relatively very low - compared to a more affluent area of the City where the majority of residents pay Council Tax and so would be required to pay a NC Precept too. This is a key equalities impact that has been highlighted by the Balsall Heath NC exploration and which BCC need to consider.

Please indicate any actions arising from completing this screening exercise.

Please indicate whether a full impact assessment is recommended

What data has been collected to facilitate the assessment of this policy/proposal? Community Governance Review (CGR) consultation data / feedback.

Results of two (independently run) postal consultative ballots of eligible voters in Balsall Heath re the proposed NC.

#### Consultation analysis

The majority of those who responded to the CGR consultation were in favour of further exploring the idea of a NC for Balsall Heath and going to a consultative ballot to help establish local opinion re this proposal. The CGR was targetted at Balsall Heath residents, organisations and workers in the proposed NC area, but others living/working outside of the proposed NC area, with an interest in the area, could also comment.

The initial consultative (postal) ballot was held in autumn 22 by Civica Election Services on behalf of BCC. All those living in the proposed NC area who were over 18 years of age and eligible to vote, were sent a postal ballot form and supporting information so they could make their decision and have their say.

The consultative ballot result was discussed by BCC Cabinet and, as the 25% eligible voter turnout threshold required by BCC's NC Policy had not been reached (by a small margin and the vast majority of those who voted had voted 'yes' - in support of a proposed NC), it was decided by Cabinet that a consultative re-ballot should be held, and further engagement undertaken, to seek to achieve a 25% or higher voter turnout and establish voters opinion a second time.

The re-ballot has been held (5th June - 3rd July 23) and a similar level of turnout was achieved - again not reaching the required 25% voter turnout. Again, a high majority of

those who voted in the re-ballot voted 'yes' - in support of the proposed NC.

Following discussion with the Leader, Officers have compiled a Report to Cabinet re the Re-ballot result and proposed next steps. It is recommended that:

\* a NC is not established in Balsall Heath as the required voter turnout level was not achieved - so the result is not valid (as set out in the BCC Policy re NC)

\* a Review is held into BCC's approach to NC (reporting in early 2024), this would include a review of the level of the voter threshold turnout required by BCC.

We also suggest that a full EIA should be undertaken as part of this review re BCC's approach to NCs - to ensure all stages and aspects of this process are fully inclusive and make recommendations if / where they should be improved.

Adverse impact on any people with protected characteristics.

This should be considered again as part of the BCC review of Neighbourhood Council policy - which is recommended to Cabinet and would report early in 2024.

Could the policy/proposal be modified to reduce or eliminate any adverse impact? This should be considered in the BCC review of Neighbourhood Council policy - which is recommended to Cabinet and would report early in 2024. We suggest the following are aspects of the NC approach that should be reviewed and which could potentially be modified to maximise inclusion and reduce or eliminate adverse impact:

**Threshold Turnout** level as required by current BCC NC Policy - we suggest that the current required level of turnout is too high, and is a significant barrier to any area of Birmingham wishing to explore a NC and to having a consultative ballot

turnout which will be regarded by BCC as valid.

**BCC to re-consider alternative methods of voting in NC**

**Consultative Ballots** to maximise engagement and turnout - online voting and ballot boxes / stations in the local area so eligible residents can vote in person. These additional voting options were requested by NDSU and Policy Exec, as well as by the proposer - Balsall Heath Steering Group, but not approved by BCC. We believe that both alternative approaches, used alongside the postal vote option, would have led to a much higher voter turnout in Balsall Heath - and in other areas exploring a NC in the future.

It has also been suggested that requiring a consultative ballot at all, as part of BCC's Neighbourhood Council process, should also be re-considered as part of this Review. Not having a consultative ballot would, of course, raise other issues about how all residents are enabled to have their say in key issues that affect them and their areas. All this would need to be looked at in detail as part of the Policy Review.

How will the effect(s) of this policy/proposal on equality be monitored?

This should be considered in the BCC review of Neighbourhood Council policy - which is recommended to Cabinet and would report early in 2024. There needs to be ongoing effective monitoring and reviews of the effects of NC proposal and BCC's NC Policy in areas exploring NCs, which have a CGR and Consultative Ballots and do / do not then move to become a NC.


What data is required in the future?

This should be considered in the BCC review of Neighbourhood Council policy - which is recommended to Cabinet and would report early in 2024.

Are there any adverse impacts on any particular group(s)	No
If yes, please explain your reasons for going ahead.	This should be considered in the BCC review of Neighbourhood Council policy - which is recommended to Cabinet and would report early in 2024. The report re Balsall Heath NC does not recommend that the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Council goes ahead at this stage.
Initial equality impact assessment of your proposal	This should be considered in the BCC review of Neighbourhood Council policy - which is recommended to Cabinet and would report early in 2024.
	The current BCC policy for NCs was followed in each stage of the CGR and Consultative Ballot/s for Balsall Heath. There may be some changes that could be recommended to improve levels of inclusiveness in this process at each stage and the Review will consider this and make recommendations re that.
Consulted People or Groups	
Informed People or Groups	
Summary and evidence of findings from your EIA	CGR result and next steps report to Cabinet 2022  Cabinet Report re Balsall Heath NC and Next Steps - Oct 23
QUALITY CONTROL SECTION	
Submit to the Quality Control Officer for reviewing?	No
Quality Control Officer comments	A Comprehensive Initial Screening done
Decision by Quality Control Officer	Proceed for final approval
Submit draft to Accountable Officer?	Yes
Decision by Accountable Officer	Approve
Date approved / rejected by the Accountable Officer	06/09/2023
Reasons for approval or rejection	No negative impacts identified and a recommendation to review policy may be beneficial
Please print and save a PDF copy for your records	Yes

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Close