

**BIRMINGHAM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**  
**PROGRAMME BOARD : 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2007**  
**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SERVICE: OPTIONS AND FUNDING**

**Purpose**

1. To inform the Board of the progress on the establishment of the new Community Engagement Service and to allow the Board to review these arrangements in view of the Government's proposed funding changes and other relevant developments.

**Background**

2. In February 2006, GOWM proposed to the BSP that the funding for the community empowerment network for 2006/07 should be ring-fenced at £729,489 within the SSC block. GOWM supported the BSP proposal to review the community empowerment/engagement function. This was approved and a review was undertaken by a Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser between April and September 2006.
3. On 29.9.06, the BSP Board considered the review of community empowerment/engagement in the City. The review had concentrated on the role of neighbourhood forums and community networks and had concluded:

“The structures that both BCEN and BANF have built need to be retained - they are key components of the community engagement structure in the city.”

4. At the same time the report was clear that there would be advantages to better co-ordination of the support arrangements for both. As a result, the BSP Board approved:

“the establishment of a new Community Engagement Service to integrate the support services for Neighbourhood Forums and Community Networks currently provided by BANF and BCEN and to co-ordinate wider engagement activities to support delivery of the LAA outcomes.”

5. Separately the Council's Local Services and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been considering similar issues as part of its review of community representation. It reported to Council on 10.10.06 and Council resolved:

“That the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Local Services and Community Safety work through the BSP to establish a new Community Engagement Service to integrate the support services for Neighbourhood Forums and Community Networks currently provided by BANF and BCEN.”

6. At its meeting on 27.10.06, the BSP Board approved an implementation plan for the new Community Engagement Service and, in so doing agreed:
  - To ask the SSCF Block to steer this work through a new Community Engagement Board.
  - Sign-off of the new service specification, the constitution and the staffing structure in February 2007

### **Progress to Date**

7. On the basis of the recommendations approved by the BSP Board significant progress has been made towards establishing the new service, including:
  - A draft constitution
  - A draft structure
  - A draft service specification/delivery plan
  - Job Descriptions for a new manager and deputy
  - Briefing for staff on TUPE implications of the service change
8. The SSC Board has also established a Community Engagement Board, with representation from all LAA blocks.

### **Funding 2007/08 and beyond – the need to reconsider**

9. There will be no ring-fenced element for community engagement for 07/08. It is thus for the BSP to decide whether to allocate funding from its overall resources to support the service in 2007/8. This is possible as there is a sum unallocated in NRF and Neighbourhood Element resources for 2007/8 of about £5m.
10. A separate report on the options for allocating £5m is on the agenda. The Board needs to consider this issue in the context of the Government's expectation of continued investment in community engagement.
11. However, this is the last year of NRF and the Board needs to have a view to the longer term and how to resource a sustainable service beyond March 2008. It is thus timely for the Board to consider a range of options for meeting its longer term community engagement requirements.
12. In November, the BSP Board agreed to commission a phase 2 review of community engagement to consider support for community engagement across all 4 LAA blocks. The aim is:
  - to support partnership working through more effective engagement between communities, community groups and service providers;

- to integrate community engagement services and thereby strengthen delivery of outcomes across the four LAA blocks.
13. Since the decision last year to establish the new community engagement service, there have been a number of developments:
- We need to factor into our thinking the emphasis on community engagement in the Local Government White Paper, including joint approaches with our partners.
  - We need to make best use of BCC / partners' staff that are already working with communities (eg Ward Support Officers, Housing Liaison Officers, Community Development Officers, Youth Workers) and neighbourhoods (Neighbourhood policing/tasking, Key individual networks, Neighbourhood watch).
  - We should consider what role the third sector might play in delivering LAA outcomes and how they might play it. This might involve promoting a social enterprise model and reducing dependency on grant income
  - We need to consider approaches to Community Engagement that also strengthens Community Cohesion
14. It would therefore be sensible to reconsider the scope of this phase 2 review, draw up fresh terms of reference and commission a review to be completed by July 07. We need to start with a clear set of objectives we want the new service to achieve and a set of principles upon which it should be founded.

### **The Way Forward - 2007/8 as a Transition Year**

15. It is thus proposed that 2007/8 is seen as a transition year, with funding approved of £750K to continue the core BANF and BCEN services. £750K does not include the full set of 'operating' costs. However this fund will allow work to be completed on the Phase 2 Review and fuller consideration to be given to a way forward in July.

### **Recommendations**

1. That work to establish the new Community Engagement Service agreed last year be suspended.
2. That fresh terms of reference for a phase 2 review of community engagement be drawn up and approved by the Programme Board. These should take account of the issues highlighted in this report, particularly those in paragraph 13.

3. That the Programme Board manages this work directly, in view of (a) its importance to all BSP stakeholders and (b) its relevance to all 4 LAA blocks.
4. That the recently established Community Engagement Board be stood down.
5. That £750K be allocated from NRF for 2007/8 to sustain BANF and BCEN through the transition phase.

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