

Be Birmingham Board 30th November 2007

Community Engagement

1. Purpose

To update the Birmingham Strategic Partnership on community engagement

2. Background

In July the Birmingham Strategic Partnership agreed four high level objectives for community engagement: -

- To communicate and consult effectively with local people about their experiences of living and working in Birmingham and their aspirations for the future
- To help to improve service delivery to the local people that is appropriate and meets their needs
- To enable the development of strong successful and cohesive communities by developing social capital
- To support the development of active citizens who are able to influence local decisions and play a full role in civil society

3. Current Position

Since July work has been going on in a number of different areas to help deliver these objectives. The task is to begin to put in place arrangements that will take forward whatever key priorities are identified by the Programme Board for community engagement as part of the Local Area Agreement.

Neighbourhood working

The neighbourhood is key to effective community engagement. There is already a wealth of activity at this level both community led (e.g. community groups and resident associations) and agency supported (e.g. neighbourhood element areas). The Single Neighbourhoods Programme that is being put in place will provide an effective framework for developing on experience to date. It will bring the benefits of: -

- Creating opportunities of spreading best practice
- Providing a promising way of making contact with the hard to reach groups
- Help build stronger and more confident communities
- Promote citizen engagement and support individuals to become active citizens.

Part of the process is to ensure that there is cross agency working, with an evidenced based approach to developments. Work has already begun on interagency cooperation on tackling the perennial problem boundaries and on making small area data available to locally based staff

Community engagement team

The BSP Team is looking to work up a model for providing support to community engagement across all agencies, which can be delivered at a local level. This will be cross a cross-agency approach, and the BSP Team will work with key stakeholders in its development. It is envisaged that this will be delivered at a constituency level in order to link in with the agreed arrangements for the local delivery of the Single Neighbourhoods Programme

Commissioning

Work is underway on preparing a single framework to enable partners to commission specific pieces of community engagement. It is proposed that the framework will include a schedule of pre-approved providers, which partners seeking to undertake specific community engagement can use. It will pull together a wide range of providers offering a range of specific services that the partners may need to call upon in delivering the LAA outcomes. This will enable the partners to match specific providers to the task in hand.

It is proposed that the framework, once established, will be managed and run by the third sector. As the commissioning framework is for all partners, the BSP will be leading on its development in discussion with key partner agencies.

Consultation & engagement database

Work has built on early discussions held between the City Council and Worcestershire County Council. Worcestershire County Council have in place appropriate software for such a database. The BSP and BCC are seeking to acquire the software. This will provide a resource for partners ensuring that consultation is coordinated more effectively.

Governance

The operation of the BSP and its related structures are being considered as part of the stocktake process in order to ensure that

Birmingham has an LSP that is fit for purpose. It is anticipated that arrangements will ensure that there is a broader involvement of the voluntary, community and faith sectors as well as dedicated neighbourhood partnership arrangements. It is recognised that there is further work to do in this respect and therefore specialist assistance is being sort to assist with this work over the next few weeks.

Task Group

The Programme Board Task Group has had one meeting. A workshop with extended membership will take place in December. One of its roles will be to act as a sounding board for the proposed developments in this field.

4. The Next Steps

It is important that the appropriate arrangements are put in place for community engagement for the new LAA. Work on a number of fronts is now underway, but it is recognised that there is a need to shape it further with the involvement of partners. In particular, the need to involve the community, faith and voluntary sectors in the development of the new arrangements. It is proposed to bring in a specialist Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser to work up proposals for this in January. Consultation is already underway on the Birmingham Green Paper on Vibrant Urban Villages. This will provide useful information and further proposals on neighbourhoods and community engagement will be brought forward in February 2008.

Jackie Mould
Director of Be Birmingham
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