

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**AUDIT BOARD**

**15TH SEPTEMBER 2008**

**LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIPS**

Responsible Member	Councillor Roger Hollingworth, Leader of the Council
Responsible Head of Service	Hugh Bennett, Assistant Chief Executive

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Cabinet (30th April 2008) agreed the findings of the independent evaluation of the neighbourhood area committees (now re-named local neighbourhood partnerships - LNPs). The Assistant Chief Executive was given responsibility for forming a third pilot in the "Hagley and Rural" area, improving the terms of reference of the LNPs and organising two stakeholder events, one on the third pilot and one with the all stakeholders on the potential expansion of LNPs.
- 1.2 The Performance Management Board have considered this report, but also asked that it be referred to the Audit Board for consideration, in particular, the terms of reference for LNPs.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Board consider the attached report and make recommendations to the Cabinet, as it sees fit.

**3. PROGRESS TO DATE**

- 3.1 Officers have had difficulty trying to work out the boundaries for each ward and a number of constitutional/legal issues with LNPs. The latter has now been sorted out (see terms of reference attached); however, the former i.e. the boundaries of each LNP remains a concern. A consultation exercise is now underway with two events planned in November and December for stakeholders to feed in their views. It is hoped that these sessions will unpick the boundaries issue. The consultation lasts until 3rd October 2008.
- 3.2 The consultation letter, boundary maps, draft terms of reference and consultation questions are set out in the Appendices of the report for consideration by the Board.

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 January 2007 Cabinet agreed to establish two LNPs in Alvechurch and Rubery. This was in response to the Leader and Leader of the Opposition's concern to devolve more decision-making to local communities and as a response to the then White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities".

- 4.2 As part of the pilots, it was agreed to carry out an evaluation. This was undertaken by a consultant funded from the Learning to Deliver Fund.
- 4.3 The White Paper has now become the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007). The Act represents a significant shift in the statutory requirements for local authorities for community engagement. Previously, we had a duty to consult, one of the “4Cs of Best Value”, whereas we now have a “duty to involve”.
- 4.4 Essentially, we need to move from what might be considered “arms length” consultation, to bringing our customers inside the process of Government. The flip side of this coin is that the vast majority of residents do not want to be involved more with the political process (only 20% of residents when surveyed expressed a desire to be more involved). This poses a challenge for us, which is further compounded by a general lack of clarity about the objectives of neighbourhood management. The Local Government Association, has set out ten objectives:-
1. Bring real power close to the people.
  2. Devolve power from central Government to local Councils.
  3. **Devolve power through local Councils to individuals, communities and local organisations.**
  4. **Strengthen local political leadership**
  5. Secure efficiently provided local services tailored to individual and local needs.
  6. **Steer all community public services to meet priorities agreed with local people.**
  7. Transfer key public services and agencies to local democratic control.
  8. Reform local taxation.
  9. Streamline inspection.
  10. Create an equal partnership between local and central Government.
- 4.5 While there have been some teething problems with the two pilots, there is a general agreement that they have added value, but need increased clarity, to be put on a more formal footing and that we spend more time refining the model before any expansion across the whole District.
- 4.6 3, 4 and 6 are highlighted above as these are the three objectives, which officers believe the Council should focus on for the three pilots. By providing each LNP with a budget and an opportunity to develop a neighbourhood plan that links into the budget process of the Council and its partners, we are devolving power i.e. money equals power to deliver change.
- 4.7 Given the relatively low public interest in being involved in political processes and also the change to the Executive/Scrutiny form of local government and creation of “front line” Members, LNPs provide an opportunity to strengthen the ward councillor role and to enhance three tier working.
- 4.8 Finally, ward councillors are uniquely placed to understand what matters to local people. With the increasing focus of Central Government on CPA, CAA and LAAs i.e. big picture, target driven management, the smaller, tactical issues, that residents often want resolved can simply be muscled out by this agenda. LNPs provide a forum for ward councillors, interested residents, senior officers and partners to discuss and resolve these issues.

- 4.9 The consultant who evaluated the pilots has made the following recommendations and the Council's response is set out in bold; these are in effect, the recommendations to the Cabinet.
- 4.9.1 A set of core objectives and terms of reference needs to be agreed for all LNP pilots. **Response: agreed.**
- 4.9.2 The emphasis of the LNPs should be to operate tactically between the strategic role of Bromsgrove Partnership and individual partner agencies rather than duplicating the effort of either and the operational and local role of PACT and other community fora. **Response: agreed.**
- 4.9.3 The Council rolls out the pilots to a further two areas, in consultation with local Members and key partners and with a clear commitment to the agreed objectives of the LNPs. **Response: Roll out one further pilot in Hagley after up front consultation with our partners that this is an acceptable way forward.**
- 4.9.4 As different opinions exist about the use of devolved budgets, we recommend that Bromsgrove District Council consider devolution of a small local budget to one of the pilots to enable it to deliver small scale local projects. **Response: provide the two existing pilots in Alvechurch and Rubery with budgets of £15,000 each and Hagley with a year one budget of £4,000, as per the first years of Alvechurch and Rubery.**
- 4.9.5 The important role of local members at Parish, District and County Council levels both as key links with their councils and as facilitators of local community action within the LNPs needs to be clarified. **Response: ensure the primacy of elected Members (all tiers) is built into the core objectives and terms of reference of the committees.**
- 4.9.6 Where Parish Councils exist they need to be encouraged to take part in the LNPs, influencing key local decisions and in some cases taking action to address these. Work needs to be done to clarify the respective roles of the LNPs and Parish and Town Councils. **Response: agree, the proposed third pilot in Hagley, has been deliberately chosen to provide a further opportunity to test the NAC model in a three tier area. Hagley Parish Council and CALC will be consulted in advance of this proposal being approved by the District Council. We also need to hold a stakeholder event for all partners to consider our approach beyond 2008/2009.**
- 4.9.7 In the original paper to Cabinet (January 2007) the concept of Area or Neighbourhood Plans was proposed as a key output from the LNPs. To date no progress has been made on these in either pilot. Simple, clear and measurable Area Plans which build on locally agreed priorities help to focus LNPs and aid clarity about the role and purpose of these groups, which is important in ensuring ongoing community support. **Response: agree. All three LNPs will need assistance to develop a simple, cost effective form of consulting residents on priorities, in order to shape these plans.**

- 4.9.8 National best practice suggests that some dedicated officer support for neighbourhood management processes is important. We would consider that this support falls into two categories: administrative support and senior level officer support. **Response: support to be provided by Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team; however, continued expansion will eventually require further support and a review of the number of evening meetings that senior officers are being asked to attend.**

## 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The original approved budget bid for a pilot neighbourhood office be re-focused to provide the funding as set out in this report i.e. £34,000, less the £8,000 already set aside for the two year one pilots.

## 6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The evaluation report identified the need to put the LNPs on a more formal footing, particularly, as the amount of money delegated has increased. However, if the LNPs were to be formally constituted, all aspects of the Council's ethical governance framework, access to information rules would apply to their members, their meetings and all business transacted by the LNPs. This would prove cumbersome for this type of scheme. Therefore it is proposed that the legal status of the LNPs remain as a consultative forum and that authority is delegated to a Senior Officer to hold the budgets and make payments on receipt of a request from a LNP which is lawful and falls within its terms of reference.

## 7. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Council Priority – Sense of Community.

## 8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Lack of agreement from stakeholders.
- Lack of sound governance.

8.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

- Consultation with stakeholders on this report.
- Terms of reference for each NAC with Equalities, Legal and Democratic input.

## 9. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

Resolution of local issues that impact on resident's quality of life.

## 10. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

The Equalities and Diversity Forum and Disabled User's Forum have similar process of being able to bid for funding through each budget round.

**11. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

Spending aligned to local priorities.

**12. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues - N/A
Personnel Implications - None at this stage.
Governance/Performance Management -N/A
Community Safety inc Section 17 Crime & Disorder Act 1998 - N/A
Policy - N/A
Environmental - N/A
Equalities and Diversity - N/A

**13. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holders	No
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director (Services)	No
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	No
Head of Financial Services	No
Head of Legal & Democratic Services	No
Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

**13. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Consultation Letter  
Appendices 2, 3 and 4 – Boundary Maps  
Appendix 5 – Terms of Reference  
Appendix 6 – Consultation Questions

**14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

30th April 2008 Cabinet Report - Neighbourhood Area Committee Evaluation  
19th August 2008 PMB Report - Local Neighbourhood Partnerships.

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