



Community Engagement

An Overview Report of the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee

1 Introduction

1.1 A key part of the Local Services and Community Safety portfolio is to ensure the

2 BANF and BCEN

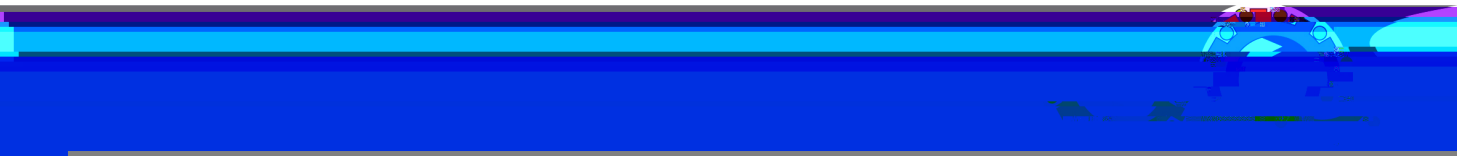
The Organisations

- 2.1 Two of the dominant bodies in community engagement in Birmingham at the moment are the Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums (BANF) and the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network (BCEN).
- 2.2 BANF is an independent company which receives a Council grant. It provides support in design, printing, training, dispute resolution and operational guidance to Neighbourhood Forums. It is a membership organisation with Neighbourhood Forums sending delegates to Association meetings. Neighbourhood Forums are resident groups that constitutionally agree to a set of “democracy” norms. These include holding AGMs and holding a minimum of 3 public meetings each year. BANF



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- 3.4 This leads to the question of how such people are held accountable to their local community. BCEN's preference is for seeking active citizens willing to organise themselves rather than impose a structure on them, which is more appealing to some people. Indeed, the advantages of having a range of bodies is that it reflects the different ways in which people want to get engaged in civic life: there are those concerned with a particular issue or area, those who simply wish to improve their immediate locale, those who are happy in the more formal atmosphere of a Neighbourhood Forum and those who prefer the looser Network approach. However, if people are appointed onto WABs and DSPs, there needs to be some form of accountability back to the community they are representing.
- 3.5 Whilst the funding given to BANF and BCEN is not large by City Council standards, it is significant and of course the Council has to ensure efficient and appropriate use of its money no matter how small. The main concern here is duplication: are we funding different people to do the same thing? When looking at community engagement generally, the aim is to increase capacity not restrict

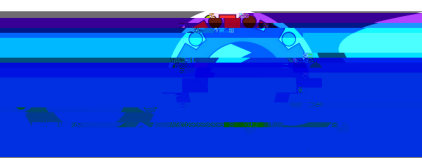


most, whilst very committed, are white and over 60. There is particular difficulty in attracting young people and young families.

- 4.12 Greater numbers of participants means the Council is less open to accusations of relying on the “usual suspects” to legitimise actions. It also reduces the possibility of “burn out”, whereby certain individuals are over-relied upon to fill community and voluntary roles, resulting in those individuals being unwilling or unable to participate further.
- 4.13 BCEN's approach – the networking philosophy – works to ameliorate this by providing a support mechanism, and allowing skills and information to be shared amongst participants. Mentoring and training are an important part of this, so that new individuals are ready to take the place of those who wish to stop. Members are also supported via the covering of small expenses and local resources.
- 4.14 But numbers of people is not the full story. The level of engagement means ensuring that the expectations of community representatives are realistic. Too often, people are expected to understand and fit in with existing Council structures. Yet, unsurprisingly, few people enjoy attending Committee meetings, voting for motions, have treasurers etc. They want to get the job done, e.g. set up a youth club. It is important therefore for the Council to start where people are, and build the structures that would encourage participation, including reduced bureaucracy and good communication.
- 4.15 This goes back to the point made earlier about providing appropriate support. Whilst it is true that some individuals tended to focus on single issues, these people can be encouraged to become involved on wider issues. This again requires development with individuals.

5 The Proposal

- 5.1 The BSP have begun a process of evaluating the organisations involved in community engagement in Birmingham. The first phase looked at BANF, BCEN and BStrong. The proposal presented to the BSP is to approve 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. It is further proposed that the role of BStrong should be the subject of a 2nd phase review which will look at the wider range of services that support community engagement.
- 5.2 The Committee met with those undertaking the BSP review at an early stage and we were able to have input into the outcome of that review. At that early stage, the Committee was clear that the current situation is no longer acceptable and that a single organisation or service to support delivery community engagement outcomes is the best way forward.
- 5.3 The advantages of a single organisation lie in:
- : as already noted, the client groups for BANF and BCEN are much the same, and certainly have similar support requirements. A single organisation would eliminate this and therefore be more cost-effective.



- The sharing of [redacted] would make a single organisation or service better placed to provide the support and guidance necessary to help maintain the stability of groups, without losing any specialisms.
- [redacted] a single service could work more effectively to full city coverage, with the infrastructure to cover the entire city. Also there is the opportunity to reach all types of community – for example, a new service could be more inclusive of communities of interest as well as those of place. This supports our findings on faith, which found that faith groups felt distant from Council structures, though there is involvement in some DSPs and WABs. There are no Constituency based multi-faith organisations, and a single organisation operating at a Constituency level would be able to fill that gap.
- A single service with a strong framework would enable clearer [redacted], and the City Council to insist on certain standards, both for organisations and those individuals participating. The importance of this is discussed further below.

5.4 The Committee found plenty of good practice across the board and this should not be lost. We certainly would not want to lose the strong local level involvement that has developed. It is hoped that the new service would be able to ensure the good is not lost.

5.5 There are some key principles to which we strongly suggest this new service adheres. Firstly, it should have clear terms of reference, which is monitored and to which mechanisms are attached

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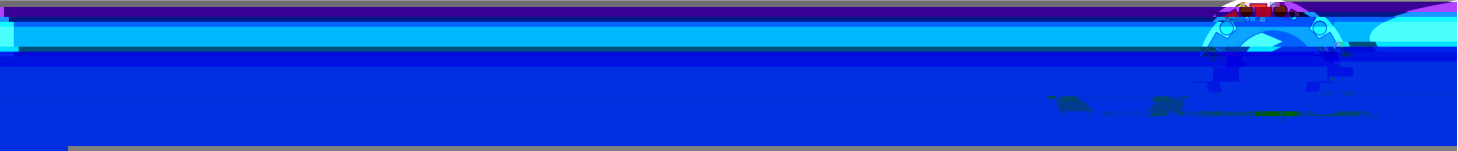


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Attempting to cover the full extent of community engagement across the city is an extremely tall order, and the Committee offers the following suggestions.

Other Bodies

- 6.2 Firstly, there is the place of other community engagement groups and initiatives in this debate: as already noted, WABs, LDGs and other Council structures have representatives from a range of community-based organisations: Housing Liaison Boards, Residents Associations, Friends Groups (e.g. Friends of Cotteridge Park, of Brandwood End Cemetery, of Hall Green Library). The latter groups receive some support from the Council, via BSTRONG or other community development schemes, but there is no consistent pattern.
- 6.3 Neighbourhood Forums work alongside Residents' Associations. It was pointed out that the two bodies were complementary and highlighted that there were some people who preferred to be involved in a smaller group rather than a Forum. Residents' Associations feed issues into the Forum. In addition, the network of street champions furthers the development of a layer of active citizens which in time should lead to greater robustness within community organisations.
- 6.4 The Committee also suggests that Parish Councils should be considered within the review. 1.3(s



schemes have been developed in different Constituencies for engaging their communities in, for example, identifying strategic priorities". The Scrutiny Review of Devolution and Localisation found that:

"...examples of public engagement through the Districts bore good comparison with the Government's view of what is good practice nationally and noted their apparent interest in developing neighbourhood arrangements."

Scrutiny Review of Devolution and Localisation (City Council 11 July 2006)

6.8 Many of these schemes are detailed in the Scrutiny Review of Devolution and Localisation and it is not our intention to repeat them here. The point is to show that there is a great deal being done in the city to involve people in the governance of their local area and in the development and maintenance of their local area. Having a multiplicity of ways in which people can engage can only increase capacity, and given that it is not always easy to get people to engage, the Council should be looking to maximise this.

6.9 "Communities of interest" – i.e. those who are drawn together because of similar experience, interests or concerns

The Role of Elected Members

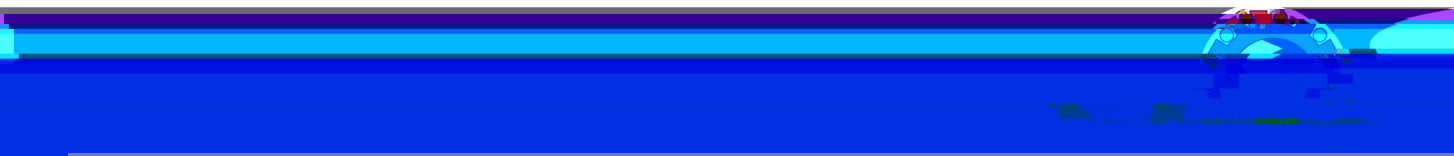
6.13 There needs to be an open debate about the role of Elected Members. There is often concern expressed that increasing community engagement diminishes the role of local, democratically elected councillors. From our findings it is clear that that is not and of course should not, be the case. The role of Elected Members is critical. It is important to emphasise that community engagement is not a substitute for community leadership but something which supports that. Members need to hear the views of a variety of people from different communities of place and interest in order to inform their decision-making, but the ultimate decision-making lies with those Members.

Suggested Action

2. That the BSP incorporate the additional findings of the Committee into Phase 2 of their work, and that the Committee continue to be involved as appropriate.

7 Motion

That the suggested actions in this report be endorsed and that the Cabinet Member be requested to report back on progress to the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee in six months time.



3.2 The report made a number of recommendations and set out 3 options for future delivery of engagement services. The 3 options were:

1. The development of a consortium approach to deliver community engagement outcomes through the LAA process.
2. The merging of the services to create a single mechanism to deliver community engagement outcomes through the LAA process.
3. The commissioning of a new service to provide the service specification to deliver community engagement outcomes through the LAA process.

3.3 The Reference Group agreed to recommend option 2 to the BSP.

4.1 As part of the review a new specification has been developed to underpin the delivery of the new service arrangements. This is included as part of the background paper. The specification makes it clear that the new service must be fit-for-purpose in delivering the BSP requirements and will:

- a. Deliver the specific community engagement outcomes identified in the LAA and any required through the annual 'refresh' process.
- b. Work with citizens and partners in the SSCF block to promote and provide interventions that will assist in the delivery of the objectives, outcomes and targets within the LAA.
- c. Engage with the 2nd phase review to better integrate community engagement structures and services across the 4 LAA blocks.

4.2 The new service will be delivered within the existing budgets for BANF and BCEN

- a. The Board approve 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.
- b. The Board request an implementation plan for its October meeting.
- c. The Board approve the wider recommendations from the Review.
- d. The Board approve the commissioning of a second phase review and ask for a draft scoping paper to be presented to its October meeting.
- e. The Board ask the SSCF block to:
 - i. Oversee the 2nd phase review;
 - ii. As part of this process to develop an Engagement Strategy for the City;
 - iii. To consider establishing an Engagement Board to oversee delivery of community engagement services;
- f. The Board agree to defer a decision on the role of Bstrong until after the 2nd phase review;
- g. The Board approve the draft Service Specification as the basis for the commissioning of the new service.



Community Engagement

Appendix 2: WAB Membership –



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From the Scrutiny Review

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(Shaded boxes ind

Constituen cy	BCC Constitu ency	Housing	POS	Other	Member	Service	Other		
Edgbaston	Constituen cy Director	J	J	ECU Reg. Services		OCU Com'der	Divisional Officer	J	
Erdington	J	J	J	Reg. Services C, YP & F	J	Inspector	Assistant Divisional Officer	J	Womens Aid Connexions O

