

REFERRALS TO COUNCIL – 11 FEBRUARY 2013

B. DEMOCRACY WORKING PARTY – 31 JANUARY 2013

69 NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING

The Working Party considered a report by the Chief Executive that had been presented to the Cabinet at its special meeting held on 28 January 2013 and would be discussed by the Council at its meeting on 11 February 2013. The purpose of this report had been to seek the Cabinet's approval for the development of a neighbourhood working approach across constituencies in Wirral, in order for services and community engagement to be more effectively and efficiently configured, targeted and delivered.

Members were reminded that the Council had been looking at how it could deliver neighbourhood working more effectively for a couple of years now. It was important that the Council found a way to make what it did with its communities more meaningful, join up the front end of its services and ensure public engagement. Officers had researched the workings of models in operation elsewhere. The present eleven Area Forums were not neighbourhoods but some Members felt that they were more representative than the four constituency areas.

It was reported that to bring about change it was important to work with ward Councillors on how neighbourhood working models based on constituency boundaries could function. Discussions had already been held with the Police and Fire and Rescue Authorities and Health partners on how they could work with the Council on this initiative. They had all indicated that they were willing to adopt the proposed model to help them set their priorities for local areas.

It was also reported that the Department of Adult Social Services and the Children and Young People's Department were considering what reconfiguration would be necessary to assist neighbourhood working in the future using the proposed model. The Working Party noted that neighbourhood working was a massive, ambitious and radical piece of work in terms of the future shaping of the Council.

Members who attended Area Forums that enjoyed a high attendance rate considered the proposed new approach to be a dilution of localism not an enhancement. They believed that the ability to meet locally was very important because people would not travel long distances. They questioned Paragraph 2.2 of the report and informed that local Councillors had played a significant leadership role all along and that this was nothing new. They identified a need to demonstrate neighbourhood working was the best way to achieve a flexible response to residents' issues. They asked how maximum participation could be balanced against efficiencies etc.

Some Members disagreed with the conclusion of Paragraph 2.3 that the proposed method of neighbourhood working would operate across organisational boundaries ensuring residents and services worked together to improve their neighbourhood. They also challenged the figures informing that the West Wirral Local Area Forum did not cost £1,300 per annum to administer. In fact some Members considered that the new structure would cost more than the current one to administer.

Some Members referred to Paragraph 2.4 and emphasised their view that the proposal would not provide them with greater opportunities than they already had at present. They informed that they would like to see more local bodies feeding into the constituency bodies.

The Working Party turned its attention to Appendix 2 of the report and queried where the Public Service Boards which would co-ordinate the strategic delivery of a Constituency Committees sat in the neighbourhood working structure. Members also queried whether it was the intention that people who had not been elected through the democratic process would have a say on neighbourhood expenditure etc. Reference was made to the recent 'What really matters' public consultation exercise and some Members requested to have sight of the findings (in a further paper) that had led to the drawing up of the proposed neighbourhood working models because they did not believe that they represented the best way forward. They also proposed that the report be withdrawn from the Council's agenda so that the contradictions within it could be further considered and so that more consultation could be undertaken on the way forward. They commented that if a long term arrangement was to be put in place it should involve informed choice.

Some Members referred to the neighbourhood arrangements that Cheshire West and Chester Council had adopted and, in particular, the specific "pot of money" it had allocated to local Members who were able to use it to provide grant aid to organisations etc. as they saw fit within their wards. Also, it was proposed that research be carried out to ascertain the best practice of Rochdale and Oldham Councils and others who had already gone down the devolution route.

In answer to the points raised The Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement informed that the intention was not to take power away from localities. In fact planning decisions could be devolved locally. Also, Members would be able to choose to direct services and funding to their local areas. Neither Parliamentary Constituency boundaries nor those of wards represented neighbourhoods. She reported that the recent consultation exercise had involved officers speaking to approximately 25,000 people over the last three/four months by going out into their communities and meeting them. She advised Members that localism was not about meetings it was about having conversations within communities.

The Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement accepted the point made regarding Local Area Forum administrative costs informing that £1,300 per annum was the average cost. The proposals related to the whole of the Council's budget and how it could operate in future. There were financial implications, the Council wanted better outcomes for local people and discussions would be held on what was appropriate to devolve down. She also referred to how the neighbourhood working structure fitted with the Public Services Boards and agreed to provide a revised structure chart for Members' information.

The Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement also reported that the neighbourhood working proposals would ensure more democratic control. Members would decide on the spending and on who could have voting rights. These matters had not yet been determined and the detail would need to be worked up by Members with

officers' assistance. The point was made that Community representatives did sit on the Local Area Forums currently. An explicit question on the neighbourhood working structure had not been asked during the consultation exercise. Staffing costs would be met from existing budgets and appointments would be made from across the Council.

The Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator was in attendance at the meeting and she referred to Community Engagement Groups and reported on community rights within localism. She referred to the 'What really matters public consultation' and informed that questions had been asked around joint services and assets. The findings were that people wanted the Council to explore this further in order to bring about a deduction in costs.

The Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator made reference to the different levels of attendance at the Local Area Forums, proposed that the Working Party should discuss roles and responsibilities and options for participation as lots of people did not like to attend meetings.

The Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator made reference to two documents used as part of the research phase of developing the report on neighbourhood working and proposed that Members visit some of the areas detailed within them:

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Report – Working in Neighbourhoods, Active Citizenship and Localism – Lessons for Policy-Makers and Practitioners

This report set out the findings of a Working and Neighbourhoods project, which the JRF ran in Bradford Metropolitan District from 2009 to 2011.

- North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Report – NW Neighbourhoods – The power to improve your neighbourhood, Your Place and Mine

This report was the result of regional research looking at the changing face of neighbourhood delivery across the North West.

A Member who had visited Rochdale informed that the Rochdale model may not necessarily suit Wirral's needs. However, it was noted that sharing other Council's best practice did provide short cuts and lessons on what had been learnt from the mistakes of others.

A Member referred to Paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 relating to Public Services Boards and Constituency Committees and registered concerns about creating levels of bureaucracy. The Member commented that the proposal illustrated the potential for a very refreshing community way of working that fitted with localism but the devil was in the detail. The Member was keen for the Working Party to put together a proposal on how powers, resources etc could be deployed. It was proposed that the report on the proposed neighbourhood working model be taken forward for discussion at the next Council meeting on 11 April 2013. It was proposed that more work was required to flesh out the proposal and that the Working Party carry this out, as soon as

possible and work up the details and make recommendations on how the model should develop.

Another Member referred to the success of the Community Safety Partnership and broadly supported the proposal as it would make local communities better and safer.

The Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement informed that it was no longer appropriate for Neighbourhood Engagement Officers to spend most of their time in the town hall. They needed to be based out in local communities. She acknowledged that there should be local variations to the neighbourhood working model as it would not be a one size fits all approach.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Democracy Working Party notes that the report will be considered by the Council at its meeting on 11 February 2013;**
- (2) the Democracy Working Party's terms of reference be widened to include giving consideration to neighbourhood working arrangements and making recommendations on how this can be achieved effectively and efficiently;**
- (3) the Democracy Working Party be provided with the following information at its next meeting so that it can give serious consideration to exactly what is being proposed and why so that it is able to make recommendations to the Cabinet and the Council on how the future neighbourhood working model should be shaped and varied to suit local communities:**
 - clarification on why this particular model has been proposed, including background information;**
 - more detail on how the model might look;**
 - a summary of the reports and best practice of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership;**
 - detail of any linkages with other Council decisions as the model must not be developed in isolation; and**
 - a revised Appendix 2 to the report to include Public Service Boards.**

C. CABINET – 7 FEBRUARY 2013

186 NOMINATION OF MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR FOR MUNICIPAL YEAR 2012/2012

The Cabinet was requested to make nominations for the positions of Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the Municipal Year 2013/2014, which would then be submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the following nominations be made for the Municipal Year 2013/2014 at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 13 May 2013:

- **Councillor D Mitchell for the role of Mayor; and**
- **Councillor S Foulkes for the role of Deputy Mayor.**