

1. Governance Strand of the Neighbourhoods Project – How People Can Influence Local Decision Making

1.1 Action requested of the Board / Group

1.1.1 To approve proposals to establish Solihull Partnership Local Forums on the basis set out in this report.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 One of the aims of the Neighbourhood's Project is to develop an agreed framework for how people are able to influence decision making in the place that they live. At your meeting on 7th January, you received a report on progress being made in respect of the Neighbourhoods Project. At that time, work on this governance strand of the Project had been largely limited to a number of fact finding visits to look at involvement of local people in local decision making in other parts of the country. You noted that learning from those was being used, alongside discussions with stakeholders, to develop a proposal for how people can influence decision making about the place that they live in for consideration at today's meeting.

1.2.2 This proposal set out in this report is concerned with how people can influence decision making about the place that they live in but we recognise, however, that as well as living in geographic communities, people also belong to communities of interest or identity and need opportunities to influence the decisions that affect these communities. We also need to ensure that there are suitable opportunities for them to do this.

1.3 Key Issues

1.3.1 The following principles have been developed upon which, it is suggested, our framework for how people can influence decision making is based. These principles have been developed and refined in discussion with a variety of stakeholders:

- (a) People should have the ability to influence:
 - What happens in their neighbourhood;
 - What happens in the wider local area (their locality);
 - The overall priorities for the Partnership.
- (b) Further developing what already works well in Solihull such as neighbourhood working and some effective residents groups;
- (c) Working with people to jointly design and deliver solutions to local issues (co-production);
- (d) Enabling elected Councillors to be leaders in, and for, their Communities;
- (e) Our approach is shared across the Partnership and link clearly to the Partnership's governance structure.

1.3.2 Existing arrangements across the Partnership have been reviewed against these principles in discussion with stakeholders.

1.3.3 At neighbourhood level, the view of stakeholders is that we need to continue to develop and build on what we already do, utilising the effective working and good relationships that already exist in many parts of the Borough. Examples of ways in which local service providers work with local people to identify and tackle issues at neighbourhood level include:

- Development of annual ward action plans using information from Councillors, residents groups, partner organisations, complaints and ongoing issues raised throughout year.
- Community priority setting meetings and beat surgeries ran by neighbourhood police teams with input from neighbourhood management teams and other partners.
- Monthly drop in sessions ran by Council Neighbourhood Coordinators.
- Surgeries held by Ward Councillors.
- Surveys of affected residents and groups – carried out (e.g. by neighbourhood teams) to gauge how residents feel about an issue or to assess views on a specific proposal.
- Local service providers, local Councillors and residents working together to identify and tackle local problems such as anti-social behaviour and local 'grot spots'.
- Clean ups and other action taken by environment champions to improve their area.

1.3.4 In discussion with stakeholders, it is recognised that we need to continue with initiatives that seek to build community capacity to engage where it is not strong at the moment and to join up and coordinate what partners are doing at local level as much as possible. The community engagement pilots that the Governing Board agreed to on 9th July 2009 are testing out a variety of different methods of engaging communities and building community capacity at neighbourhood and ward level. The HELP project in Smith's Wood (sponsored by the Healthier Communities Board) is piloting a community led, neighbourhood self management approach. The Stronger Communities Strategic Group is keen to support a pilot based around Babb's Mill Park in Kingshurst which will aim to increase community ownership of the park and tackle issues around anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. We are also currently in discussion with the Neighbourhood Resource Centre for Central England about how they could support local service providers and residents to work together to tackle local issues in Fordbridge.

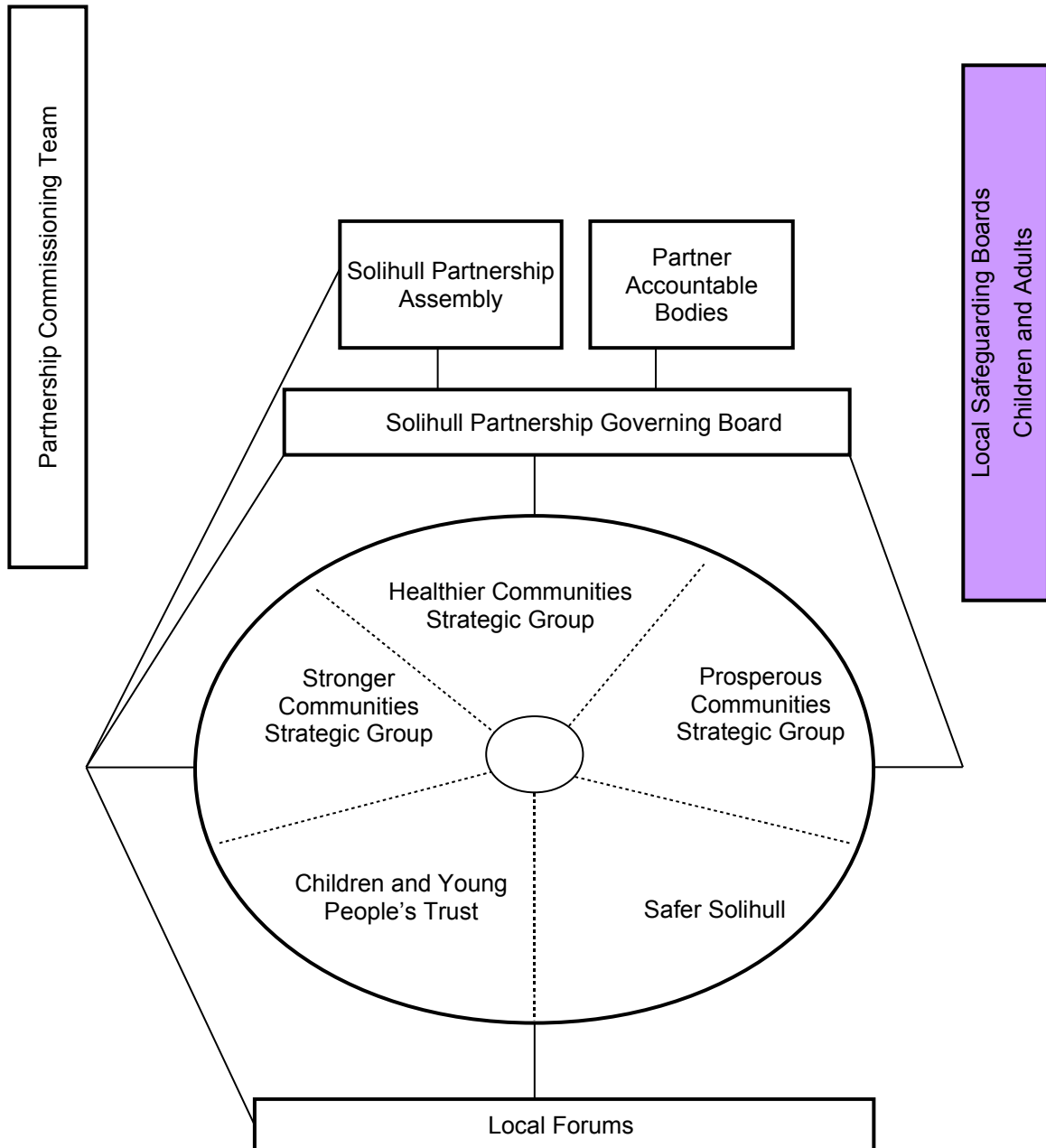
1.3.5 At locality level, it is clear from discussions with stakeholders that there is a gap – there is no coherent framework for people to be able to discuss common issues and to be able to influence partnership priorities and commissioning across localities. There is also a perceived need for greater transparency about the work of the Solihull Partnership and more influence for local stakeholders over its work and a closer relationship between the work that takes place in the structures of the Solihull Partnership, local ward Members and other local stakeholders such as Parish Councils and Residents Groups. To address these issues, the proposal is for the Solihull Partnership to create local Forums to provide a channel for communication and consultation about the work of the Solihull Partnership, inform the Partnership's priorities and plans and help to ensure that what local partners are doing contributes fully to achieving the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

1.3.6 Specifically, the remit of the forums would be to:

- (a) Provide an opportunity for information exchange and dialogue about the work of the Solihull Partnership and local work to achieve the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- (b) Give local stakeholders a direct opportunity to influence the work of the Solihull Partnership's Strategic Groups and vice versa.
- (c) Influence the Partnership's priorities (and specifically to input into the process of revisiting the Partnership's priorities and refreshing the Sustainable Communities Strategy that will take place over the coming year as agreed at your meeting on 2nd March).

- (d) Identity how common issues and priorities for the locality can be addressed.
- (e) Be consulted about significant policy or service development proposals affecting the locality.

1.3.7 Essentially the proposed forums are more localised and frequent versions of the Partnership assembly and might be described as ‘the assembly on the road’. They would be part of the Partnership’s Governance Structure as shown below.



1.3.8 Draft operating arrangements for the forums are set out at Appendix ‘A’.

1.3.9 If you agree to establish the forums, it is suggested that there be a formal review of progress by the Partnership Commissioning Team towards the end of their first year of operation e.g. after the first 3 rounds of forum meetings. This will look at whether the forums are achieving their aims of strengthening local involvement in priority setting and improving knowledge about and involvement in the work of the Solihull Partnership.

1.4 Stakeholder Involvement

1.4.1 I have sought to involve a range of stakeholders in developing the proposals in this report. I have discussed draft proposals with members of the Solihull Partnership Governing Board, members of the Neighbourhoods Project Board and the Partnership Commissioning Team. The main points that have emerged from these discussions are:

- The neighbourhood level is the best level for most involvement as it is where issues that matter to people can be tackled by local people and service providers working together.
- There is perceived to be value in discussing at a locality level issues and concerns that are experienced across neighbourhoods in that locality.
- The locality level is an appropriate one to have a dialogue about major issues that affect a locality e.g. major changes to public service provision, major regeneration proposals.
- Partnership forums would allow a 2 way dialogue to take place to influence both strategic priorities and what local partners are doing to support the achievement of these priorities.
- A concern that locality forums will only appeal to the already involved and that this will compromise their ability to bring in new information and points of view.

1.4.2 A Task and Finish group made up of 7 elected Councillors has also met 3 times - 11th February, 22nd March and 13th April – to consider proposals for involving people in local decision making. Their views are:

- Neighbourhood issues should still be dealt with at this level. Neighbourhood coordinators are key in action at local level and should be empowered to act.
- In principle, partnership forums would be worthwhile but their constitution need careful consideration. There should be two forums in Solihull given its size.
- The need to ensure that in any given area the right people were engaged.
- These bodies would provide an important locality link into the work of the Partnership, particularly with the involvement of local Members.
- Ward members are key stakeholders. They are present in each ward and consistent for at least 4 years and can bring continuity.
- The Forums should have some “clout” in the form of having influence over decision makers rather than acting purely as “talking shops”.
- A view that participants in the forums should be there to contribute to improvement rather than solely to scrutinise the action of others.

1.4.3 These views have been used in shaping the draft operating arrangements for the proposed forums (Appendix A).

1.5 Contribution to the Sustainable Community Strategy

1.5.1 The proposed Forums will ensure that the priorities in the Sustainable Communities Strategy are informed by local priorities and that local partnership working is fully aligned to achieving these priorities.

1.6 Resource Implications

1.6.1 There will be an additional cost of £10-£15k per annum associated with the servicing of forum meetings which will be funded from within existing budgets

1.7 Implications for Equality and Diversity, and Sustainability

1.7.1 The approach set out in this report aims to ensure that there are opportunities for all our communities to influence decision about matters that affect them.

1.8 Supporting information (attached as appendices)

Appendix A: Solihull Partnership Local Forums - Draft Operating Arrangements

1.9 Contact Person

Sarah Barnes, Project Manager (Neighbourhoods), 0121 704 8347

1.10 Background Papers (available on request)

- Reports to Solihull MBC Neighbourhoods Task and Finish Group, 11/2/10, 22/3/10, 13/4/10

Solihull Partnership Local Forums – Draft Operating Arrangements

Areas Covered

It is proposed that there will be 4 joint liaison forums:

- (a) Lyndon, Elmdon, Olton and Silhill wards;
- (b) St Alphege, Shirley East, Shirley West, Shirley South and Blythe wards;
- (c) Castle Bromwich, Smith's Wood, Fordbridge & Kingshurst, Chelmsley Wood wards; and
- (d) Dorridge and Hockley Heath, Knowle and Meriden wards and Bickenhill wards

In drawing up these proposed boundaries we have tried, as far as possible, to group areas with similar characteristics and issues together and to keep each forum to a manageable size. Some topics e.g. Solihull Town Centre or Birmingham International Airport will affect 2 forum areas and will need to be considered by both affected forums. We can always adjust the boundaries if there is a need to do so.

Key Principles

The forums will operate according to the following key principles:

- They are action rather than just scrutiny forums. Participants are there to contribute to improvement by taking active responsibility for those things that they can influence.
- Participants are open and honest with each other.
- Participants treat each other with respect, recognise each other's contribution and raise issues constructively.
- The purpose of the forums is to discuss collective issues and not to raise individual issues. Any individual queries should be raised with the relevant service provider outside the meeting.
- Any actions agreed at a forum meeting are carried out as agreed. Draft minutes should be circulated within 1-2 weeks of the meeting to help with this.

Membership

Membership of each forum will comprise:

- Elected Councillors (all ward councillors in each locality).
- Key local service providers (Neighbourhood Manager, Neighbourhood Police Inspector, head teacher representative, GP practice based commissioning consortia representative).
- Parish Council representatives.
- Residents groups representatives.
- Voluntary and community sector representatives.
- Representative of businesses in the locality

Participants must have a legitimate right to represent a local organisation or group. Forum members would have to provide evidence that they are part of and have been nominated by a local organisation or constituted residents group. In the case of any dispute about who is entitled to attend, the Head of Partnership Commissioning shall make the a decision.

Arrangement for Chairing Meetings

Each meeting would be chaired by a representative of the Solihull Partnership. The most appropriate Partner to chair each meeting will be determined according to the nature of the agenda, for example, if the main focus of the agenda is about action to promote healthy lifestyles then a member of the Healthier Communities Strategic Group would chair the meeting.

Frequency and Location of Meetings

Meetings will be held 3 times per year

The location(s) for meetings will be agreed by each forum. Depending on the locality, it might be appropriate to hold meetings in one central location or to rotate meetings between venues in different parts of the locality.

Agendas

The proposed agenda for the first meeting (to take place in early July 2010) is:

- Solihull Partnership Video (to give a rapid introduction to the work of the Partnership's Strategic Groups)
- Presentation about what statistics and surveys say about this area; these will be drawn from ward profiles and from the various needs analysis carried out to inform partnership strategies.
- Discussion about whether these give a true picture of what it feels like to live in the area and about the key issues facing the area over the next 5 -10 years.

The focus of the second meeting (to take place in early November 2010) will be to identify what the Partnership's priorities should be over the next few years in the light of the key issues that we identified at the first meeting.

Thereafter, it is proposed that the agenda for meetings would be set using the

- i) Minutes of previous meeting / matters arising
- ii) Presentation on an aspect of the work of the Solihull Partnership e.g. the work of one of the Strategic Groups and discussion about what's happening locally that could complement this
- iii) Consultation on any significant proposals affecting the locality
- iv) Discussion about an agreed topic of common interest, sharing experiences and identifying action that participants can take to address the issue.
- v) Identification of topics for discussion at future meetings

Support Arrangements

The Solihull Partnership Commissioning Team will be responsible for coordinating the work of the forums, ensuring that they are considering the right things at the right time to influence the work of the Partnership. Servicing of meetings will need some additional resource but we will seek a low cost solution to this e.g. paying a clerk (similar to the arrangement for clerks to school governors).

Communications and Feedback

There will be regular communication with Forum members which will be done electronically where possible. The outcomes of forum meetings will be incorporated into relevant agenda items for

strategic groups and the governing boards. We also communicate the work of the forums through the partnership website, newsletter and any other partnership communications.

14th April 2010