

Localism in Birmingham: A Framework for Future Policy, March 2018

Introduction

This paper summarises the framework for policy on localism within the city over the next period. It is based on the work of the Assistant Leaders over the last eighteen months, reporting to the Cabinet Committee Local Leadership and consulting with members across the council. It takes into account the reduced level of resources available to the City Council and the widespread desire to provide more local leadership at the ward level, within a very different pattern of wards from May 2018. Detailed proposals will be developed for all aspects of this framework.

Overall objectives and priorities

The overriding focus of this work is to improve service delivery in neighbourhoods and bend the organisational culture of the council and the wider public sector towards neighbourhood priorities and needs. There is strong commitment from partners to this agenda which can be built on. Empowering councillors in their local leadership role is critical to achieving this.

Citizens and communities must also be able to participate in setting local priorities and to take action themselves, recognising the rights and responsibilities of everyone in the city and the value of collective action for the common good. Building stronger communities and “Neighbourly Neighbourhoods” is as important as economic and physical improvements. The city needs to be a healthy city in order to be a prosperous city and this includes having a healthy democracy and opportunities for people to make a contribution.

This includes a commitment to a “Whole Place” and “Whole System” way of working – improving the way that the whole range of services and resources are deployed together to achieve outcomes. Creating stronger local leadership is a journey, not a single event, but by setting clear objectives and a framework for how we will work together, we can focus on delivering changes that make a difference to outcomes in neighbourhoods.

Form must follow function, so the structures of governance and service delivery we develop must be designed to suit the outcomes we are trying to achieve, rather than arbitrary boundaries or pre-existing approaches. Our measures of success are:

- Services being different, better suited to the area, and more efficient
- Officers working for “one council”, putting shared outcomes and local places first, not their service or directorate
- Local councillors having more influence on services

- Residents feeling they are more in control of their services and their local area.

These are the acid test of what we are trying to achieve with our policy for localism. Above all we must avoid paying lip service to 'devolution' and focusing on bureaucratic processes, and instead take action to improve our neighbourhoods: maximising influence, leverage and power locally, working with citizens and partners.

Local services and resources

The top priority is to improve the key local services that every citizen experiences in their neighbourhood and this means making them more responsive to different local needs and problems.

We will:

- Align the existing resource provision to support work at the ward level, by May 2018
- Steadily increase the influence of local people over services through their wards (particularly the services that the public see) as far as practicable, in a phased programme that realistically reflects the resources available in the years ahead. This will include creatively redesigning services from the bottom up to help implement Ward Plans – engaging local people in the process of prioritisation for the local area. Note that these are not to be confused with more formal neighbourhood 'spatial' plans, in 2018-19
- Seek opportunities to make external service contracts more open to local influence, both in existing contracts and as they come up for renewal. in 2018-19
- Seek ways to enable local organisations to provide additional services and activities that help improve neighbourhoods, in 2018-19
- Substantially intensify our focus on income generation opportunities to bring in external funding to local areas, in particular working with community organisations to help them secure more funding, in 2018-19

Existing work is in place to identify "relationship managers" in key services who will ensure that they respond better to issues and ideas arising at the ward level and we will also explore how to establish stronger engagement between all senior managers and particular localities in the city. We will bring forward a detailed options paper on how we can create more local responsiveness and influence across a defined range of locally facing services, both within each service and at the ward level, bringing services together, within available resources. A good example is provided by the work in Adult Social Care and Health on Neighbourhood Networks, which will support a community work approach and put the emphasis on "prevention first".

Ward based working

A key element of success in the years ahead will be working effectively in the new pattern of wards. The new wards and neighbourhoods within them will be the basic organisational building blocks for the new approach, following abolition of the district structure. Updated guidance will be issued on the role of Ward Forums and councillors and on Ward Plans, including working in single member wards and across wards.

We will:

- Support every ward in setting up a Ward Forum in partnership with local organisations and seek resources to provide officer support to work at the ward level. This will include single member wards after May 2018, in 2018-19]
- Enable cross-ward working where there is local support and it will enable local objectives to be met more easily, in 2018-19
- Require councillors in every ward to develop a Ward Plan, working in partnership with citizens and organisations in the local area. These will provide the means for planning and delivering on the local priorities identified by local residents, in 2018-19
- Use innovative ways to involve residents and local organisations, for example to create and update the ward plans ensuring they are built with citizens and reflect genuine local priorities. Our aim will be to make sure the “quiet voices” in every community are heard, not just those who are already engaged, including better mechanisms for engaging council tenants, in 2018-19 and beyond
- Give wards better data on council assets and service specifications in order to decide locally how best to use assets most effectively in line with city wide plans and strategies. Ward and neighbourhood level data will be significantly improved and mainstreamed within the council’s systems, to support ward based planning and performance management, in 2018-19 and beyond
- Clarify support available to councillors in their ward role and continue to develop a better member development programme that will help them perform that role more effectively, by May 2018
- Develop a policy on the use of local referendums where significant regeneration involving the replacement of housing is proposed, in 2018-19 and beyond
- Review the operation of Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy and pilot new approaches to ensure positive engagement and local support through the new roles and ward governance arrangements at a local level, in 2018-19 and beyond
- Publish a “green paper” on how we work with parish and town councils and how more local councils can be created across the city and conduct a summer of

engagement on future models of ward governance - initial paper to Cabinet in March 2018 with 'white paper' to follow in September 2018.

Locality “devo deals”

Where strong governance and accountability is in place, such as a parish or town council that is operating effectively and inclusively and engaging the whole community, then we recognise that there may be a wish to go further and to operate appropriate services at a more local level. So, we will make local organisations a new offer: a Local Devolution Deal. The aim will be to unleash creativity and ideas in our communities and early local 'devolution deals' could become pilots for the rest of the city.

We will:

- Develop a Local Devolution Deal process and work with communities to identify ways of strengthening local democracy and services, in 2018-19 and beyond.

Engagement and commitment at the top level

If localism is to make a difference then senior managers and the council's Cabinet must be fully committed and engaged in the needs of different local areas of the city. We mention above that we will explore ways to link all senior managers into different local places in the city. We need a similar commitment from Cabinet Members.

We will:

- Ensure that Cabinet as a whole and every Cabinet Member is fully engaged in this agenda so that it is integral to the corporate policies of the City Council. The newly appointed Cabinet Advisor on localism will have an important role in ensuring this happens, by May 2018
- Ensure that senior city council managers are fully engaged with the localism agenda and specific local places in the city and responsive to local issues as they arise through dedicated ward 'champion' roles and proactive liaison with ward members, ward forums and the ward planning process, by May 2018

Next steps

Many of the commitments made in this policy framework will be followed up by further detailed reports, guidance and reviews during the year ahead. There will also be consultations and a "summer of engagement" on "working with neighbourhoods". We want to engage as many people as possible in the debate about the next chapter of the story of how Birmingham is run.