

Birmingham Partners – The Birmingham City Partnership Group Update Briefing for BIIP

Context

The Kerslake report recommended the development of a new approach to city-wide leadership. Following publication of the report, a number of public debates were held, organised by NewsinBum and facilitated and hosted by Birmingham City University and the University of Birmingham. The high level of engagement with these debates, both through the events and social media, demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment from a wide range of stakeholders in the city, to work together for the good of the city. Responses and perspectives were diverse and varied but number of clear key themes emerged;

- The need for more collective leadership across the public, private and community sectors, underpinned by mutual trust.
- Acknowledgement that Birmingham has a great deal to be proud of as well as significant challenges.
- The wish to focus on the positives rather than to be constantly re-iterating the challenges.
- The importance of ensuring that any new leadership approach is diverse and inclusive and informed by continuing dialogue.

For the City Council in particular, Kerslake highlighted a number of gaps and deficiencies in Birmingham's approach to partnerships that had already been identified by others such as Lord Warner and feedback from our own consultations, e.g. Budget consultations, various events and previous surveys done with partners within the previous Be Birmingham environment. The Council recognises these issues and wants to work to address them, but to also take the opportunity to take a more holistic view of partnership working generally. Whilst the Council and a number of partners have invested heavily in partnerships in the last decade there has been little collective progress on key issues such as employment and skills, social inclusion, (until recently) vulnerable children, child poverty, health and wellbeing. This suggests that existing partnership models have not been fit for purpose or complicit in a system that has not been fit for purpose and that new ways of viewing and delivering partnerships need to be considered. It is also fundamental to what is being developed with Birmingham Partners so that we are not doing more of the same or packaging old, defunct models as something new.

We should also be clear about what Birmingham Partners is not. It is not a hierarchy. It does not seek to replace or override the democratic accountability of elected members. It is not responsible for the performance and functions of the City's existing partnerships. It is not an exclusive group of the 'great and the good'. It does not allocate funding. It does not have a formal budget. Rather, it is an attempt to 'wire a network' of existing partnerships from the city to district to community level, harness the potential of collaborative working and move the city forward into a more positive, shared and connected future.

Purpose

Birmingham Partners will have as its primary objective the continued development of a positive shared vision for Birmingham and an understanding of how individual stakeholders can contribute to its achievement. Once a shared vision is agreed, Birmingham Partners can then begin to 'influence the mainstream' – linking organisational objectives, strategies and policies to provide more coherence and synergy across the public, private and voluntary sectors. As the group evolves, we envisage that it could become more forward-looking, anticipating 5,10 and 20 year positions for the city and identifying emerging cultural, scientific, technological and economic trends and breakthroughs that would benefit Birmingham the most.

The Council is in the process of developing its own '2020' vision. This will need to tie in with the city vision where appropriate – where themes are beginning to settle in both areas at the present moment in time, they don't look to be widely divergent.

The Steering Group

The role of the current Steering Group is to help develop a new narrative for Birmingham, which reflects the many positive aspects of the city and to provide a collective and inclusive approach to leadership. Ultimately, Birmingham Partners should be a coalition, not a committee. The Steering Group is working with, not for, the City Council and reaching out beyond the traditional municipal landscape to connect with leaders in other sectors.

The Steering Group will provide an informal forum to bring a wide range of stakeholders together. It will support innovation by increasing understanding of the current and potential contributions of those stakeholders. The group will support the development of a new Birmingham story by inviting the involvement in its work of key influencers such as business leaders, and MP's and others that have regular and important opportunities to raise awareness of Birmingham externally.

Key objectives:

- Developing a shared vision for what Birmingham could and should be
- Prioritising actions necessary to deliver this vision
- Identifying how sectors and organisations themselves can contribute directly to the delivery of the vision, and to complement the activities of the City Council
- Building self-belief and confidence in our ability to deliver this vision
- Improving the effectiveness of civic and wider leadership
- Improving the reputation of the city and its collective leadership

The current membership of the Steering Group is broadly representative of the various sectors within the city that Birmingham Partners is seeking to attract. It is comprised of a group of interested individuals who have come forward to work with the Council to launch this initiative. As Birmingham Partners develops into its role as a consensus, coalition and influencing group rather than having direct responsibilities for budgets and assets, we will need to identify a key group of influential partners who reflect the collective assets / levers available to the city and who could form a loose

'leadership' group, linking in to the wider partner networks both inside and outside the Birmingham Partners world.

Activity to Date in this area

Background to the development of the Steering Group and it's thinking

The thinking behind Birmingham Partners has come from a variety of different sources.

- In February, the Council hosted an informal gathering of interested partners to hear their responses to the Kerslake report and to take some soundings around the recommendation for a city partnership group, and what partners felt that should and should not look like.
- Professor Cliff Allen (BCU) and Jerry Blackett (then Chair of the Chamber of Commerce) bought forward a more structured proposal for a Birmingham Partnership Group that would join up the agendas of individual interest/sector groups, encouraging innovation, creating opportunities through the connection of previously silo'd activity and bring together those partners who control the main resources consumed in Birmingham, both financial and other
- Professor David Eastwood (Vice Chancellor, University of Birmingham) hosted a private dinner with guests from all of the key partner areas across the city, which looked at the role of a Birmingham Partnership Group and considered concerns around issues such as democratic mandate, ensuring local involvement and learning points from previous work in this area
- The Council hosted a workshop in April that invited key partners to share respective plans about future roles and delivery models, identify points of consensus and divergence and spot opportunities for future collaboration, co-ordination and alignment.

Steering Group Activity to Date

The Steering Group met for the first time on 27thMay, and discussed how to initially take the creation of the CPG forward. Catherine Staite (UoB) undertook to draw up a paper outlining a potential approach to wider engagement with partners, and the steering group agreed to hold an event on 8th July, focussing on the question "what makes Birmingham great".

The event on 8th July was held at the MAC with over 70 representatives from partner organisations invited (attendance approx. 40). Invitees were nominated by all members of the steering group including members of previous working groups and new nominations made by those members and the Future Council Team (where gaps have been identified). The main focus was on developing stakeholder engagement and input to scoping the ideas and responses to two questions:

- What's great about Birmingham?
- What will make Birmingham successful in the future?

There were 43 commitments to lead conversations, host events, provide information and become part of a communications team. These offers are now being followed up in order to co-ordinate activity – partners at the event agreed to take responsibility for engaging their networks, communications channels and resources in developing the ideas and responses to the event's two questions

Alongside this, Diane Kemp (BCU) has taken the lead in creating www.birminghampartners.com, twitter and facebook accounts for the group. Work continues to add content to these – the steering group have been asked to take the lead until more organisations come forward to become involved in Birmingham Partners. The website will be the coordination and focal point for the “What makes Birmingham Great” campaign, which will be taking place in August and September. The campaign seeks to promote an ‘asset based’ approach – ie concentrating on we have and how we can build on this and maximise it, rather than a ‘deficit based’ approach – what we don’t have and what is missing. It will be an important step in building the collective, more positive narrative for the city, as well as raising awareness of Birmingham Partners, promoting a new way of working and encouraging people to join in.

Planned Activity Going Forwards

Post September plans still need to be fleshed out in more detail with the steering group – which will be happening over the coming weeks. We have discussed slippage against the original timescales set out in the Kerslake Action Plan with Sally Hammond (on behalf of the Panel), and have been told that provided we can demonstrate the rationale for the delay (ie we are taking our time to develop something that looks and feels different), this shouldn’t be a problem. For the purposes of this update, current timelines are as follows:-

Pre September 11th

- Meeting of Steering Group with BIIP – we hope that this will take place in advance of the Panel’s public meeting on 11th September
- We need to flesh out the plan for Birmingham Partners going forward, and add more detail to the below

Post September 11th

- A second Birmingham Partners event is planned, hosted by UoB and will look at a variety of key themes posed by partners such as
 - How will the Birmingham Partnership ensure that the City Plan brings real opportunities and that these are seized?
 - How will the Birmingham Partnership engender and maintain a sense of purpose, belonging and benefit for each partner?
 - How will a sustainable governance structure be established?
 - How will the Birmingham Partnership ensure maximum benefit from national and European policies
- Alongside this, the steering group will continue to explore a number of overarching themes through the above dialogues which will unite a wide range of interests, including local economic growth (within the context of the wider West Midlands agenda), education, aspiration, social inclusion, inequality, culture and quality of life. These themes can then be used as building blocks for the creation of the city vision.
- From September onwards, we need to ensure that there is targeted engagement with wider elected members on the Birmingham Partners initiative and the creation of the city vision.
- Members of the Future Council team will be meeting with partners / stakeholders across the city as part of the wider Future Council programme, and as part of these discussions will be asking partners about ‘Birmingham Partners’ and how they might want to be involved, what

their expectations are, what they could bring to the table. This piece of work will continue through the coming months

October

Feedback from the September event, ongoing summer activities and the steering group's work will be used to draw out the key themes and develop a draft vision.

December

City vision formally agreed with Birmingham Partners and with City Council

December – March 2016

Once the vision has been agreed and signed up to, we need to formally develop any governance arrangements for the wider Birmingham Partners and clearly establish roles and responsibilities that will enable the group to move into the "influencing the mainstream" space.

This would be the period where we seek to identify the key influential partners that could form a 'leadership' group going forward, bearing in mind that membership of this group will flex and change dependent on the areas of focus and where resources lie.

March – July 2016

Formal launch of group – firming up of any governance arrangements, prioritisation of activity (in line with the city vision)

How will we know we're making a difference?

One of the main challenges from the BIIP is for us to be able to demonstrate that the way the Council has operated in the partnership space is changing. This can't just be through perception surveys (although they will play a part) – the whole process of creating Birmingham Partners has to look and feel different, and we need to carefully balance taking time to properly embed, develop and commit to new ways of working with the need to demonstrate a degree of pace in terms of delivery. As the Council moves to change its own behaviours in the partnership world, partners will also be making changes of their own in terms of their relationship with the Council and with each other, and we need to allow for a certain period of adjustment whilst everyone finds their feet.

Appendix 1 – City Vision Cycle

