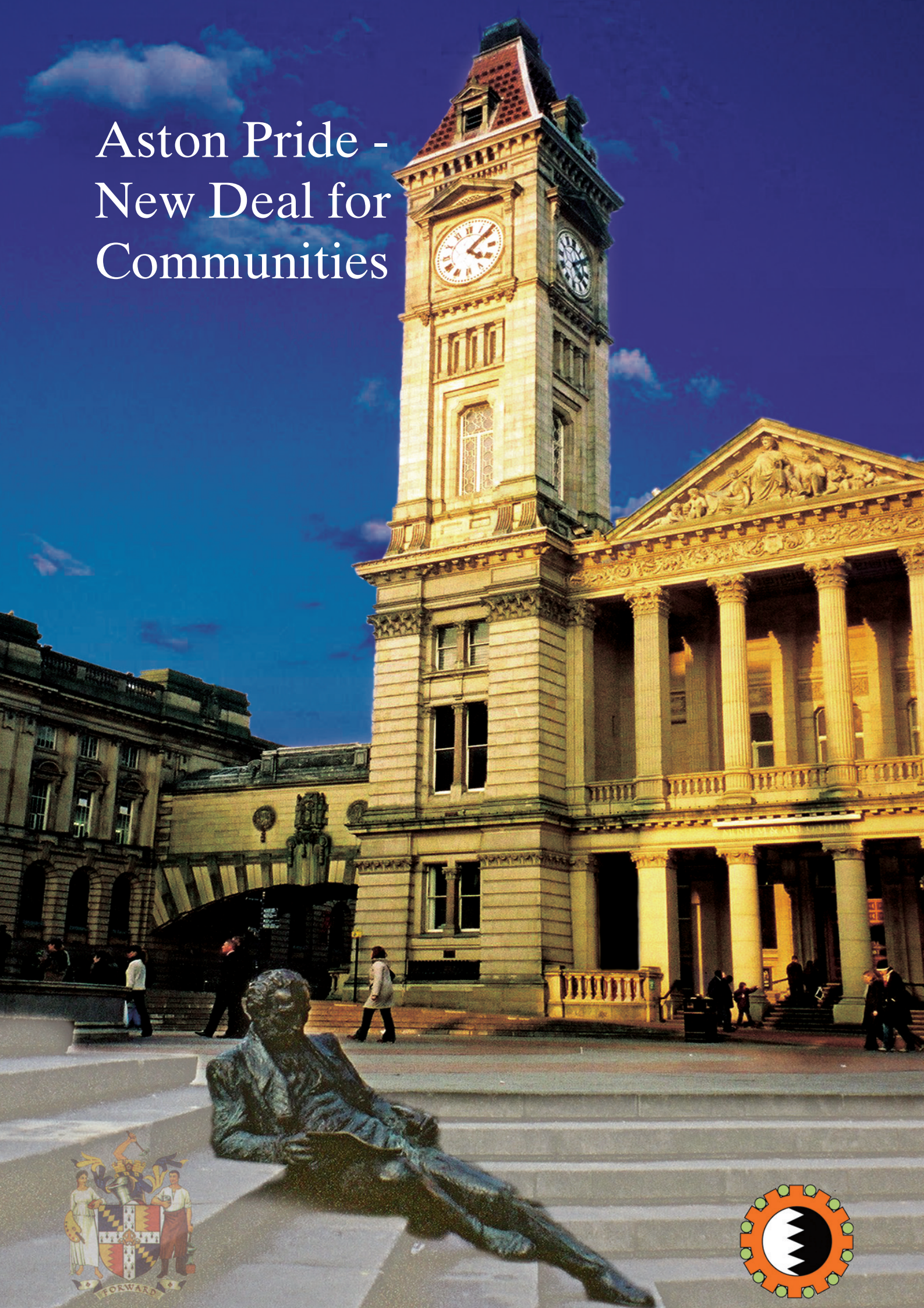


# Aston Pride - New Deal for Communities





## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

6 April 2004

Report of the Regeneration Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee

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# Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

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## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

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## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

# Preface

**By Councillor Nigel Dawkins**

Chairman, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee



At the beginning of 2000 a group of people came together with goodwill to bid for regeneration money with the high expectation that it would help transform the communities of Aston. They gave their time and commitment to this ambitious and challenging task. Some were unpaid representatives of the local communities, and some were senior professional staff of statutory bodies. All were united in an overwhelming tide of optimism, excitement and high expectation.

Yet, almost three years later, in March 2003 on the instructions of the then Minister, Tony McNulty, Aston Pride Partnership Limited ceased to be the delivery vehicle for the £54m New Deal for Communities programme in Aston. This was the culmination of a series of highly publicised events that eventually led to the creation of a new Delivery Partnership in April 2003.

The Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided, in June 2003, to investigate the events leading to these decisions. Our broad investigation sought to answer three questions:

- Did Aston Pride fail?
- If it did fail, why did it fail?
- What lessons can be learnt for the future?

Our intention was to find answers, and not to find scapegoats. Throughout this piece of work we have been impressed with the work and dedication of all those involved with Aston Pride. We have also been impressed by the way witnesses have brought such a constructive viewpoint to our Committee. Many witnesses, although deeply disappointed with the past, were nevertheless keen to ensure that lessons could be learnt for the future. They were grateful for their first opportunity to put forward their point of view.

At the heart of our investigation were the relationships between people; people who had different perspectives, different interests and different backgrounds. Much of our work was seeking to discover how events had affected those relationships for the good, and often for the worst, and how inevitably those very relationships themselves began to affect events.

In this report we have tried to incorporate a degree of humility into our findings and our conclusions. Trying to disengage cause from effect is a difficult task as is trying to answer an endless series of 'what ifs?' Yet we believe that our conclusions are robust; many of them, in fact, having already appeared in previous Scrutiny reports.



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We are extremely grateful to all those who made written submissions and came to talk to members of my Committee. We have attempted to respect their confidences and to do justice to them all. I present this report in the positive and constructive spirit in which they all gave their evidence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. D. M.' or similar, written in a cursive style.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

# 1: Summary of Key Issues and Conclusions

## 1.1 Introduction

### Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

1.1.1 New Deal for Communities (NDC) is an Area Based Government Initiative (ABIs) launched in 1998. Community based partnerships were invited to bid for funds usually in the region of £50 million. At the moment there are Partnerships in 39 deprived neighbourhoods in England and are carrying forward ten year programmes designed to reduce gaps between themselves and the rest of the country in relation to five key outcomes: crime, education, health, unemployment, and housing and the physical environment.

The overall ten year Programme is to cost about £2 billion. The initiative is neighbourhood based, managed by local partnerships and each NDC area has, typically, between 1000 and 4000 households.

At the beginning of 2000 a community based bid was submitted by a group called the Aston Pride Partnership made up of community groups, statutory bodies, residents, neighbourhood forums and City Councillors. In June 2000 the Government Offices of the West Midlands announced that the Aston Pride Partnership bid had been successful and was award £54 million.

In October 2001 the Partnership Board agreed that they should become an incorporated body and would be called Aston Pride Partnership Limited.

In March 2003 on the instructions of the then Minister, Tony McNulty, Aston Pride Partnership Limited ceased to be the delivery vehicle for the £54m New Deal for Communities programme in Aston.

In April 2003 a new non-incorporating body, Aston Pride Delivery Partnership became the new delivery vehicle for the New Deal for Communities programme in Aston.



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### 1.2 Summary of Key Issues

- 1.2.1 This review examines the circumstances leading up to the Ministerial intervention in March 2003 that required the partners – the City Council, Learning & Skills Council, Job Centre Plus, Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust, Birmingham Social Housing Partnership and West Midlands Police - to establish a new Delivery Partnership for the Aston Pride New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme.
- 1.2.2 The issues that arose within the Aston Pride Partnership that resulted in Ministerial intervention were:
- Expectations that **Aston Pride would be “community led”** resulted in fundamental differences within the Partnership at an early stage. These differences resulted in a collective failure to establish a shared vision for what Aston Pride would be, what it would achieve, and how it would become an effective agent of change for the people and communities of Aston. The “community led” concept discouraged the kind of interventions that could reasonably have been expected to resolve the difficulties within the Partnership
  - The Board of the Aston Pride Partnership was plagued with **mistrust and hostility** that eventually left it dysfunctional and ineffective, despite the commitment and passion of its members. It became a battleground between conflicting interests rather than the centre of effort on the huge task of transforming Aston. Members of the Board collectively lacked the experience, skills and understanding necessary for the effective leadership and direction of a complex £54m 10-year regeneration programme, and were not provided with effective training and support to assist them in their onerous task.
  - **Incorporation** – the creation of Aston Pride Partnership Ltd as a Company Limited by Guarantee – proved a major distraction for the partnership from its key task of delivering benefits to the residents of Aston. Not only was it a huge distraction but it also reinforced an illusionary concept of independence from those statutory bodies that it actually needed to embrace. It also locked in the current membership and made future required changes to the constitution almost impossible to implement, changes necessary to resolve difficulties relating to the accountability of the members of the Board and the representative balance of the Board in relation to gender and ethnicity.



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- The **number, skills and experience of staff** available to support the effective governance, programme management and delivery of Aston Pride were hopelessly inadequate. The project started with four and it ended with four. The small Programme Team did not receive adequate induction, training or support, and lacked the capacity to deal with the complex issues that arose as Aston Pride developed. There was a fundamental failure of the partners and Board to resolve this problem quickly.
- **Mechanisms for project development**, appraisal, approval, delivery and evaluation were confused, and there was no clear performance management framework for Aston Pride. It was therefore difficult to judge progress, both in developing the Partnership and in starting to deliver benefits to the residents of Aston.

1.2.3 Ever since the 1980s regeneration has increasingly focused on approaches that are 'community owned' and 'community led'. These concepts are laudable, but have not always been thoroughly defined. Such approaches saw local community organisations not only as beneficiaries of regeneration but central to the decision-making process itself. This approach also made the role of statutory agencies, including local government, less clear and has required the evolution of new structures, relationships and skills.

1.2.4 Many of these issues have arisen in other NDC programmes in England, and are reflected in the concerns raised by the NDC National Evaluation Team. The summary of key issues arising from the National Evaluation is reproduced in Appendix 4.

### 1.3 Summary of Key Conclusions

The following section is a summary of the conclusions listed in Chapter five of this report which fall under the following headings:

#### Did Aston Pride Fail?

1.3.1 In March 2003 when the Minister intervened relationships within the Board were commonly perceived to be beyond repair. Most witnesses have agreed that Aston Pride Partnership Limited, the delivery vehicle for the programme, had all but ceased to function and had outlived its usefulness and a new beginning was required. One witness said it was "the best thing that could have happened". This was a commonly held belief. This then answers our first question; did Aston Pride fail? Yes it did. Had our witnesses believed that the solution lay in giving it more time or believed that some part was broken and that once fixed it could continue we may have concluded differently. However, in general, our witnesses did not believe this. Therefore, despite the considerable achievements during those three years and despite the huge effort and dedication of people involved, we conclude that Aston Pride did fail because it





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was a ten year programme that had stalled irretrievably after three years. Of course we recognise that the funding remains and that a new delivery partnership emerged from the ashes in April 2003 to take forward the programme. However, it must be recognised that the old Aston Pride Partnership was the culmination of a long, hard process that began when the community first bid for those funds at the beginning of 2000. That process effectively ended when a new delivery vehicle was created in April 2003 and the old delivery vehicle discarded. The structures and the relationships that had taken three years to build, all of that work came to an abrupt halt in March 2003 in a atmosphere of recriminations and rancour. As we have said earlier this is not to say that the old delivery vehicle did not achieve a great deal because it did. Nor is it to say that the new delivery vehicle has not learnt lessons from the old Partnership or taken and progressed work begun by the old Partnership because all of these things are true. However, what is also true is that the old delivery partnership, had stalled prematurely and that this must be recognised as failure.

### **If It Did Fail, Why Did It Fail?**

#### **Hostility and Mistrust**

- 1.3.2 It is hard not to conclude from the evidence that the main factor that led to its poor performance, and eventual demise, was the hostility and mistrust that existed between factions on the Board, mainly between community representatives and the statutory bodies and those Board members representing those statutory bodies. It was this hostility and mistrust that then made the entire enterprise vulnerable to the other problems that beset Aston Pride. In some cases it was the mistrust that exacerbated these other problems. In other cases the problems exacerbated the mistrust. It was mistrust that was a contributory driver for incorporation to achieve independence from the City Council. The Board meetings would have been more effective without hostility and mistrust; negotiations over staffing could have been perhaps more quickly resolved without hostility and mistrust. Had everything else functioned well perhaps this hostility could have been eventually overcome. Unfortunately, however, everything else did not function well.



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### **Failure to Create and Embrace a Common Philosophy**

- 1.3.3 There was a failure to imbue all participants with a common philosophy, a shared vision in the New Deal philosophy and to define what 'community led' meant.
- 1.3.4 It is clear that participants and Board members had no common definition of what the purpose of Aston Pride was. They shared no common vision of how New Deal was to be different to previous regeneration projects. None of them had a clear or shared definition of what 'community led' meant. Many Board members just considered it to be a way of spending £54 million over 10 years via a range of projects. Some statutory Board members appeared not to understand that New Deal was looking for partnerships that required the statutory partners to find new ways of working.
- 1.3.5 The relationship between Aston Pride and the other bodies, the City Council and the statutory bodies was never defined. Nor was the importance of these bodies to the success of Aston Pride stressed. The importance of embracing and influencing these organisations was critical to the success of the regeneration of Aston.
- 1.3.6 If the Board was incapable of understanding this shared vision it should have been up to the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) and the City Council to ensure that it did understand. The fact that they did not was a serious mistake.

### **Failure to Ensure Adequate Resources**

- 1.3.7 There simply were not enough resources for Aston Pride to function. Almost all of our witnesses believed that there were too few staff to actually run the partnership and develop and implement the programme. This was within both the dedicated Programme Team and other staff engaged in the development and implementation of Aston Pride-supported projects. While we accept the comments we have received about the first year of the programme being a "planning" year, the programme appears to have been seriously under-resourced to prepare for effective delivery in year two and beyond. In fact, by March 2003 when intervention took place they had not managed to employ a single new member of staff.
- 1.3.8 This was a serious disadvantage. The pressure was continuously building to deliver projects and yet the staffing was simply not there to prepare projects adequately. This lack of resource had also the effect of demoralising many Board members and others who became disillusioned with the seeming lack of progress and demonstrable effect on the community.
- 1.3.9 The amount of administrative work falling upon the Chief Executive's team undoubtedly had some demoralising effect as well as blunting their ability to present a strategic view to the Board.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

- 1.3.10 It is clear that this logjam over the employment staff should have been broken. The inability of both the Aston Pride Partnership Limited and the City Council to resolve these issues was a serious blow to progress and that these issues were allowed to drag on in an ever debilitating way was a serious error.

### Ownership

- 1.3.11 Who owned the Aston Pride project? By this we mean who ultimately set the rules. It is a simple question but one whose answer was not clear to everyone. Many community representatives believed that the Aston Pride Partnership alone owned it. Perhaps their involvement in the long bidding process and sense of achievement at winning the funding for their area inevitably brought with it the unforeseen connotation of exclusive "ownership".
- 1.3.12 The community representatives' understandable assumption that "community led" meant "community ownership", coupled with the fact that they felt that it was they who actually "won" the bid, was a dangerous misconception and one that the GOWM and others seemed reluctant to correct. For many community representatives the winning of the bid was felt as a route to independence for them; independence from the statutory bodies that many felt had failed them in the past. The opposite was in fact true but this was never made clear during the bidding process. When it became necessary for external bodies to impose change or to suggest changes in the structure then suspicions arose among some of the community representatives, which then aggravated the mistrust.
- 1.3.13 Changes were suggested and concerns raised about governance issues. The GOWM raised concerns with the Board in October 2001, and confirmed these in writing in October 2001. The GOWM also provided the support of the National Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser from 2001 until April 2003 with regards to governance issues. However, that issues were being raised and advice given which was being largely ignored should have raised more serious concerns at an earlier stage and prompted action.
- 1.3.14 The GOWM finally asserted its ownership by changing the delivery vehicle in March 2003. Failure to intervene earlier in a more controlled fashion allowed damage to be done to both the credibility of the NDC project in this area and to the morale of all those involved. This should have been the one outcome that should have been avoided.

### Responsibility

- 1.3.15 Many Board members failed to measure up to their responsibilities as Board members and clearly missed opportunities to intervene at an early stage when things began to go wrong. In general their



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

perception was that fault – and responsibility for action - always lay elsewhere.

- 1.3.16 Although many had fears, not many actually took steps to correct the situation or to alert others to the problems. Our witnesses appear to have remained unduly optimistic that problems within the Board that became apparent as early as May 2001 would be resolved, but the expectation seems to have been that others would resolve them. We have found little evidence of Board members proactively looking for solutions to the problems. The 'falling off' of the attendance of representatives of the statutory bodies at Board meetings, in sharp contrast to the community representative attendance over the three year period, had the effect of further unbalancing the Board.

### Leadership

- 1.3.17 There seems to have been a lack of leadership at all levels. Government, through the GOWM, was the body with ultimate responsibility that failed to ensure the necessary support to the Board. It was the GOWM that legitimised Aston Pride. It was they who awarded the funding from public funds. It was their responsibility to ensure that the organisation vested with the responsibility to deliver was capable of doing that.
- 1.3.18 The original Chairman of the Interim Partnership Board appears to have provided real leadership in the early days of Aston Pride. However, when he left in July 2001 he was replaced by a democratically elected Chairman. He was in a difficult position as he also had responsibilities to the Neighbourhood Forum that placed him on the Board. He appears to have found it difficult to overcome this conflict of interest and was unable to offer the drive to control meetings and unite the Board that a Chairman needs to do.
- 1.3.19 Despite his hard work and dedication the former Chief Executive seemed unable to give the leadership or the vision. This may have been because his position was clearly under-resourced in terms of staffing or it may have been because some members of the Board saw him, unfairly, as a representative of the City Council and were suspicious. For a Chief Executive not to have the confidence and the support of a significant minority of the members of the Board is an untenable situation and one that should not have been allowed to continue.
- 1.3.20 Statutory members never appeared to bring extra resources to the table that could have helped to counter the mistrust against them. If the Partners did make additional resources available to Aston Pride, it is unclear what these resources were, and our witnesses strongly expressed the views that the resources available were insufficient to deliver the programme.



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- 1.3.21 Nor did Partners appear to bring a commitment to new ways of working within Aston Pride. The statutory body members never met outside of meetings, either with themselves as a group or with other Board groups or with the Chairman or Chief Executive. As their attendance eventually trailed off due to disillusionment so they further 'unbalanced' the Board.
- 1.3.22 The City Council should have shown much more of the strategic leadership within the Board that would have been expected from a major strategic partner. It did not attempt to demonstrate to the Board how it considered 'community led' was to be different from other regeneration projects. Instead it took a very 'hands off' approach. If one of the aims of New Deal was to enhance mainstream services it seems odd that the main 'mainstream' service provider had no protocols which could allow such things to happen. It never explored with the Chief Executive of Aston Pride mechanisms which could enable such changes within Council services delivered to the Aston area, to take place.
- 1.3.23 While we are left with the conclusion that strategically the City was taking a back seat and was not attempting to influence the agenda even in the face of severe difficulties, we have sympathy for the view that the Council did not want to appear to the community to be dominating the project, and that they should be deferential to the community representatives' perspective. Indeed other Councils have interpreted NDC guidance as explicitly forbidding local authorities from taking a lead role. However, this is more difficult to argue from the stage when the partnership began to experience difficulties, particularly difficulties that the City Council was intimately involved with such as staffing. The City Council was a major strategic partner. It had tremendous influence through its Board membership as well as its position as the Accountable Body and as a key implementation and delivery agency. It did not seek to co-ordinate its influence or to adopt a strategic view.

### Structure

- 1.3.24 The structure was inappropriate and ineffective. The Interim Partnership Board that bid for the funds became the delivery body with little modification. Little changed as it attempted to implement the delivery plan. There was pressure to submit the bid and once the bid was successful there was pressure to begin to deliver. The members of the Board do not seem to have been given sufficient time and space to resolve these issues before prejudices and antagonisms became entrenched. In addition the structure was now encumbered with the phrase 'community led'.
- 1.3.25 This was a phrase which brought with it high expectations for the community and for the community representatives. It brought with it an expectation of independence for Aston Pride that was unrealistic. The phrase was not clearly defined.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

- 1.3.26 Changes to the Aston Pride partnership's constitution were required as it grappled with the complex tasks ahead. Instead of reaching out, the Board turned in. The first significant change to the constitution, namely the incorporation of the Partnership into a company limited by guarantee, actually locked the partnership into a self-perpetuating structure. It 'locked' into Aston Pride the existing Board members. The second effect and perhaps the more damaging one was that incorporation was able to reinforce an illusionary notion of independence and isolation away from those very bodies and organisations that Aston Pride needed to embrace; the City Council and the statutory bodies. It was able to reinforce prejudices held by some Board members against the City Council. This reinforcement of independence made subsequent and necessary changes to the constitution, such as the introduction of directly elected Board members, that much harder, and in some cases impossible.
- 1.3.27 The failure of the GOWM to prevent incorporation taking place may also have further contributed to a false sense of independence within the Board.

### **1.4 What Lessons Can Be Learnt For The Future?**

- 1.4.1 The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership was born in the white heat of publicity and was under enormous pressure to deliver. That it managed to restructure and to begin the process of delivery so quickly is a credit to all involved.
- 1.4.2 Lessons have already been learnt and the new structure has attempted to correct some of the weaknesses of the original Aston Pride Delivery Partnership:
- There is no incorporated body.
  - They have an independent Chairman and an Acting Chief Executive who are both very well qualified with a great deal of experience for both positions.
  - It has a smaller number of members on the Board.
  - The Cabinet Member for Regeneration is on the Board and participates actively in the partnership.
  - Training appears to be mandatory for all members.
  - They are rapidly building up their staffing resources based upon secondments from the City Council.
  - The actions of the partnership are well organised and clearly focused.

These changes are to be welcomed.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

- 1.4.3 However, the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership has changed the balance between community involvement and programme delivery. It is a body primarily focused on delivery rather than the programme being "community led". Community representatives on the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership have been selected by a combination of direct election and appointments by an Independent Commission.
- 1.4.4 The legitimacy of those representatives appointed by the Independent Commission has been questioned by some. Questions will need to be answered regarding the legitimacy of the new Chairman and the Chief Executive. Despite their hard work both current holders are just temporary appointments. The Chief Executive position is currently being advertised. The current Chairman acknowledges that his is a temporary position although there is no policy as yet on how to appoint subsequent Chairmen.
- 1.4.5 However the hardest task before the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership will be to answer the question 'how is this different from all of the other regeneration projects that have gone before it?'
- 1.4.6 It is fundamental that the concept of 'community led' must not be lost. Therefore despite all of the good work currently being done we feel that the current structure should therefore, perhaps, be considered as an interim structure. There should now be a piece of work that attempts to look again at structure in an un-pressurised environment, seek opinions from professionals and community representatives and try to design a structure that can somehow combine the difficult tasks of project delivery, community involvement and community engagement.
- 1.4.7 It is important that the Aston Pride Delivery Partnership is seen to be representative of the diverse communities of Aston, and enjoys their confidence and trust. Indeed, wider involvement of the people of Aston in the regeneration of their communities is no less important than representation on the Delivery Partnership to the long-term success of Aston Pride. The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership should build on recent experience and continue to explore ways of effectively creating a structure that intimately involves the community in its work.



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- 1.4.8 To this aim we would draw attention to a number of factors that will be critical to the long-term success of Aston Pride:
- the role and legitimacy of community representatives
  - the need for continued training and support for all members of the Delivery Partnership
  - the involvement of local people and their communities in project development, appraisal, implementation and evaluation
  - communication with local residents and groups
  - Sustainability of Aston Pride's achievements beyond the 10-year programme.





## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

# 2: Recommendations

## 2.1 Background to the Recommendations

- 2.1.1 This scrutiny report is the third such report to investigate aspects of community based regeneration in this City in the last three years.
- 2.1.2 The first such report, "Priorities for Regeneration from a Community Perspective", came before the City Council in April 2001. The second scrutiny report entitled "SRB6 Programmes" came before the City Council in April 2003.
- 2.1.3 We were disappointed to find that few of the recommendations presented to the Council from the first scrutiny review in April 2001 appeared to have been adequately addressed in such a way that could be seen to have made a difference. Yet many of these recommendations precisely targeted those problems identified by this Committee in this report and had they been robustly implemented, they may have made some difference to the final outcome.
- 2.1.4 There are many of the recommendations from the second report that are also directly relevant to the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership although they were too late to affect the old Aston Pride Partnership Ltd.
- 2.1.5 Scrutiny Committees have now adopted a process of 'tracking' previous scrutiny report recommendations. In fact the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee revisited the recommendations of the second report in December 2003 and were assured by the outgoing Director of Economic Development that these were, in the main, achieved.
- 2.1.6 It would therefore be inappropriate to repeat those same recommendations within this report and we will trust in the new 'tracking' process to again revisit those recommendations in six months time.



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- 2.1.7 It is felt that our recommendations should therefore be concerned primarily with Aston Pride. We want our recommendations to be external pressure, via the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, from a 'critical friend' on the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership to seek answers and solutions in those areas that are felt to be essential if wide community engagement and community led regeneration is to continue.
- 2.1.8 We also wanted to recommend that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration introduce a more formal system of reporting for tracking the status and progress of bodies upon which we have some involvement or representation.
- 2.1.9 Our third recommendation seeks to find an appropriate mechanism for all relevant strategic partners to meet and share information regarding the various regeneration bodies that they have an interest in. We are aware that the City Strategic Partnership was the body that nominated statutory bodies onto the new Aston Pride delivery body. It may be that some mechanism can be found within the CSP to achieve this recommendation. However, a reading of the summary of CSP meetings since those nominations were made last year has produced little evidence that such a sharing of information is currently taking place.
- 2.1.10 Our fourth recommendation concerns the difficulty that this committee encountered trying to examine the minutes of Aston Pride. It was simply ludicrous that the Council was initially prohibited from examining the minutes of Aston Pride Partnership Ltd because of rules of confidentiality. Some action needs to be taken to ensure that that situation does not arise again.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

### 2.2 Recommendations

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
R1 To produce a status report on how the Aston Pride Delivery Partnership is progressing.  This Report will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What action is being taken to encourage and support the emergence of leaders from within the communities of the Aston Pride area.</li><li>• What are the perceptions of the communities in the Aston Pride area on the role and legitimacy of community representatives?</li><li>• How effectively is the Aston Pride Delivery Partnership reflecting the diversity of communities in Aston, and how does it propose to be accountable to them.</li><li>• How effectively is Aston Pride Delivery Partnership communicating with local residents and communities in Aston?</li><li>• What development and training have the Aston Pride Delivery Partnership and staff of the Programme had.</li><li>• The effectiveness of different approaches taken to involve local people and their communities in project development, appraisal, implementation and evaluation.</li><li>• How an exit or succession strategy for Aston Pride is progressing.</li><li>• Evidence of the added value and leverage of resources brought into the Aston Pride area by the statutory bodies.</li></ul>	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2004 and 6 months thereafter



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

R2	To introduce a more formal system of reporting to allow the Council to become informed of the status and progress of Regeneration bodies upon which the Council has some involvement or representation. These should clarify the Council's distinctive roles and its strategic expectations within such regeneration bodies and clarify the role and expectation that we would have for our representatives.	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2004
R3	To establish formal reporting mechanisms and co-operation between Government bodies, statutory bodies and the Council in order for them all to share a strategic overview of the regeneration partnerships in which they share an interest. In particular it should enable the sharing of information regarding the status and progress of such bodies and details of any significant difficulties.	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2004
R4	To ensure that legal agreements with organisations for which the City Council is funder, a strategic partner or Accountable Body is in place that ensure the availability of minutes and other documentation for Accountable Body and Scrutiny purposes, while respecting the confidentiality of commercially sensitive information and personal data.	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2004
R5	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis until completed. The first report should be within 6 months of the approval of these recommendations  Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.	Cabinet Member for Regeneration	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2004



## **3: Purpose and Methodology Of The Review**

### **3.1 Background**

- 3.1.1 Aston Pride is one of 39 New Deal for Communities partnerships in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England that have the objective of reducing gaps between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest of the country in relation to crime, education, health, worklessness, housing and the physical environment. New Deal for Communities is a flagship of the Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.
- 3.1.2 The Performance Plan Priority 2 Action 3 charges the Cabinet Member for Regeneration with the responsibility to "ensure effective arrangements are in place to deliver current New Deal for Communities [NDC] and Single Regeneration Budget [SRB] programmes with the City Council acting as Accountable body".
- 3.1.3 The background to this review was criticism from a number of quarters that the Aston Pride NDC initiative had failed to perform, leading to Ministerial intervention and a range of constitutional and management changes to the programme.
- 3.1.4 The Terms of Reference agreed for this review set out the following specific objectives:
- To develop a clear understanding of the issues that arose within Aston Pride which resulted in government intervention.
  - To assess if the solutions adopted offer the best balance to achieve both community involvement and programme delivery within the national policy framework for Neighbourhood Renewal.
  - To understand the new delivery arrangements, including governance and executive responsibilities, and to assess whether these arrangements will ensure successful delivery.

Background information on the Aston Pride NDC initiative is referred to in the Appendices to this report.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

### 3.2 Methodology

#### Written Evidence

- 3.2.1 Invitations to submit written evidence to this Scrutiny Review were sent to 41 individuals who had been involved in the initiative, including members of the former Aston Pride Partnership Board, community representatives and residents of the Aston Pride area, representatives of statutory organisations, and elected members and staff of the City Council.
- 3.2.2 Thirteen individuals submitted written evidence, which was presented to the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2003.

#### Aural Evidence

- 3.2.3 Following submission of written evidence, an informal working group of elected members of the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 6 occasions to hear evidence from 16 individuals. In addition the full Committee heard evidence from a further 5 individuals. These hearings enabled the members of the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explore individuals' experiences, perceptions and judgements in more detail.

#### Key Issues

- 3.2.4 The written and oral evidence provided to the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee demonstrated a range of significantly different perspectives, expectations and judgements in relation to key issues affecting the effectiveness of the Aston Pride NDC initiative.
- 3.2.5 These issues are explored in "Review Findings", below, and their implications considered in "Conclusions", below.



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# 4: Review Findings – Key Issues

### 4.1 The Meaning Of “Community-Led”

- 4.1.1 The language of Government about New Deal for Communities was that the programme was to be “community led”. We received clear evidence that the community representatives believed that the partnership would be community led, and that the City Council would have no influence over it.
- 4.1.2 We also heard evidence from the National Evaluation of NDCs that combining community engagement in areas of disaffection and disengagement with innovative approaches to management and delivery of this 10-year regeneration programme has proved to be very difficult. The expectation that “the community” could run this was described as one of our witnesses as “interesting”.
- 4.1.3 This distinctive feature of the New Deal for Communities programme was not part of a bigger vision of how NDC, and Aston Pride in particular, was to be different from previous regeneration programmes. It seems the Interim Partnership Board failed to establish a shared vision of what Aston Pride was to be, what it would achieve, and how the community would work in partnership with the City Council and statutory agencies to effect change in the area.
- 4.1.4 Perhaps this is the biggest casualty of the failure to have induction training into the ethos of NDC because one of the main objectives was to create lasting and sustainable change in the way mainstream services were being delivered into the area. This meant that the resources of the City Council and the statutory bodies were in some way to be ‘effected’ by the Aston Pride. Therefore it was incumbent upon Aston Pride Board to seek as much contact with these bodies and to develop long term constructive relationships at many levels. Only through such close contact could Aston Pride hope to create such lasting change. This vision was not made pervasive within Aston Pride. In fact the opposite view was allowed to develop that the Council and the statutory bodies were to be distrusted. Incorporation can now be seen as an attempt for independence and even for isolation, characteristics which were not helpful.



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- 4.1.5 There was a responsibility upon the statutory bodies to counter these feelings. A much more proactive embracing of Aston Pride by the statutory bodies would have been helpful. A demonstration of bringing new resources to the table. A willingness to bring something more than just a member of a Board.
- 4.1.6 It is unfortunate that the Interim Partnership Board did not use the Delivery Plan prepared with the total involvement of community representatives and agreed with the GOWM to create a clear performance management framework whereby activities and resources could be aligned with the specific objectives and overall vision for Aston Pride. Failure to do this prejudiced the ability of the Aston Pride partnership to make progress on delivering real benefits to the residents and communities of Aston in the first two years of the programme.
- 4.1.7 Tensions arose within the Aston Pride partnership at an early stage concerning the legitimacy of some of the community representatives and their role in relation to the representatives of statutory bodies and the City Council. The 2003/03 National Evaluation reported relationships between 15 of the 39 NDCs and their local authority to be "excellent", whereas others had no relationship. This difficulty was not unique to Aston Pride.
- 4.1.8 Efforts to resolve these tensions were ineffective. Those who we would have thought were best placed to intervene failed to do so. One reason given was a reluctance to intervene for fear of being seen to dominate or take over what was seen as a "community-led" programme.
- 4.1.9 We learnt that the language of the New Deal for Communities programme has now changed, with communities now being referred to as being "at the heart of [NDC]" in recognition that while the programme may be driven by communities, it cannot survive without a positive relationship with the local authority and other statutory agencies.

### **4.2 Partnership Board - Membership and Effectiveness**

- 4.2.1 Members of the Aston Pride Partnership Board had widely ranging skills and experience. We have no doubt that all individuals came to the Board with good will and intent to make Aston Pride work.
- 4.2.2 However, people were unaware of what was expected of them, and did not have the capacity to deal with such a large and complex initiative. The community representatives on the Board, in particular, appear to have had little understanding about the regeneration process – how things work in relation to the Government Office and the City Council in particular. It was difficult for them to understand the magnitude of the task.





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- 4.2.3 Board members had different understandings of their different roles and responsibilities as Board members, and as representatives, advocates and champions of the communities of Aston. Members of the Board appear to have had little concept of their formal collective responsibility, as Directors of Aston Pride Partnership Limited, for the affairs of the Company and partnership. It was put to us that few Board members were able to suppress self-interest in the interests of community cohesion. Not everyone acknowledged that they were representing the interests of all residents of Aston, and in the absence of an agreed, shared vision, many were perceived to have their own agendas.
- 4.2.4 There was a lack of appreciation of the complementary roles of Board members from the community and statutory bodies, and we find no evidence of a shared understanding of the concepts and procedures of the partnership, least of all the responsibility of all Directors, following incorporation, to safeguard and promote the interests of the Company. Community members of the Board clearly felt that the Council and other statutory bodies wanted to control the Board.
- 4.2.5 Attendance of the community representatives at meetings of the Board was exemplary. However, attendance by representatives from the statutory bodies declined. We were told that meetings were stressful and heard evidence of friction and distrust between the community representatives and those from the statutory bodies. In the absence of clear evidence of the added value and leverage of resources into the area by the major agencies, the community representatives came to believe that the latter were taking more from Aston Pride than they were bringing to it.
- 4.2.6 We heard evidence that relationships between members of the Board broke down, and that rude and aggressive behaviour by some members at Board meetings created difficulties for the management of the partnership's business, including a reluctance of statutory bodies' representatives to attend meetings. The former Chair of the Board was elected and well respected, but we were told he, understandably, attempted to please all interests in the community and had difficulty in controlling meetings. We believe he could have expected more support from the former Chief Executive in performing this very difficult and challenging role.
- 4.2.7 We heard evidence that the culture of Aston Pride was aggressive and exclusive, in which agencies that could have been expected to be supportive were treated with suspicion. This resulted in mistrust, and in the absence of good information about the programme, suspicions arose that "something's going on here".
- 4.2.8 That many issues were put to a vote at the Board indicates an absence of consensus and consistently confirmed divisions within the Board. We heard that the accuracy of Board minutes was repeatedly challenged, but the Board seems to have been unable to resolve this fundamental issue.



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- 4.2.9 However, what appeared to some to be disruptive behaviour at Board meetings was observed by others to be a firm stance in expressing legitimate concerns about constitutional issues and the accuracy of recording the Board's decisions. Others saw the inappropriate behaviour to be a reflection of some members' frustration and lack of understanding of what was actually happening at the Board.
- 4.2.10 Community representatives who were employed or in full time further or higher education, had particular difficulties in attending Board meetings that were held during the day. We heard evidence that at least two employed local residents had to withdraw because they could not get time off work to attend meetings, and other nominees never attended. We heard no evidence of this barrier to participation being challenged, which is a problem solved by other regeneration partnerships by holding meetings outside the normal working day.
- 4.2.11 The Board and its members failed to establish a capability for learning and development. The inexperience of some Board members could have been overcome by effective induction, support and training on regeneration issues, policies and procedures and the role of local and national government agencies and other statutory bodies. Despite discussions at early meetings, no effective training was provided. The support of the National Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser appears to have been helpful, but we heard that community representatives on the Board felt he had divided loyalties.
- 4.2.12 We heard evidence of events outside of the Board and Neighbourhood Forums affecting the relationships between Board members and others, and therefore the work of Aston Pride. It is unrealistic to suppose that a £54m regeneration programme could be insulated from the political life of the local communities, but it appears that the Aston Pride partnership failed to reconcile these and other potentially harmful tensions.
- 4.2.13 The Board also failed to establish effective mechanisms for accountability. The incorporation of Aston Pride Partnership Limited froze the membership of the Interim Partnership Board and gave the new Board the power to appoint Directors in the future. It is not clear how the Board intended to ensure its accountability to the communities of Aston over the lifetime of the 10-year programme.
- 4.2.14 Little publicity or feedback appears to have been given to the Neighbourhood Forums – the key mechanism by which the original community representatives were nominated – or other organisation involved in the partnership. In the absence of good information about what Aston Pride was doing, it is difficult to see how the confidence of Neighbourhood Forums and others in the communities of Aston could be sustained. The lack of information flow may have been compounded by personality clashes between individuals within the Neighbourhood Forums.



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- 4.2.15 A number of our witnesses referred to the imbalance of the Aston Pride Partnership Limited Board. All the statutory bodies' representatives on the Board were white, and the community representatives were predominantly Asian males, which reflected the leadership of the active Neighbourhood Forums. Some witnesses expressed scepticism as to whether the co-option of Asian females to the Board effectively overcame this gender imbalance.
- 4.2.16 All we can conclude is that in an area of such diverse communities, we would have expected greater efforts to ensure a greater diversity in the membership of the Board. It would be easy to think that this was the benefit of hindsight and yet all of the evidence suggests to us that it was recognised that the Aston area has some of the most diverse range of ethnic groups. In other areas with greater homogeneity this factor may not have been so important, but it was clear that it would play a large part in Aston and yet we found no evidence that this was considered when the Board was set up.

### 4.3 Appropriate structures

- 4.3.1 The Interim Partnership Board voted unanimously to incorporate on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2001 and "Aston Pride Partnership Ltd" was registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2001. Nationally, about one third of NDCs are incorporated bodies.
- 4.3.2 Incorporation created unforeseen problems, and a number of our witnesses regarded incorporation as a mistake resulting from an inability to challenge the advice and recommendations given.
- 4.3.3 We received conflicting evidence about the rationale and motivation for incorporation, but the following appear to be the important factors in reaching the unanimous decision:
- Legal advice that the independent company form was possible and used by other NDCs
  - Suggestions by NRU that Aston Pride could be its own Accountable Body
  - The desire for independence from the City Council
  - Direct employment of staff to ensure control over the programme
  - Lack of firm objection or opposition from GOWM or any other agency.



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- 4.3.4 Along with the lack of training, the issue of incorporation can be seen now as an important milestone in the decline of the effectiveness of Aston Pride. Although incorporation caused the Board many problems it may have been that the greater damage was done because by incorporating the Board was able to reinforce a notion of independence and isolation away from those bodies that it needed to embrace. The Government Office for the West Midlands advisers who attended Aston Pride Board meetings felt that incorporation at this particular time would be inappropriate. Again, maybe with hindsight, the failure of the GOWM to prevent incorporation taking place may also have contributed to a false sense of independence.
- 4.3.5 Community representatives thought that the City Council wanted day-to-day control over the former Chief Executive and staff supporting Aston Pride, and this conflicted with the Board's aspiration for the Chief Executive and staff to be accountable only to them.
- 4.3.6 Board members of Aston Pride Partnership Limited - Directors - had individual and personal responsibility in law for the Company. Individuals nominated to the Board by statutory bodies and other organisations may not have appreciated that, and we heard evidence from one witness who was unwilling to accept this personal responsibility.
- 4.3.7 Confidentiality of the affairs of Aston Pride Partnership Limited created particular difficulties for this review. The express permission of all current Aston Pride Partnership Limited Directors to release the minutes of the Board was required before they could be considered for the purposes of this scrutiny review, despite copies of the minutes having been openly and widely circulated previously within partnership organisations.
- 4.3.8 The Government's chief concern was delivery rather than governance until it became apparent that the governance arrangements were contributing to delivery failure.
- 4.3.9 The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership arrangements approved by the Minister and agreed by the strategic partners has now been established. Under the direction of Government, strategic partners have nominated representatives to Aston Pride Delivery Partnership. Community representatives on Aston Pride Delivery Partnership have been selected by direct elections in which there was a 42% turnout of electors in Aston, and by an Independent Commission. Aston Pride Delivery Partnership has an independent Chairman, has made training for all members compulsory and there is an induction process for new members.



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### 4.4 Programme Team Support

- 4.4.1 New Deal for Communities is a unique programme requiring effective governance, programme management and delivery. Specific staff skills and experience are required to achieve effective delivery and spend. The staffing arrangements already put in place for the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership have demonstrated the difference that appropriate staffing levels can make.
- 4.4.2 The evidence of those who commended the work and commitment of the former Chief Executive and his team impressed us. However, from the evidence we received, we conclude that the former Chief Executive and other staff received inadequate induction, ongoing training and support.
- 4.4.3 The work of delivering Aston Pride was not the same as the previous work of the Ward Team. Although that provided a ready-made staffing solution at the inception of Aston Pride, they lacked the capacity to deal with the complex issues that arose as Aston Pride developed.
- 4.4.4 We were told that Board members and the former Chief Executive continually raised the inadequacy of staffing levels in the Programme Team. We received evidence of the protracted discussions over the employment of the Chief Executive and programme team staff, both within the Board and its sub-group and between Aston Pride Partnership Limited and the City Council. It is understandable that the Board of Aston Pride Partnership Limited would want to directly employ its staff, but Aston Pride Partnership Limited did not establish the capability to employ staff and we understand that the existing staff of the Programme Team wanted to retain their status as employees of Birmingham City Council. The Board had agreed to allow the acting Chief Executive to continue his secondment from BCC for a 5 year period. The remarkably long time that it took to conclude a staffing agreement was clearly debilitating to all involved and diverted attention from programme and project development and delivery.
- 4.4.5 It is important to note that in addition to the small dedicated Aston Pride Programme Team, there were other City Council staff involved in the development and implementation of Aston Pride-supported projects.
- 4.4.6 The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership has concluded an agreement with the City Council to employ the staff of the Programme Team, and has a clear commitment to recruit the staff required to deliver the programme. It has appointed an Acting Chief Executive and a Deputy Chief Executive, both with a proven record in managing regeneration programmes. Other staff have been appointed, including a Community Involvement Manager.



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### 4.5 Programme and Project Development and Delivery

4.5.1 A key feature of the former Newtown South Aston City Challenge programme was that the bid defined the details of the programme and individual projects to be supported, but that there was subsequent disagreement on the appropriateness of some projects. By contrast, Aston Pride was explicitly set up to have a learning process and not to rush into project delivery.

4.5.2 Nevertheless, Aston Pride has made significant achievements already, with expenditure by the end of the third year of the 10-year programme estimated to be in the region of £6m. Projects approved in the period up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003 included:

- Safer Streets in Aston CCTV Scheme
- Sure Start Family support
- Cleaner Greener Aston
- Arts in Form architecture & design project for young people
- Aston Pride Cleaner Environment Campaign
- School for Social Entrepreneurs
- Residents' Resource Room
- Aston Park Master Plan Development
- Employment Intermediary Project
- Aston Pride Games
- Home Loans Feasibility Study
- Aston Family Learning Centre (formerly Ronnie's Roller Rink)
- Overcoming Social Exclusion Through ESF Co-financing
- Environmental Clean-up Project 2002-2005
- Home Security Project
- Health and Regeneration Facilitator
- Aston Hall and Park
- Jobsfair
- Employment Feasibility Studies



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- 4.5.3 However, despite the project development, appraisal and approval processes put in place by the City Council to support the programme and the approval of such projects, we received evidence that these mechanisms were unclear and confused many members of the Aston Pride Partnership Limited Board.
- 4.5.4 We heard evidence of an adversarial relationship between Board members from the community and statutory bodies affecting the progress of projects proposals. We were not able to explore the reason for projects' progress or otherwise through the appraisal and approval process, which appears to have been chaotic.
- 4.5.5 Individual Board members championed projects that addressed the needs and expectations of residents and communities of Aston. They demonstrated effective ways of engaging local residents on issues that were important to them, but felt they had no support from the Board, Programme Team or any other agency. Indeed, we heard evidence of Board members blocking proposals designed to benefit particular groups or communities in the area.
- 4.5.6 There appears to have been no mechanism for resolving potential conflicts of interest of Board members involved in project development and implementation, and the multiple roles of members of the Board who had institutional interests appears to have presented difficulties.
- 4.5.7 We find it curious that the Task Groups set up to develop Aston Pride's programme of projects that would complement and add value to the work of the statutory partners were not effective. This was an opportunity lost to engage key mainstream delivery agencies and to resolve different perspectives on project proposals coming forward from various sources. We understand that community and statutory body representatives on the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership are starting to work closely together on the development of the Partnership's five portfolios, and this should overcome this difficulty.
- 4.5.8 We were made aware of the frustration and anger of community representatives at the slow progress of project proposals. In the absence of a clear vision for Aston Pride, the failure of the Board to agree priorities and criteria, and lack of understanding of the process by which proposals have to be appraised and approved, it is understandable how such feelings could arise, resulting in distrust and suspicion.
- 4.5.9 We were also made aware of the frustration felt by Board members at the slow approval of agreed projects by the Government Office for the West Midlands. There may have been good reasons for this but it should have been clear that many Board members would not have the appropriate experience to appreciate this and that such delays could have been explained, and better understood with an appropriate induction process.
- 4.5.10 The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership has established a project



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development and approval process, and is moving towards commissioning of activity to achieve the long-term vision for Aston.





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# 5: Conclusions

## 5.1 The Issues Resulting in Government Intervention

- 5.1.1 In March 2003 when the Minister intervened relationships within the Board were commonly perceived to be beyond repair. Most witnesses have agreed that Aston Pride Partnership Limited, the delivery vehicle for the programme, had all but ceased to function and had outlived its usefulness and a new beginning was required. One witness said it was “the best thing that could have happened”. This was a commonly held belief. This then answers our first question; did Aston Pride fail? Yes it did. Had our witnesses believed that the solution lay in giving it more time or believed that some part was broken and that once fixed it could continue we may have concluded differently. However, in general, our witnesses did not believe this. Therefore, despite the considerable achievements during those three years and despite the huge effort and dedication of people involved, we conclude that Aston Pride did fail because it was a ten year programme that had stalled irretrievably after three years. Of course we recognise that the funding remains and that a new delivery partnership emerged from the ashes in April 2003 to take forward the programme. However, it must be recognised that the old Aston Pride Partnership was the culmination of a long, hard process that began when the community first bid for those funds at the beginning of 2000. That process effectively ended when a new delivery vehicle was created in April 2003 and the old delivery vehicle was discarded. The structures and the relationships that had taken three years to build, all of that work came to an abrupt halt in March 2003 in a atmosphere of recriminations and rancour. As we have said earlier, this is not to say that the old delivery vehicle did not achieve a great deal because it did. Nor is it to say that the new delivery vehicle has not learnt lessons from the old Partnership or taken and progressed work begun by the old Partnership because all of these things are true. However, what is also true is that the old delivery partnership, has stalled prematurely and that this must be recognised as failure.



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### 5.2 If It Did Fail, Why Did It Fail?

#### Hostility and Mistrust

- 5.2.1 It is hard not to conclude from the evidence that the main factor that led to its poor performance and eventual demise was the hostility and mistrust that existed between factions on the Board, mainly between community representatives and the statutory bodies and those Board members representing the statutory bodies. It was this hostility and mistrust that then made the entire enterprise vulnerable to the other problems that beset Aston Pride. In some cases it was the mistrust that exacerbated these other problems. It was mistrust that was a contributory driver for incorporation to achieve independence from the City Council; the Board meetings would have been more effective without hostility and mistrust; negotiations over staffing could have been quickly resolved without hostility and mistrust.
- 5.2.2 Had everything else functioned well perhaps this hostility could have been overcome. Had these other problems been taken out of their hands or had been solved at a much earlier stage then perhaps, just perhaps, it could have worked. However, mistrust in Aston appears to be endemic and who is to say that this isn't justified? It is a damaged community that has frightening levels of deprivation. From their perspective they are recipients of a long history of neglect by the statutory bodies.
- 5.2.3 Therefore any regeneration project must take account of these unique attributes of Aston. What they needed was more engagement by the statutory bodies, what some community representatives thought they were being presented with was a golden opportunity to disengage and become independent of the statutory bodies, namely 'community led' New Deal money.
- 5.2.4 It was a huge misconception amongst the community representatives. They believed they owned the project. They were led to believe that they were going to run and decide everything, it was after all 'community led'. They felt that they had done all of the work in getting together the community at the Partnership Group meetings. They submitted and then won the bid. When the first Interim Partnership Board was created on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2000 they had the majority of the 21 places.
- 5.2.5 The Interim Partnership Board and the incorporation of Aston Pride Partnership Ltd were structures incapable of dealing effectively with the hostility and mistrust that resulted from the failure to unite the divergent interests and perspectives of those involved in the partnership into a common philosophy and shared vision for Aston Pride.
- 5.2.6 In the light of all the evidence we have received, our conclusions



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fall into six key areas:

### **Failure to Create and Embrace a Common Philosophy**

- 5.2.7 There was a failure to imbue all participants with a common philosophy, a shared vision in the New Deal philosophy and to define what was meant by 'community led'.
- 5.2.8 It is clear that participants and Board members had no common definition of what the purpose of Aston Pride was. They shared no common vision of how New Deal was to be different from previous regeneration projects. None of them had a clear or shared definition of what 'community led' meant. Many Board members just considered it to be a way of spending £54 million over 10 years via a range of projects. Some statutory Board members appeared not to understand that New Deal was looking for partnerships which required the statutory partners to find new ways of working.
- 5.2.9 The relationship between Aston Pride and the other bodies, the City Council and the statutory bodies was never defined. Nor was the importance of these bodies to the success of Aston Pride stressed. The importance of embracing and influencing these organisations was critical to the success of the regeneration.
- 5.2.10 "The community are key players but they cannot work on their own, therefore the key to success is to work in partnership with the local authority and other agencies who are in the area". This was said by a GOWM adviser who attended a Board meeting in July 2001. It was a message that was far too late in its delivery. It was a message that should have been critically delivered at the very beginning and everyone should have been made to understand it.
- 5.2.11 This failure of the Board to share 'the big picture' was a major contributory factor in the endemic misunderstandings, the prejudices, the mistrust and antagonisms that plagued this project.
- 5.2.12 It should have been imperative that the Board was united behind the philosophy and shared the same philosophy and vision. It was a vision that needed to have been stressed at the incubation period of Aston Pride when the initial bid was being prepared. This could have been achieved by the usual devices; seminars, away days, induction training and probably a whole host of other imaginative ideas. The vision would have needed to be continuously reinforced and the projects that were created should have been placed within that philosophy. The philosophy should have been continuously communicated to the wider community so that they too understood what was being done in their name.



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- 5.2.13 The Board proved incapable of creating this shared vision and the support provided by GOWM and the City Council at this time appears to have been largely ignored by the Board. This was a serious mistake.

### **Failure to Ensure Adequate Resources**

- 5.2.14 There simply were not enough resources for Aston Pride to function. Almost all of our witnesses believed that there were too few staff to actually run the partnership and develop and implement the programme. This was within both the dedicated Programme Team and other staff engaged in the development and implementation of Aston Pride-supported projects.
- 5.2.15 The lack of professional administrators meant that Board members seemed to have been overly involved in administrative work. Endless meetings regarding Accountable Body Agreements, Constitutional Agreements and staffing, as well as project and programme matters, sapped the will of some Board members.
- 5.2.16 This was a serious disadvantage. The pressure was continuously building to deliver projects and yet the staffing was simply not there to prepare projects adequately. This lack of resource had also the effect of demoralising many Board members and others who became disillusioned with the seeming lack of progress and demonstrable effect on the community.
- 5.2.17 The amount of administrative work falling upon the former Chief Executive's team undoubtedly had some demoralising effect as well as blunting their ability to present a strategic view to the Board.
- 5.2.18 It is clear that this logjam over the employment of staff should have been broken. The inability of both the Aston Pride Partnership Limited and the City Council to resolve these issues was a serious blow to progress and that these issues were allowed to drag on in an ever debilitating way was a serious error.
- 5.2.19 The City Council should shoulder some of the responsibility for this. While it may be unclear as to exactly what action the Council could have taken, discussion should nevertheless have taken place to attempt to resolve matters. The Board members must also share in this responsibility as it followed in large part from their persistent and false assumption that a Board needed to directly employ staff in order to reinforce its independence. They seemed to be fuelled by mistrust again. However, even the questionable legal advice given reinforced this assumption: 'It is impossible for someone to be employed by one person and accountable to someone else'. This was part of the legal advice given to them at a Board meeting in May 2001.



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- 5.2.20 In addition the Board failed to build up its own resources and skills base by providing adequate and ongoing training for its own Board members.

### Ownership

- 5.2.21 Who owned the Aston Pride project? By this we mean who ultimately set the rules. It is a simple question but whose answer was not clear to everyone. The answer is the GOWM. They set up NDC, they were providing the finance. They could impose their will by withholding funding at any stage. However, many community representatives believed that the Aston Pride Partnership alone owned it. Perhaps their involvement in the long bidding process and sense of achievement at winning the funding for their area inevitably brought with it the unforeseen connotation of exclusive "ownership".
- 5.2.22 The community representatives' understandable assumption that "community led" meant "community ownership", coupled with the fact that they felt that it was they who actually "won" the bid, was a dangerous misconception and one that GOWM and others seemed reluctant to correct. For many community representatives the winning of the bid was felt as a route to independence for them; independence away from the statutory bodies which many felt had failed them in the past. The opposite was in fact true but this was never made clear during the bidding process. When it became necessary for external bodies to impose change or to suggest changes in the structure then suspicions arose within some of the community representatives which then led to hostility and mistrust.
- 5.2.23 This dangerous misconception could have been avoided by some kind of induction training for everyone in the partnership into the philosophy behind New Deal for Communities and the reality of delivering complex, large-scale regeneration programmes under Treasury rules.
- 5.2.24 The Government finally asserted its ownership by changing the delivery vehicle. Failure to intervene earlier in a more controlled fashion allowed damage to be done to both the credibility of the NDC project in the area and to the morale of all those involved. This should have been the one outcome that should have been avoided.

### Responsibility

- 5.2.25 Who felt responsible for the project? We have been disappointed by the little humility shown by some of our witnesses. Few expressed any feelings of responsibility, but clearly opportunities were missed to intervene at an early stage when things began to go wrong. In general their perception was that fault - and responsibility for action - always lay elsewhere.
- 5.2.26 The former Board members' commitment to Aston Pride is not in



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question. The community representatives on the Aston Pride Partnership Limited Board, in particular, spent a massive amount of time in innumerable meetings, and individual Board members successfully championed specific initiatives and projects with little professional, administrative or technical support. Aston Pride Partnership Limited simply had insufficient capability to manage a £54m programme.

- 5.2.27 Pressure to spend, works against the development of skills and the capability to deliver. Experience elsewhere shows that time spent in developing trust, transparency and understanding as a basis for community involvement and representation is well spent. It seems that the limited time available could have been spent more productively on community involvement in the real work of developing the Aston Pride regeneration programme.
- 5.2.28 Although many had fears, not many actually took steps to correct the situation or to alert others to the problems. Our witnesses appear to have remained unduly optimistic that problems within the Board that became apparent as early as May 2001 would be resolved, but the expectation seems to have been that others would resolve them. We have found little evidence of Board members proactively looking for solutions to the problems. Despite guidance from GOWM, independent legal advice and the support of the National Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser, it appears that advice was given but not taken up by the Board.

### Leadership

- 5.2.29 There seems to have been a lack of leadership at all levels. The GOWM, the body with ultimate responsibility, failed to ensure the necessary support to the Board. It was the GOWM who legitimised Aston Pride. It was they who awarded the funding from public money to them. It was their responsibility to ensure that the organisation vested with the responsibility to deliver was capable of doing that. Perhaps the GOWM would say that this was a pilot scheme, some kind of experiment; they would say that this is perhaps community led; a learning experience, that it is up to the community to determine how they should organise themselves. The GOWM eventually faced up to this responsibility but by that time a great deal of damage had been done.
- 5.2.30 The democratically elected former Chairman of the Aston Pride Partnership Limited Board was in a difficult position as he also had responsibilities to the Neighbourhood Forum that placed him on the Board. He seemed incapable of overcoming this conflict of interest and was unable to offer the drive that a Chairman needs to do. In many cases he seemed unable to control meetings. Several Board members described meetings that were chaotic and disruptive. Despite his hard work and dedication the former Chief Executive seemed unable to give the leadership or the vision. This may have been because his position was clearly under-resourced in terms of staffing or it may have been because some members of the Board



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saw him, unfairly, as a representative of the City Council and were suspicious. For a Chief Executive not to have the confidence and the support of a significant minority of the members of the Board is an untenable situation and one that should not have been allowed to continue.

- 5.2.31 The former Chairman and the Chief Executive do not seem to have acted with any planned unity and did not provide coherent collective leadership to the Board. Without previous experience of running such a body, considerable support would have been required to undertake this role effectively, but such support was not made available.
- 5.2.32 Statutory body members never met outside of meetings either with themselves as a group or with other Board groups or with the Chairman or Chief Executive. This lack of liaising outside of Board meetings in the face of difficulties is hard to understand.
- 5.2.33 The City Council should have shown the strategic leadership within the Board that would have been expected from a major strategic partner at a much earlier stage. It did not attempt to demonstrate to the Board how it considered 'community led' was to be different from other regeneration projects. Instead it took a very 'hands off' approach. If one of the aims of New Deal was to enhance mainstream services it seems odd that the main 'mainstream' service provider had no protocols which could allow such things to happen. It gave the former Chief Executive of Aston Pride no mechanisms to enable such change to take place.
- 5.2.34 The Cabinet Member for Regeneration should have ensured that the Council at least maintained a full complement of Board members representing the City Council. At one stage in 2002 there was no Board member attending from the Economic Development Department over a four month period, and out of the three City Councillors eligible for appointment to the Aston Pride Partnership Ltd Board only two took up their position and attended the meetings. These Councillors gave a great deal of time to Aston Pride, and their attendance and commitment were excellent. Yet they never met as a group outside of the Board meetings, nor did they meet formally with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration or the Aston Pride Chief Executive or Chairman outside of the meetings, although they did liaise with the Director Economic Development and other City Council officers.
- 5.2.35 Although not required to do so as he was not a member (Director) of the Board, the Director of Economic Development had only ever attended one meeting before October 2002. In October 2002 he attended in order to present himself as the potential new Board member for the City Council after the four month lapse. In the event, the Board failed to take the steps necessary to appoint him as a Director, although he continued to attend and took an active part in subsequent meetings.



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- 5.2.36 Again, although not required to do so, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration did not attend any Aston Pride meetings as an observer. Nor did he organise any formal meetings with other Board members. Nor did he appear to be having formal briefings from any parties with regards to progress and problems regarding Aston Pride. There are no minutes of such meetings and there is no correspondence. In fact there seems to be scant correspondence regarding Aston Pride between anybody in Economic Development or the City Council and any other body. There seemed no co-ordinated attempt by the Cabinet Member to rally those parties upon which he had influence to bring the project back on track.
- 5.2.37 While we are left with the conclusion that strategically the City was taking a back seat and was not attempting to influence the agenda even in the face of severe difficulties, we have sympathy for the view that the Council did not want to appear to the community to be dominating the project, and that they should be deferential to the community representatives' perspective. Indeed other Councils have interpreted NDC guidance as explicitly forbidding local authorities from taking a lead role. In addition the City Council's importance to the success of Aston Pride was never stressed by GOWM.
- 5.2.38 However, this is more difficult to argue from the stage when the partnership began to experience difficulties.
- 5.2.39 The City Council was a major strategic partner. It had tremendous influence through its Board membership. As the Accountable Body for Aston Pride the City Council has the major responsibility for the programme's financial probity and compliance with government guidelines and requirements. The City Council is also a key implementation and delivery agency for Aston Pride. While these are distinct, and in usual circumstances largely separate functions, it is clear that the City Council did not seek to co-ordinate its considerable potential influence or to adopt a strategic view of how the difficulties that arose could be resolved.

### Structure And Resources

- 5.2.40 Perhaps the delivery body had within it the seeds of its own failure. The Interim Partnership Board was brought together with the aim of bidding for regeneration money. It made sense to assemble an alliance of community representatives at the beginning to make the bid. The prospect of £54m for Aston appears to have been a compelling unifying force.
- 5.2.41 Some members of this Board were invited purely on the basis that they were known by other members of the partnership, rather than from any structured desire to create a balanced and representative grouping. This is entirely understandable when the object of the exercise was to bid for resources. However, once the bid was successful a structure needed to be put in place that did meet





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complex needs of a community based regeneration project and was capable of delivering. A structure that could clarify the term 'community led' and attempt to reconcile divergent aspirations within the community. This clearly did not happen. It seems strangely naive that anybody thought that the bidding partnership could meet the complex needs of a 'community based' regeneration project and be capable of delivering. Perhaps people with little experience of such matters could be forgiven for such a mistake, but it does seem strange that experienced professionals should likewise believe such a thing.

5.2.42 At the point when the bid was successful two options should have become available:

- The first would have involved a process of creating an appropriate structure that was fit for the task before it. This would have been a slow process, perhaps. It may have involved asking consultants to investigate. It would have meant taking advice from regeneration professionals using knowledge already available concerning previous regeneration projects. It would have involved a considerable amount of work in consulting the community about the best ways to involve them at the centre of this work. Trying to agree how the term 'community led' could best be accommodated into a delivery body. It would have defined in detail precisely what was to be expected of the statutory Board members, particularly the Local Authority. These types of discussions had taken place during the year but the pressure of meeting submission deadlines prevented them from resolving them. It would have needed to be done in an environment not under pressure to begin delivery.
- The second alternative could have been to have a structure put in place that would be regarded as an interim structure that could begin the process of delivery. At the same time it would be a structure that would have remained fluid and be expected to evolve and change and learn. A structure that had within its constitution breakpoints where modifications to its structure and constitution would take place, changes that could be done to the structure in a controlled and expected way, a structure which would welcome changes rather than regarding them as an affront to its sovereignty.

5.2.43 What we got was neither. We had the structure that bid for the NDC funds. The Interim Partnership Board became the delivery body with little modification. Little changed as it attempted to implement the delivery plan. There was pressure on them to submit the bid and once the bid was successful there was pressure on them to begin to deliver. They never seemed to have been given sufficient time and space to resolve these issues before prejudices and antagonisms became entrenched. In addition the structure was now encumbered with the phrase 'community led'. Yet it was a phrase which brought with it high expectations for the



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community and for the community representatives. It brought with it an expectation of independence for Aston Pride that was unrealistic. The phrase was not clearly defined. What were required were changes to the constitution as it grappled with the complex tasks ahead.

5.2.44 At various times structural changes to the Board were raised. At the Board meetings in 2001 it was stated that the Interim Partnership Board should be 'monitored and reviewed'. At other times the issue was raised concerning direct elections from the community. Little ever came of it. Instead of reaching out the Board turned in. The first significant change to the constitution, namely the incorporation of the Partnership into a company limited by guarantee actually locked the partnership into a self-perpetuating structure. Incorporation had two immediate effects. The first was to 'lock' into Aston Pride the existing Board members because the articles of Association contained no details of eligibility. The second effect and perhaps the more damaging one was that incorporation was able to reinforce an illusionary notion of independence and isolation away from those very bodies and organisations that Aston Pride needed to embrace; the City Council and the statutory bodies. It was able to reinforce prejudices held by some Board members against the City Council. Again this reinforcement of independence made any subsequent and necessary changes to the constitution such as the introduction of directly elected Board members that much harder, and in some case impossible.

5.2.45 The Government Office for the West Midlands advisers who attended Aston Pride Board meetings prior to incorporation felt that incorporation at that particular time would have been inappropriate. Again, the failure of the GOWM to prevent incorporation taking place may also have further contributed to a false sense of independence within the Board. Two significant quotes from two different Board members in the Board minutes in May 2001 tell the story:

*"The Board and the Community have the ability to run this programme"*

*and*

*"The Board already have enough expertise without Birmingham City Council"*

### 5.3 The Specific Questions for the Future

**Does the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership achieve the best balance to achieve community engagement in delivering an effective programme of change within the national policy framework for Neighbourhood Renewal?**



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- 5.3.1 Incorporation gave the original Aston Pride partnership a spurious sense of independence, when what was required was a more effective partnership in which the important role of public sector bodies – particularly the City Council – was recognised by the communities' representatives, and in which the statutory bodies respected and supported the role of the community representatives.
- 5.3.2 The new structure is clearly under a lot of pressure to deliver. We commend the fact that the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership has organised itself fairly quickly and tried to overcome many of the inherent problems of the old structure. These steps are to be applauded.
- 5.3.3 We are aware, however, of some criticisms and concerns about the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership. These must be addressed if the difficulties of the past are not to be repeated.
- 5.3.4 We understand that the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership has considered whether to hold its meetings in public. We believe the Partnership must balance the need for its transactions to be transparent and publicly accountable against the need to ensure effective consideration of the complex matters involved in directing the implementation of the programme.
- 5.3.5 The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership is primarily focused on delivery in response to pressure from Government and the press (amongst others) to quickly sort out a replacement structure and to begin to deliver benefits for the community. The "community led" aspect of the programme is considerably less prominent now, but involvement of the people of Aston in the regeneration of their communities is no less important to the long term success of Aston Pride. The new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership should build on recent experience and continue to explore ways of effectively involving communities in its work.
- 5.3.6 However, it appears to us that this current structure should only be regarded as an interim structure. One created in the white-hot glare of publicity. Now that a calmer situation is upon us a parallel piece of work should begin. This would attempt to design a new structure. One that takes account of all of the past failings and is clearly committed to bringing back to Aston Pride the notion of 'community led' regeneration. As we have explained previously the old structure was clearly not designed in any sense of the word. The current structure has too much pressure on it to deliver.
- 5.3.7 In this period, perhaps over the next 12 months, an investigation should begin into designing a new structure. A structure that is capable of both delivering projects in an efficient way and justifiably claim to be community led.



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### **Will the new delivery arrangements, including governance and executive responsibilities, ensure successful delivery?**

- 5.3.8 We have heard very positive reports about the new governance and management arrangements of the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership.
- 5.3.9 The Chair is regarded as strong and effective, and we are told that meetings of the new Partnership are well run. Members of the new Partnership are regarded as well informed and hard working and have undertaken a lot of good work.
- 5.3.10 The Acting Chief Executive is seen to have made a significant difference by bringing in staff to the Programme Team and ensuring Partnership members understand what's going on. It remains the case that members of the new Partnership will continue to need capacity building and training.
- 5.3.11 We therefore draw attention to the need to consider changes to the structure of the new Aston Pride Delivery Partnership over the lifetime of the programme to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose. In particular, we draw attention to the need to keep the following under review:
- Arrangements for the selection and accountability of community representatives on the Aston Pride Delivery Partnership to enhance their role and legitimacy in the eyes of local communities
  - The need for continued training, capacity building and support for community representatives and others to ensure they are able to play the fullest and most constructive role in the direction of Aston Pride
  - Effectiveness and transparency of project development, appraisal and implementation processes and timescales
  - Mechanisms for involving local people and their communities in the development, delivery and evaluation of projects that address their needs and aspirations
  - Appropriate forms of communication with local residents and groups to ensure wide-spread understanding of the priorities and achievements of Aston Pride
  - The sustainability of Aston Pride and its achievements beyond the life of the current New Deal for Communities programme
- 5.3.12 The current structure should not be considered to be the final solution, and the 3-year review of the Aston Pride Delivery Plan that will form the basis for the Funding Agreement with GOWM from April 2004 presents an ideal opportunity to address these issues and begin to map out how the Delivery Partnership will respond to them and evolve over time.



# Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

## Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

### Proposed Scrutiny Review of Aston Pride NDC

A	Subject of review	Aston Pride New Deal for Communities
	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Regeneration
B	Reason for review	The Performance Plan Priority 2 Action 3 states "ensure effective arrangements are in place to deliver current NDC and SRB programmes with the City Council acting as Accountable body". There has been criticism from a number of quarters that the Aston Pride NDC initiative has been failing to perform and as a result of Ministerial intervention a range of constitutional and management solutions have been put in place. The review will explore both why the project was considered to be failing and the appropriateness and the effectiveness of the programme for recovery which is now being implemented.
C	Objectives of review, including outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop a clear understanding of the issues that arose within Aston Pride which resulted in government intervention</li> <li>• To assess if the solutions adopted offer the best balance to achieve both community involvement and programme delivery within the national policy framework for Neighbourhood Renewal</li> <li>• To understand the new delivery arrangements, including governance and executive responsibilities, and to assess whether these arrangements will ensure successful delivery.</li> </ul>
D	Lead Member(s)	Councillor Nigel Dawkins
E	Lead Review Officer	David Homer
F	Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Andrew Coulson Cabinet Member of Regeneration Relevant Ward Councillors
G	Council departments expected to contribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Development</li> <li>• Finance and Performance Review</li> </ul>



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<p>H External organisations expected to contribute</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aston Pride Board members (Chair)</li> <li>• Government Office of the West Midlands</li> <li>• Independent Adviser on Neighbourhood Renewal to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister</li> </ul> <p>Organisations delivering projects grant aided by Aston Pride</p>
<p>I Anticipated date of report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>January 04</p>
<p>J Estimated Number of Working Days to Conduct Review</p> <p>Per Member</p> <p>Officers</p>	<p>4 Committee sessions to hear evidence and 2 to consider the report.</p> <p>3 days to prepare for each Committee session and 10 days to draft the report.</p> <p>7 days administrative and research support</p> <p>Total 38 days</p>
<p>K Anticipated call on Scrutiny Budget</p>	<p>Possibly a small cost to cover travel expenses for witnesses</p>



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

# Appendix 2: Background Papers

- Aston Pride Partnership Limited, Memorandum and Articles of Association, Companies House, October 2001.
- Birmingham Regeneration Commission
- "Third sector "cartel" blasted for controlling NDC funds", New Start, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2003. Available from <http://www.newstartmag.co.uk/news578.html>, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2003.
- "Training void threatens community cohesion", New Start, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2003. Available from <http://www.newstartmag.co.uk/news584.html>, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> December 2003.
- Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2003). "Research Summary 7 – New Deal for Communities – The National Evaluation 2002/03: Key findings." Available from <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publist.asp> accessed 24<sup>th</sup> November 2003.
- Scrutiny Review: Priorities for Regeneration from a Community Perspective, February 2001.
- "Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration – a Call to Action", Strategic Development Commission, December 2003. Available from <http://www.sd-commission.gov.uk>.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

# Appendix 3: Aston Pride NDC Chronology

### Chronology

15 <sup>th</sup> September 1998	New Deal for Communities launched. Birmingham invited to bid.
November 1999	Second round of NDC programme. Birmingham only area invited to bid for second time.
April 2000	Aston Pride NDC bid submitted, with community representatives' request that Birmingham City Council be Accountable Body.
3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2001	GOWM raised concerns to be addressed in Mid-year Review.
15 <sup>th</sup> October 2001	GOWM summarises findings and set out proposed course of action.
18 <sup>th</sup> October 2001	Aston Pride Partnership Limited registered as a private company limited by guarantee with no share capital. Of 28 Board members, 20 were appointed as Directors.
21 <sup>st</sup> November 2001	Offer of Chief Executive post made.
16 <sup>th</sup> January 2002	Board minutes record offer of Chief Executive post.
23 <sup>rd</sup> January 2002	GOWM issues 2001/02 Annual Review notice for 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2002.
January 2002	Peter Bevington, Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser, attended Board to introduce his work on community engagement and constitutional issues.
January 2002	Draft financial rules presented to the company. [No reference in January 2002 minutes].
6 <sup>th</sup> March 2002	GOWM carries out Annual Review of 2001/02 performance.
13 <sup>th</sup> March 2002	Peter Bevington, Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser, presented first report to Board.
March 2002	Birmingham City Council asked to become Accountable Body for Kings Norton NDC.
March-April 2002	Correspondence between Aston Pride Partnership Ltd and Birmingham City Council concerning Chief Executive appointment.
7 <sup>th</sup> May 2002	GOWM issues key points from 2001/02 Annual Review, including summary stating "B banding" of performance ["good progress but encountering some problems"].
12 <sup>th</sup> June 2002	Board considered and agreed hosting agreement with Birmingham City Council for employment of staff.
5 <sup>th</sup> July 2002	GOWM wrote to City Council's Acting Chief Executive offering a new Aston Pride Funding Agreement for 2002/03.
September 2002	Barbara Roche speech to NDC 3 <sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference in Birmingham.
22 <sup>nd</sup> October 2002	Mid-year Review held at Bangladeshi Multi-purpose centre.





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28 <sup>th</sup> November 2002	GOWM wrote to Chair of Aston Pride Partnership Board setting out the issues the Partnership must address if the programme is to succeed.
October 2002	National Evaluation of New Deal for Communities highlighted key issues for Aston Pride Partnership to address, including constitutional review.
9 <sup>th</sup> October 2002	Board endorsed previous decision of 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2002 for hosting agreement with Birmingham City Council for employment of staff.
19 <sup>th</sup> December 2002	Board meeting in London with Tony McNulty, Minister for Regeneration. Tony McNulty required constitutional "route map" leading to direct election of community representatives.
7 <sup>th</sup> January 2003	Minister wrote to actions agreed at their meeting on 19 <sup>th</sup> December 2002.
13 <sup>th</sup> February 2003	Aston Pride Chief Executive commissions Trowers Hamlyn (Solicitors) to provide independent legal advice on new constitutional arrangements.
26 <sup>th</sup> March 2003	Board rejected recommendations of final report from Trowers Hamlyn and Peter Bevington on proposed constitutional changes.
31 <sup>st</sup> March 2003	2002/03 Funding Agreement expired.
1 <sup>st</sup> April 2003	Minister wrote to Board informing them that GOWM would work with Birmingham City Council to establish a new delivery partnership.
April 2003	Electoral Reform Services conduct direct public election for community places on board. Turnout 42%.
April 2003 onwards	Appointments made to new Aston Pride staffing structure.
June 2003	2003/04 Delivery Plan submitted to the GOWM.
August 2003	City Council and GOWM sign 2003/04 Funding Agreement.
10 <sup>th</sup> September 2003	First meeting of new Aston Pride Board.



## **Appendix 4: New Deal for Communities, the National Evaluation 2002/03 Key Findings**

### **Research Summary 7, New Deal for Communities, The National Evaluation 2002/03: Key Findings**

New Deal for Communities (NDC) is one of the most important Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) ever launched. Partnerships in 39 deprived neighbourhoods in England are carrying forward ten year programmes designed to reduce gaps between these poor neighbourhoods and the rest of the country in relation to five key outcomes: crime, education, health, worklessness, and housing and the physical environment. The overall ten year Programme is to cost about £2 billion; each of the 39 Delivery Plans attracts about £50 million. NDC is a flagship component to the government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Because of the scale of resources allocated to NDCs and their ten year life cycle, they should provide an ideal vehicle through which the neighbourhood renewal community as a whole can learn 'what works and why'. In 2001 a national evaluation team, headed up by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University, was appointed to undertake the first phase of the national evaluation. The 2002/03 Annual Report of the national evaluation is now available. This document pulls together some of the main issues raised in the full report.



## Aston Pride New Deal for Communities

The national evaluation team uncovered evidence pointing to a number of **positive aspects** to the Programme:

- NDC Partnerships operate in the **most disadvantaged neighbourhoods** in England. The sudden arrival of new populations, notably asylum seekers, has often added a further layer of complexity. The fact that, as of May 2003, all 39 Delivery Plans had been approved and progress made in all of them is to be commended.
- The scale of **'setting up' tasks** should not be underestimated. Partnerships have had to develop their own teams, establish longer term arrangements with agencies in the locality, engage with local communities, think strategically, and so on.
- No previous ABI has placed so much emphasis on **community engagement**. Locally elected residents now constitute a majority on virtually all Partnership Boards. Unlike some other ABIs, NDCs have taken very seriously their remit to place local communities at the heart of their thinking. This has helped unearth community leaders, led to many individual success stories, and empowered and upskilled many local residents across the 39 Partnerships.
- Partnerships have received more guidance and support in relation to **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities** than has been the case with previous ABIs. Across the piece most Partnerships are attempting to engage with, and identify outcomes appropriate to, their BME communities.
- NDCs have made substantial progress in relation to a whole host of **'partnership working'** issues.
- Partnerships are now **implementing a wide range of projects** in association with key agencies of whom the police, health authorities, and increasingly, local authorities have generally proved especially supportive of NDC Partnerships. Partnership working is an essential ingredient to achieving longer term outcomes in the five main theme areas.
- **Programme-wide expenditure** for both 2001/02 and 2002/03 was **in line with reprofiled figures**. Individual Partnerships vary considerably in terms of total expenditure and the degree to which they spend original allocations. The national evaluation team also identified a **number of concerns**:
- **Community engagement** is a central plank in the design of the NDC Programme. But it comes at a cost: burn-out of key local community players; intra-community tensions; the demands placed on the time and resources of NDC employees and agencies; and so on.



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- Across the Programme **neither gender nor disability figure prominently**. There is a long tradition of ABIs implementing 'gender free' policies. There is a danger that some NDC Partnerships could fall into the same trap.
- Partnerships have generally attempted to engage with BME communities; but not all have done so and the links between BME needs and aspirations on the one hand, and appropriate projects and outcomes, on the other, are not always evident.
- Some Partnerships have encountered a **degree of instability**: Chief Executives leave, chairs of boards are replaced, agency representatives move on. Some of this is inevitable, sometimes desirable. But it can place a heavy burden on the 'stayers'.
- Ten-year strategic planning is complex, requiring a careful reflection of the steps required to close gaps between the area and the wider district. Partnerships with an inbuilt majority of local residents **cannot always be relied on to think strategically over a ten-year period**.
- Some Partnerships have identified what seems to be a **formidable number of outcomes**. An analysis of Delivery Plans undertaken in 2002 suggested that ten Partnerships had identified at least 40 outcomes, and four more than 55. Some Partnerships may be advised to focus on a more realistic tranche of outcomes which should, wherever possible, complement the 2002 neighbourhood renewal floor-targets.
- In line with experience across neighbourhood renewal there is strong evidence pointing to a **lack of appropriate skills** to enable Partnerships to drive forward their Plans. There appear to be particular shortages in relation to the role of health and education in neighbourhood renewal.
- Some Partnerships tend to learn by bringing in consultants rather than by exploring the existing evidence base.
- Partnerships need to set in place **monitoring and evaluation** systems which allow them to know total disaggregated expenditure, outputs, beneficiaries and anticipated links to outcomes, for each and every project. Unless this evidence is available, Partnerships, and the wider community, will simply not know what has been done, at what total cost, and for the benefits of whom.
- There is considerable **confusion in relation to what 'mainstreaming'** means for partnerships and agencies. There is little to support the view that agencies are systematically providing additional resources for, or providing better services towards, NDC localities. Indeed there is evidence suggesting some agencies have been seeking to use NDC resources to reduce existing commitments into the neighborhood.



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- There is a sense that NDCs may be **becoming a little isolated** in a policy environment within which Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are clearly playing a central co-ordinating role in relation to neighbourhood renewal across districts. Evidence from the evaluation allows for some early observation in relation to the **five outcome areas**:
- Developing initiatives to reduce **crime** has benefited from three factors. The police have often been the most supportive of agencies; it is a theme which tends to receive strong support from residents, boards and stakeholders; and it is relatively easy to implement quick wins, notably target hardening projects and the joint funding of additional police. It will be interesting to see the extent to which the police are able to maintain continuity and commitment to NDCs when other neighbourhood renewal initiatives, notably LSPs, also require a 'community policing' input.
- Partnerships tend to have problems in relation to **health** outcomes. Residents may prioritise other themes; Partnerships can have problems in defining their roles; and major organisational changes, notably the creation of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), whilst likely to prove beneficial in the longer run, have undoubtedly led to a degree of uncertainty in the short term. In addition health, together with education, is likely to achieve positive outcomes only in the longer term. It may be many years before the full effects are known of preventative measures introduced now.
- **Education** has been the subject of considerable organisational change, including the local management of schools initiative which has led to schools sometimes proving reluctant to engage with other institutions in the locality. That issue seems to be easing now. However, whereas Partnerships will be in a position to engage with local primary schools, not all have a secondary school within their areas. The numbers of schools which NDC post-11 pupils attend can be remarkable, posing a real challenge for Partnerships wishing to improve educational standards for post-primary education pupils.
- Partnerships have implemented initiatives such as training, mentoring, job brokerage, and skill enhancement in order to address problems of **worklessness**. Established employment agencies may be around to assist with project development and implementation. But not all Partnerships have found it easy in practice to engage with employment agencies or New Deals for the Unemployed Programmes. The implications of Jobcentre Plus, whilst likely to prove advantageous in the longer run, have not yet fully rolled out in all NDC areas. And there can be an inclination for Partnerships to support local initiatives such as social enterprise, whereas positive outcomes are more likely to be achieved by integrating NDC residents within wider job markets.



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- A wide range of **local environmental initiatives** have successfully been introduced across the Programme. Major **housing redevelopment** proposals raise more fundamental issues. These can often only be carried out in partnership with other agencies. Sometimes initiatives can be undermined by issues beyond the control of Partnerships, such as stock transfer proposals. Some major initiatives are also being considered by Partnerships in Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas. Pathfinders cover nine subregions, accommodating some 720,000 of the estimated 880,000 low demand properties in England. 9 NDCs are located in these areas where according to the government's 'Sustainable Communities' strategy the intention is that '*radical and sustained action*' should be implemented through '*demolition and new build or refurbishment*'. It is not clear that major housing initiatives in NDCs located within these Pathfinders have always fully taken on board the implications of this new policy context.

Across the Programme there are grounds for satisfaction arising out of the findings from this first full year of the national evaluation. Huge efforts have gone into a range of 'process' tasks such as partnership building, community engagement, and inter-agency working. There is a sense now running through all of the key local constituencies, Partnerships, their stakeholders and local residents, that it is now time to deliver.

# Aston Pride - New Deal for Communities

