

# **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**25th August 2010**

## **Neighbourhood Groups Review – Implementation Monitoring Report**

Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Carole Gandy / Cllr Michael Braley
Relevant Head of Service	Hugh Bennett (Director of Policy, Performance & Partnerships)

### **1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

One of the key roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to monitor the implementation of recommendations that have been reported through the Overview and Scrutiny process. This report contains further information about the action that has been taken to date to implement the Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group's recommendations, which were approved in December 2009. A number of these actions are in the process of being implemented whilst other actions have already been completed.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Committee are asked to RESOLVE that,**  
**subject to Members' comments, the report be noted.**

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Groups review was undertaken in 2009. There were four members of the Group: Councillor Kath Banks (Chair), and Councillors Enderby, Pearce and Thomas.
- 3.2 The review had been proposed by the Executive Committee owing to concerns about the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Groups as an informing and consultation mechanism. The Groups had been introduced in 1996 and by 2009/10 a budget of £62,210 was allocated by the Council to support the process. Attendance at these meetings had decreased steadily and by 2009 only a small number of highly dedicated residents were attending meetings of the thirteen Neighbourhood Groups.
- 3.3 The Councillors were tasked with reviewing the impact of the Neighbourhood Groups as a consultation mechanism and whether any alternative approaches to engagement and consultation might more effectively be implemented by the Council.

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- 3.4 Members consulted widely during the course of the review, both in writing and in person during the meetings of the Neighbourhood Groups in October 2009. By the end of the review information had been provided by local Borough Councillors, County Councillors, Council Officers, Student Councillors, Police Officers and local residents and the feedback provided informed the Group's final recommendations.
- 3.5 At the end of the review the Councillors concluded that the Neighbourhood Groups were no longer fit for purpose. The residents attending the meetings, though very dedicated, were not necessarily representative of the broader local population and the Councillors were concerned that this was providing a tiny proportion of the local population with a disproportionate amount of influence over local community action. Furthermore, frequently the issues that were raised during Neighbourhood Group meetings related to matters beyond the Council's direct control and required action from other public service organisations which could not be enforced through the Neighbourhood Groups.
- 3.6 The Councillors proposed that, instead, alternative mechanisms could be utilised by the Council to more effectively engage with local residents including arrangements that would involve a multi-agency approach to resolve complex problems. The Councillors were keen to propose a variety of different methods to meet the needs of different groups within society. They were also anxious to ensure that that traditionally hard to reach residents, such as young people, would be more effectively engaged by the Council as a result of any changes that might occur.
- 3.7 The Councillors reported their findings for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25th November and for the consideration of the Executive Committee on 2nd December 2009. Subject to a number of amendments the Councillors recommendations were approved and fully ratified during the Council meeting on 7th December 2009.
- 3.8 A total of eight recommendations were approved as well as thirteen subsidiary recommendations. Further information about progress with regards to implementing these recommendations is outlined below.

### **4. KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 The following section outlines the Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group's recommendations, as they were approved in December 2009, and the action that has been taken in response to each recommendation.

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**4.2 Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Neighbourhood Groups are not now fit for purpose and should be discontinued in their present form.**

4.2.1 The final meetings of the thirteen Neighbourhood Groups took place in February and March 2010. All residents on the Council's distribution list for the Neighbourhood Groups were advised in writing that this would be the final round of the Neighbourhood Group meetings (Appendix 1). Furthermore, it was announced at each Neighbourhood Group meeting in February and March 2010 that that would be the last meeting of the Group.

**4.3 Recommendation 2: We recommend that following consultation with the Police, the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) Group meetings should be re-launched and delivered as an equal partnership arrangement.**

4.3.1 Following the Council's decisions on the O&S recommendations, joint working with West Mercia Police led to further detailed recommendations, as detailed in Appendix 2. These indicated a far less rigid, more responsive local response to community needs, with no one single process to 're-launch' to replace the former structures. These arrangements are now being worked up in greater detail between local Borough, County Councillors and relevant local policing representatives. They are based on equal partnership between these bodies. However, the Police retain the prime co-ordinating role in terms of the remaining scheduled PACT meetings; and lead on the master PACT website which, for historical reasons, is theirs.

**4.4 Recommendation 2a: We recommend that Redditch Borough Council should work with the Police and other local agencies participating in Partners and Communities Together (PACT) to agree funding and administration for PACT meetings.**

4.4.1 This principle is agreed and practical arrangements are evolving as ideas about what is required in each area develop. Because of the Police lead on the formal scheduled PACT Meetings, they currently retain the administrative and financial responsibilities for these. Savings on the Neighbourhood Group budgets provide a fund for Borough Council assistance with other less formal PACT activity and meetings; and the County Council may similarly be able to contribute to this, but arrangements are still at an early stage of development and new patterns have yet to be set. Periodic review of progress with the Council's partners will be necessary, and corresponding adjustments made, as assessed at the time.

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- 4.5 **Recommendation 2b: We recommend that a protocol should be jointly developed outlining the roles and responsibilities of all agencies in the re-launched Partners and Communities Together Groups.**
- 4.5.1 The new arrangements have not yet reached this stage of development, as there is no 'one size fits all' solution. (This may not be quite as envisaged at the time of the Neighbourhood Group Review, but it is the agreed pattern now set by the partner agencies.)
- 4.6 **Recommendation 2c: We recommend that the Chairs of all Partners and Communities Together meetings should be independent members of the community.**
- 4.6.1 This principle is agreed by all partners and, where independent Chairs do not yet exist, 'capacity building' is encouraged to develop potential new Chairs.
- 4.7 **Recommendation 2d: We recommend that promotion of the re-launched Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings should be appropriately targeted towards clarifying the meaning of the new arrangements for residents living in areas where PACT and Neighbourhood Group meetings currently only take place on the same night.**
- 4.7.1 Again, given the state of development of the rather more complex arrangements, area by area, the need for this is accepted and will be rolled out and promoted area by area, as proposals develop.
- 4.8 **Recommendation 2e: We recommend that the existing Neighbourhood Groups Hire of Premises budget (0630 3551) be retained and made available for the re-launched Partners and Communities Together groups to be spent as considered appropriate for the arrangement of ad hoc meetings.**
- 4.8.1 This has been accepted / agreed.
- 4.9 **Recommendation 3: We recommend that to supplement the new arrangements a further variety of methods that will enable Redditch Borough Council to inform and consult more effectively with local residents should be considered.**

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- 4.9.1 A number of actions have been taken to implement recommendations 3a-h. This action is outlined in response to each of those subsidiary recommendations below.
- 4.10 **Recommendation 3a: We recommend that subject to a successful revenue bid, the Council should publish quarterly editions of Redditch Matters during the year to inform residents about local public services, activities and Council business.**
- 4.10.1 Redditch Matters is the Council's newspaper. A revenue bid was submitted to fund the publication of four editions of the newspaper per year during the 2009/10 budget setting process. This revenue bid was approved by Council on 22nd February 2010.
- 4.10.2 It was planned to produce four editions of the magazine in 2010 but unfortunately income generated for advertising for the summer edition was poor. This was partly caused by the World Cup, according to the advertising sales contractor (the Advertiser Group). Therefore, available funds in 2010/11 mean the Council needs to rationalise and produce three editions rather than four and hence the autumn and winter editions are being combined. This is unfortunate but does not mean that the Council will neglect to publicise key consultation developments with residents through the magazine.
- 4.11 **Recommendation 3b: We recommend that Redditch Borough Council should continue to host road shows throughout the Borough.**
- 4.11.1 The road shows initiative began in June 2009 in Headless Cross and these events are attended by Councillors and Officers. These events have continued to take place in the Borough since the Review Group delivered its final report. The Council is gradually working its way across all Wards in the Borough, with the support of Councillors, and has recently completed road shows in Abbeydale and Feckenham, with plans to cover Woodrow in September and Crabbs Cross in October. They are an important opportunity to meet residents face-to-face and gather views on the Council, its services and about living in Redditch.
- 4.12 **Recommendation 3c: We recommend that Redditch Borough Council should embrace the Worcestershire Viewpoint Citizens' Panel and use every opportunity to work with the Panel to consult with residents over local issues.**

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- 4.12.1 Members of the Worcestershire Viewpoint Citizens Panel, incorporating Redditch residents, were engaged in the Worcestershire Viewpoint Survey in November 2009 and May 2010. The Viewpoint Survey will be conducted again in November 2010.
- 4.13 **Recommendation 3d: We recommend that the Council should promote web based systems, such as the Worcestershire Hub and FixMyStreet, that can be utilised to resolve residents' individual issues.**
- 4.13.1 Promotion of FixMyStreet and the Worcestershire Hub form ongoing duties for members of staff.
- 4.13.2 During the course of the review a number of concerns were raised by residents about the quality of the Worcestershire Hub service. Similar concerns were raised by County Councillors in 2009. Following on from this Worcestershire County Council established a Task and Finish review of the Worcestershire Hub. Representatives from each of the district Councils, including Redditch Borough Council, were invited to participate in this event as co-opted members. It is anticipated that as a consequence of this review recommendations will be brought forward that could lead to improvements to the service.
- 4.14 **Recommendation 3e: We recommend that social networking should be used by the Council to inform and consult with residents in appropriate circumstances.**
- 4.14.1 The Council introduced corporate Facebook and Twitter sites during the spring and these have proved useful, additional communications tools. There are currently 43 people who 'like' the Council's Facebook site (i.e. active users) and 72 followers on Twitter. So far the Council has only used social media to inform. This has included publicising all the Council's press releases, highlighting community safety tips, procurement opportunities, and promoting major events. However, the Council has also used social media as a key part of the current 'Redditch Pride' campaign, spreading messages about the campaign but also asking residents for good photos of the town (via the Flickr photo-sharing website) and encouraging general thoughts on Redditch. Several services also have their own Facebook sites including for the Palace Youth Theatre, Action Sport and the Morton Stanley Festival.
- 4.14.2 This is still a fairly new area for the Council and more work needs to be done to settle new working protocols for staff and Members in this respect.

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- 4.15 **Recommendation 3f: We recommend that The use of Councillor Calls for Action be promoted in order to be used to resolve local neighbourhood issues.**
- 4.15.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a requirement for all local authorities to have a Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA) process from 2009. The CCfA is designed to enhance the role and responsibilities of local Councillors. The process provides Councillors with an opportunity to work with relevant local partner organisations to resolve long-term problems affecting a particular neighbourhood within their ward. In most cases it should be possible for a Councillor to resolve a CCfA without recourse to scrutiny. In fact, Overview and Scrutiny should only be involved in a CCfA as a last resort.
- 4.15.2 In Redditch a process for the operation of CCfAs was developed in 2009 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a briefing, to which all members were invited, was delivered on this subject on 15th December. Further information about CCfAs was provided during the Introduction to Scrutiny Training that was delivered by Officers on 10th June 2010. Therefore, the process has been widely promoted for the consideration of all members of the Council.
- 4.15.3 To date, however, no CCfAs have been formally registered by a local Borough Councillor or reached a stage in Redditch where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been asked to review a local neighbourhood matter.
- 4.16 **Recommendation 3g: We recommend that more effort should be made by the Council to advertise the fact that residents should resolve individual issues through direct contact with Councillors, Officers and the One Stop Shops (now Customer Service Centres).**
- 4.16.1 This remains an ongoing responsibility for all Officers and Councillors at Redditch Borough Council to address.
- 4.16.2 In the summer edition of Redditch Matters details are published of the new Council with pictures and contact details for every Councillor. Every edition also includes full details for contacting the Council and the Customer Service Centres. When `Walk the Wards` are promoted over the next couple of months (Members and senior managers working together to identify issues in specific wards) the point will be made that Council

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representatives need to hear from residents about any concerns they have in their local areas

**4.17 Recommendation 3h: We recommend that the Council should work in equal partnership with the Police and other local agencies to advertise Street Briefings and Environment Visual Audits to local residents.**

4.17.1 Relevant Officers at Redditch Borough Council continue to work closely with West Mercia Police on Street Briefings and Environment Visual Audits. These processes are organised by Police Officers on an ad hoc basis in response to issues as and when they emerge. They now form part of the wider developments of the PACT processes mentioned earlier.

4.17.2 All PACT events, including formal meetings, Street Briefings and Environment Visual Audits, are advertised on the West Mercia Police website for each policing team in the Borough. Councillors are often invited to participate in these activities. Partner agencies recognise the need to link in, and increase, their own publicity and promotion activities to match / support those of the Police.

**4.18 Recommendation 4: We recommend that Redditch Borough Council should continue to seek ways to better engage and consult with a more diverse range of residents.**

4.18.1 The Council remains committed to consulting with residents and other relevant stakeholders. There have been developments across different Council service areas which have led to some new approaches to consultation as well as the continuation of ongoing methods of engagement. A number of these approaches are detailed below, though this should not be regarded as an exhaustive list of all the consultation that is currently being undertaken by the Council.

4.18.2 Housing and Tenancy teams continue to consult with existing residents' bodies, such as the Borough Tenants' Panel, over developments impacting on local tenants. The Customer Services, Dial-a-Ride and Leisure Services teams also continue to produce customer satisfaction surveys. The feedback provided by customers in these surveys informs developments in the services and the actions taken in response to the consultation can now be broadcast using the screen in the reception area. Furthermore, the Redditch Community Forum continues to operate as a central network for consultation with statutory and community organisations.



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- 4.18.3 Following the completion of the Neighbourhood Groups review, some core consultation groups have been established and consultation events have taken place. Key examples have included consultation on the Council's governance model relating to the potential introduction of whole Council elections involving articles in Redditch Matters, consideration by the Community Forum, the provision of information about the process through the delivery of leaflets and publication of information on the Council's website. Meanwhile, the Housing and Tenancy teams have introduced a Working Group of local residents to monitor progress with introductory tenancies and held a public conference to consider the new Tenant Involvement Strategy.
- 4.18.4 Additional developments in consultation are likely to occur within service teams which already undertake some form of consultation, in order to contribute to continuous improvements. In this capacity, the Economic Development Team, which already organises consultation surveys and attends existing forums to consult local stakeholders, is aiming to build on existing consultation processes. Initially this will occur through building permanent links with businesses using electronic communications.
- 4.19 **Recommendation 5: We recommend that the Council should have a robust monitoring system in place to assess the effectiveness of each of the mechanisms used to inform, engage and consult with local residents.**
- 4.19.1 A variety of monitoring systems are in place across the Council's services to assess the effectiveness of the mechanisms used to inform, engage and consult with local residents. The type of monitoring arrangement varies from mechanism to mechanism.
- 4.19.2 The scrutiny monitoring process requires the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor the impact of scrutiny recommendations. Under these circumstances this report provides Councillors with an opportunity to both assess the implementation of the recommendations and to review what impact this has had, if any, on service delivery.
- 4.19.3 Further reports in due course to the O&S Committee will help to keep Members updated both on further progress achieved and on any detailed monitoring / assessments.
- 4.20 **Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Community Forum and similar groups which engage and consult with local residents should report to the Executive Committee.**

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Feedback mechanisms to the Executive Committee / Council from outside bodies are not very robust at present and require more thought. At present the only approved route is to report to Executive Committee meetings periodically, though this does not yet happen routinely.

**4.21 Recommendation 7: We recommend that the Council should have a central electronic database which would be used for the purposes of consultation with key partners in the Borough.**

4.21.1 This has long been identified as a weakness in the Council's consultation arrangements. Officers preparing this report are not aware of any progress to date in this respect. Given recent major restructurings in the IT area and elsewhere, this proposal may require re-launching with new Service Teams and Service Leads.

**4.22 Recommendation 8: We recommend that the February round of Neighbourhood Groups be the last in their current format; and that the intention is to re-launch the revised Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings from the beginning of the new municipal year.**

4.22.1 The last round of Neighbourhood Group meetings took place in February and March 2010 as detailed above. Officers at Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council and Police Officers from the West Mercia Police have met on a number of occasions to consider appropriate arrangements for future PACT and other local consultation processes. These arrangements are again outlined in further detail above and in Appendix 2 attached.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 A total budget of £62,210 had been allocated to supporting the Neighbourhood Groups by 2009/10. The Task and Finish Group had concluded that, owing to the low number of residents attending the meetings and the limited ability to resolve local problems through the Groups, the Neighbourhood Groups did not represent value for money.

5.2 The cancellation of the Neighbourhood Group meetings did not necessarily remove this expenditure, the greater part of which comprised internal administrative recharges which would not necessarily all be recouped. However, some of the Neighbourhood Groups' spending budgets were reallocated to support the alternative consultation arrangements proposed by the Councillors.

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### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications to this report. Though new legal duties to involve residents are relevant.

### **7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct Policy implications.

### **8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

Many of the Group's recommendations complement the Council's priority to be a well managed organisation.

### **9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no direct risk management or health and safety considerations.

### **10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

The Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations which have implications for the local authority's customers, particularly with regards to the ways that service users are engaged and consulted with by the Council.

### **11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct equality or diversity implications.

### **12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT**

There are no direct value for money, procurement or asset management implications in this report, though deletion of the former Neighbourhood Groups was based in part on their poor value for money.

### **13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY**

There are no direct climate change implications.

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### **14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

The cancellation of the Neighbourhood Groups process will have had an impact on the work of various Officers who previously supported the Neighbourhood Groups process. New PACT processes specifically exclude routine Officer attendance/ involvement in scheduled PACT meetings.

### **15. GOVERNANCE / PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct governance or performance management implications, though clearly better connection with local residents / communities should better inform all aspects of the Council's work.

### **16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998**

Partners and Communities Together (PACT) arrangements remain in place across the Borough and will be enhanced to better address community safety issues.

### **17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct health inequalities implications.

### **18. LESSONS LEARNT**

Many lessons were learnt in the process of the Neighbourhood Groups Review, as detailed in the report of that review, including significant lessons around undertaking meaningful engagement with local residents, against the previous one-size-fits-all 'blanket' arrangements.

### **19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

19.1 The Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group undertook extensive consultation during the course of their review. This included face to face consultation with hundreds of residents by members of the Group who attended thirteen Neighbourhood Group / PACT meetings in October 2009. Hundreds of residents were also advised about the Group's proposals and invited to contribute to the review in writing. In total approximately 1,650 residents were consulted as part of the review.

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19.2 The response received from residents was overwhelmingly in favour of the Review Group's proposals. In particular, many residents recognised that the Neighbourhood Groups were no longer working effectively and they supported the Group's suggestion that these meetings should be discontinued and replaced with alternative mechanisms.

**20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	No
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	No
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Resources	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

**21. WARDS AFFECTED**

All wards.

**22. APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1 - Letter to residents
- Appendix 2 - PACT combined notes and Action Plan – July 2010.

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### **23. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Executive Committee Minutes – 2nd December 2009  
Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007  
Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group – Executive Summary  
Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group – Final Report.  
West Mercia Police Authority Website, ‘PACT – Agreeing Local Priorities’,  
which can be accessed at <http://www.westmercia.police.uk/pact/>

### **24. KEY / GLOSSARY**

CCfA	Councillor Calls for Action
PACT	Partners and Communities Together
Environment Visual Audits	Environment Visual Audits involve all relevant local public service organisations working together to address issues in a targeted area. This can involve the organisations responding to an issue that has been raised by local residents on a previous occasion or addressing issues that have been identified by one or more of those organisations. Environment Visual Audits are also known as ‘Estate Inspections’ and ‘Walkabouts’.
FixMyStreet	FixMyStreet is a website which helps people to view, discuss or report local problems to their Council. The resident reports the issue to the website which then forwards their report onto the relevant local Council. The Council responds to the report in the usual way that the Council would deal with any query or complaint.
Social Networking	Social Network services comprise communities of people working online to communicate and share interests or experiences. There are a number of social networking sites, including Bebo; Facebook; and MySpace.

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Members of these sites can keep in touch with friends and post information about themselves on their personal profiles. A number of organisations now engage with the public using group profiles on social networking sites.

Street Briefings

Street Briefings are more informal and are designed to be more proactive than Environment Visual Audits. Representatives of local organisations work together in particular streets to address local issues which are raised by residents on the day that they visit that street.

Twitter

Twitter is a web based method of communication. Individuals sign up to be members of Twitter. They can then view Twitter comments that have been posted by other users of Twitter and can submit 'tweets', or comments, in response to those original tweets.

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