

## Issues, challenges and opportunities around cohesion, community development and neighbourhood/area management

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### 1. Background

Nationally through a number of recent government strategies and by legislation there has been an increased emphasis on enhancing community engagement and promoting the sustainability of local communities. Communities have been defined for place shaping concentrating on a neighbourhood approach and also of interest focusing on cross-cutting issues such as young people, faith groups, disabilities etc. Within this context the development of community cohesion has been another aspect of building stronger communities.

The development of community cohesion is to build communities with four key characteristics:

- A common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- Valuing diversity
- Similar life opportunities for all
- Strong and positive relationships being developed between people from differing backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, schools and within neighbourhoods

The IDeA and LGA agreed the definition of community cohesion as ‘what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another’. Thus, community cohesion refers to a much wider sense of concerns in relation to a community as a whole which may include service provision, economic development, social inclusion, education and planning. The knowledge and skills required to address community cohesion work are applicable across much of the work of community development, community health and education, youth work and equality work.

The approach to neighbourhood/area management needs to mainstream community cohesion and ensure that any action plans address the points above especially related to service planning and performance management. Delivering the foundations needs engagement at senior management level with a shared understanding and agreed approaches between all partners. Effective leadership and an in-depth knowledge of communities are vital. There is an important link with the equalities agenda and to deliver equalities and cohesion effectively, they need to be part of the core business of the local strategic partnership.

## 2. Current position

Area working across the City has been developed through the Area Committee structure. The outcomes which can be achieved through a neighbourhood/area approach include:

- Engaging and actively involving local communities
- Involving a range of agencies to solve complex issues
- Enhance community leadership role of elected members
- Local decision-making and scrutiny of local issues
- Development of local performance and quality targets
- A more appropriate allocation of resources by responding more effectively to the different needs of each area
- Translating corporate objectives into practical local actions

However there needs to be:

- Clear objectives and accountability to strategies and partnerships
- Clarity on how local people and front-line staff are to be involved/empowered
- Adequate resources to achieve goals

Although the structural component has been in place, there is a need to further develop community engagement and involvement in order to effectively achieve more sustainable and stronger communities.

## 3. The way forward

The area planning process has been developed to incorporate local identified needs and recent consultation has been taken to a neighbourhood level. The community led planning model has also been further developed within three areas of the City and in partnership with the County Council. This approach used the parish planning model and was evaluated to assess its relevance to a more urban setting. The evaluation showed that the model could be used with some adjustments on consultation methodology.

The Area Committee structure was used as the basis for the development of the Neighbourhood Policing model. There are policing areas aligned to the six area committee areas and the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) were set up within these areas fitting closely with ward boundaries.

The development of a neighbourhood approach to working with local communities could link to the Area Committee structure as the NAGs already do. This provides a clear path for accountability and ensuring more complex issues are reported back on. The NAGs concentrate on community safety issues so there is a need to develop more neighbourhood working to address the wider

agenda.

During the consultation on area planning, 24 neighbourhoods were identified through residents/community groups consultation. These could be further developed and linked back into Area Committees to build an overview of local place shaping agendas.

Neighbourhood management needs resources to support the process and ensure that there is effective community involvement and a joined up approach with the statutory and voluntary agencies. The priority may therefore be initially focused on those identified through the Regeneration Framework - Blackbird Leys, Barton, Rose Hill, Littlemore, Northway and Wood Farm.

By establishing neighbourhood groups in these key regeneration areas, there could be a representative member of each group on the Health and Social Inclusion Partnership group. This would enable a key link to be developed to the strategic partnership.

### **Advantages**

- Already established many of the building blocks of this model
- Many neighbourhoods already identified and have established resident/tenant/community groups
- Already working with Community Centres towards achieving the national VISIBLE standard which includes more evidence of how they address local community needs

### **Challenges**

- Neighbourhood/area working needs dedicated resources
- Need to develop local monitoring/performance especially related to sense of place/satisfaction with area living in and services
- Need to also address cross-cutting issues not area specific - young people, older people, faith groups, disabilities

The following diagram shows how the various groups/committees could link to establish accountability and effective monitoring procedures.

If the model of working is supported, a more detailed report can be developed on the structures require, frequency of meetings and reporting mechanisms.