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| Report to: | Strategic Policy and Resources Committee |
| Subject: | Community Planning Update |
| Date: | 25 th April 2012 |
| Reporting Officer: | Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health & Environmental Services |
| Contact Officer: | Sharon McNicholl, Strategic Planning & Policy Manager, ext 6009 |

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| 1.0 | <u>Relevant background information</u> |
| 1.1 | This report provides an update on the BIG Lottery Fund Community Planning Pilot and proposals from the Community Planning cross-party reference group on the way forward for community planning within Council. |
| 1.2 | In June 2006 the 'local government taskforce community planning sub-group' produced a recommendation paper. The Director of Development was a leading Member of this group which made 21 key recommendations with regard to community planning. At that time it was envisaged RPA would be introduced in 2009. This slipped to 2011 and it is now anticipated to be introduced in 2015. As a consequence of the taskforce and the subsequent Foundation Programme a significant amount of work and policy developments were initiated in Council to prepare for community planning. |
| 1.3 | A key initiative was an application to the BIG Lottery Fund to tender for one of three contracts to deliver a community planning pilot project in Northern Ireland. In May 2010 Belfast City Council (as the lead partner in the Belfast Community Planning Consortium) was awarded one of the contracts (valued at £140k plus VAT). This was to be completed by January 2012. |
| 1.4 | The focus of the Pilots was the support of the VCS to participate in proposed community planning processes. The key achievements of the Belfast Pilot included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising the profile of community planning and contributing to a shared understanding of community planning • Developing and strengthening relationships and alliances between Council Members/Officers and cross-sector external agencies (statutory & VCS) • Assisting the Belfast Strategic Partnership to develop its Framework for Action by designing its initial planning process and first stage engagement. • Development of a community planning model/framework for Belfast • Delivering a replicable capacity building learning programme in partnership with University of Ulster • Summary of key lessons learned |
| 1.5 | The achievements and learning from the Pilot were shared at a summative conference held on 19 January 2012. The keynote speaker was the Minister of the Environment who reiterated the Programme for Government's commitment to Local Government Reform and in particular the introduction of the duty of Community Planning by 2015. He publically invited the Pilot Consortium to engage with his department in order to share the learning from this pilot. |
| 1.6 | The Belfast Pilot was extended by two months until the end of March 2012 and this additional period has focused on transitioning the Pilot's work from a time-bound project into a sustainable value-added process within BCC. |

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| 1.7 | The cross-party Members working group on Community Planning has met monthly since September 2011 after its post-election re-establishment. It has met jointly with the Pilot Consortium twice and Cllr Attwood (Chairman) spoke at the Pilot's final conference outlining the Council's commitment to the continuing development of community planning. |
| 1.8 | The cross-party Members group recently met and agreed proposals for the next stage in developing Community Planning. |
| 2.0 | <u>Key issues</u> |
| | Engagement with DoE & alignment with RPA |
| 2.1 | The Minister of the Environment's invitation to the Pilot Consortium indicated he would welcome engagement with his department as it seeks to develop the legislative framework and guidance for Community Planning. This has been reinforced at recent meetings between the Minister and Members. This invitation provides a real opportunity for Council (& its partners) to influence the legislation and guidance ahead of the proposed introduction of the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill (potentially November 2012). The cross-party reference group suggested Council officers made initial contact with DoE officials to explore development of further engagement. |
| 2.2 | The cross-party Members group identified the importance of linking internally with the new Voluntary Transition Committee and ensuring community planning developments were aligned to the emerging work on Local Government reform. |
| | Preparing for the duty of community planning |
| 2.3 | In addition to the BIG Community Planning Pilot a number of significant initiatives have been progressing in Council that have synergies with the on-going development of Community Planning, including thematic and neighbourhood working and the development of Community Development and Consultation & Engagement strategies. The Council is also a key player on partnerships seeking to develop community planning approaches such as the Belfast Strategic Partnership, the Policing & Community Safety Partnership and the Good Relations Partnership. Cross-party Members noted that the stated commitment by the Assembly to progress Local Government Reform provides an impetus to draw these disparate strands together and develop a coherent strategic approach in preparing for the introduction of the formal Community Planning duty. |
| 2.4 | Cross-party Members identified that there is a need to build capacity of both Members and officers ahead of the formal introduction of Community Planning. It was suggested a programme of learning be developed and that this should potentially include finding out more about cities/areas where community planning is well established and has shown successes and briefings to share best practice in this area. |
| 2.5 | The group is keen to see the next stage of Community Planning continue to support current activities within Council. The BIG Community Planning Pilot produced a high-level model for community planning in Belfast (see Appendix 1). The cross-party reference group would encourage the model's continued development and have suggested a number of themes to explore its further application, including youth unemployment/NEETs; the Investment Programme; Older People; Community Safety. These areas are currently being refined so that the approach can best add value to what the Council sees as its priorities. |

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| 2.6 | The development and high-profile commitment to the Investment Programme has raised expectations about the way the Council will deliver the Programme and in particular how it will work with its partners and local communities. The Investment Package includes commitments to partnership working, stakeholder engagement and local involvement in delivering key projects. The cross-party Members identified this as a real opportunity for continued work on community planning to support the development of these processes, whilst at the same time providing an additional resource for delivery. |
| 2.7 | Cross-party Members recognise that an important requisite in preparing for the proposed Community Planning duty will be the continued communication and engagement of Council with a wide range of stakeholders (including Members; other statutory agencies and departments; the private sector; voluntary and community sector, local communities and citizens). They acknowledged the role the Belfast Community Planning Consortium has played in enabling this as part of the successful delivery of the BIG Community Planning Pilot and asked them for feedback on how this may be continued. The Consortium suggested that Council provided regular opportunities (possibly 3 times a year) for wider stakeholders to meet and to engage with Council on the progress of Community Planning in Belfast. These events could be aligned with specific developments eg carrying out a joint consultation on the new draft Reform of Local Government Bill due in the Autumn. |
| | Terms of Reference |
| 2.8 | As the BIG Community Planning Pilot project has now concluded, the terms of reference of the cross-party members group need to be updated to reflect this and the subsequent regional announcements surrounding RPA and community planning. Suggested amendments will be brought to a subsequent SP&R Committee for approval. |
| | Conference at Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon, 27th April |
| 2.9 | The Committee is also asked to note that at its meeting on 28 th March, the working group agreed that SP&R Committee be asked to approve attendance by any member of the reference group at a community planning conference, "Ensuring the VOICES of Minorities in the Community Planning Process" in the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre in Craigavon on 27 th April. So far the Chair of the working group has confirmed his intention to attend. The Committee is asked to approve attendance by Members of the cross party working group at this conference. There is no conference fee. |

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| 3.0 Resource Implications |
| All resource implications have been included within financial estimates for 2012/13. |

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| 4.0 Equality implications |
| The principles of equality and good relations will underpin the approach to community planning as it develops. |

5.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the achievements of the BIG Lottery Fund's Community Planning Pilot
- Consider the approach outlined in the report and support the identified actions:
 - That Council proactively responds to the Minister's invitation to engage with the DoE
 - Identify clear linkages with the RPA voluntary Transition Committee
 - Develop a strategic, coherent approach to Community Planning internally within Council; including a review of and recommendations relating to the Council's approach to community engagement and external relations, building upon work carried out to date in this area
 - Develop a learning programme for Members and officers including possible best practice study visit.
 - Continue development and testing of the emerging Belfast Community Planning model in identified areas of work
 - Consider how a community planning approach can be used to aid the delivery of the Investment Programme
 - Provide regular opportunities to communicate and engage with wider stakeholders in the ongoing development of Belfast Community Planning.
 - Update the terms of reference of the cross-party reference group;
 - Approve attendance by Members of the cross party reference group at the community planning conference in the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon on 27th April.

6.0 Decision Required

Members are asked to endorse the proposals of the cross-party reference group and the approach outlined in the report.