
Central Dudley Area Committee 9th March 2010

Report of the Director of Adult, Community, and Housing Services

Community Renewal Working Group

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee on the progress to date of the Working Group and development of the Central Dudley Area Committee Community Renewal Plan.

Background

2. The working group met on 23rd of February as the meeting scheduled for January was cancelled because of weather conditions. It has met this year on four occasions to develop and monitor the Area Community Renewal plan for Central Dudley.
3. At each of the working group meetings performance against the community renewal plan activities has been considered and noted, with further activities added where appropriate. Priorities within the plan are identified and once targets are achieved they are added to the Achievements and Completions spreadsheet. Members of the working group have explored in detail issues of concern with various partners contributing to the renewal of communities in central area.
4. To ensure that the plan reflects community issues it was recommended that the results of engagement with community groups, neighbourhood partnerships and forums are fed into the community renewal working group and into the community renewal plan for the area and also that that a co-opted member for the purpose of representing the local neighbourhood partnerships be appointed to the Working Group.

Current Key Activities

Co-ordination of approach to derelict and abandoned land sites within neighbourhoods (sites under 0.2 hectares).

5. – it was noted that progress was not as advanced as projected on this theme and that there were no longer land teams available through Future Jobs Fund however, the Community Renewal team were now working with alternative options to allow the project to move forward.

Improving street scene and environment to improve community reassurance

6. – the recent joint pilot scheme between DMBC Housing and Age Concern to improve garden standards which members had raised as a concern had been reported on, to Area Housing Panels; the scheme is a Housing initiative and targets vulnerable adults. Although the pilot scheme had been a success, before moving the scheme forward, the criteria were being considered further- members asked to be kept updated of the progress and the criteria concerning the definition of vulnerable adults arising from concerns about potential benefits trap disincentives for those taking up skills and training opportunities.
7. - a project is currently being undertaken to address the poor state of the environment and private housing and street scene at Edwards Street /Russell's Street area in St James ward. The working group asked to be kept updated and in particular referred to the issues of poorly managed private rented property particularly in St Thomas' and St James which they asked to be incorporated into the work plan.

Community Centres

8. - members discussed the development of the proposed North Priory Community Centre and noted that further discussions are taking place on how to move the project forward. They further noted the progress with the improvements in the management of the Wrens Nest Community centre and Woodside community centre.

Tackling worklessness in the most deprived wards in the borough

9. – the working group was made aware of the Community Information and Recruitment Events being organised through the neighbourhood employment and skills partnerships (NESPs) in the central area. These are designed, through targeted action, to link unemployed people into skills, support and training opportunities and through partnership working, to ensure that people are able to access the training and support which most meets their needs.
10. 170 people had attended the recent event in St James, where there were opportunities in the construction and trades because of the development of the extra care housing scheme. The event enabled local people to identify their skills gaps and to connect with local skills and training providers including Future Skills, Colleges, Adult and Community Learning, Black Country Training and Connexions at an early stage. This makes it possible for them to prepare the relevant skills to enable them to take up the opportunities being made available through Midland Heart Housing.
11. 150 people had attended the event at St Thomas's and although the Woodside event, which was run more as a family event , had attracted a less impressive number, 40 people had requested further information in relation to training courses that were available.
12. An event at Castle and Priory had been less successful and steps were being

taken to reconnect the partners with the NESP, however as a result of partnership working in the ward there had been a noticeable increase in the take-up of adult literacy and numeracy courses at the neighbourhood learning centres in that ward.

13. In addition members noted that through Future Jobs Fund, 3 local young people had started work experience within the Community Renewal Team as Community Assistants and 1 had started work experience as a cook's assistant in the Community café and training kitchen at Wren's Nest.

Reduction of criminal damage and vandalism and reduction in alcohol associated anti-social behaviour

14. – the working group considered these issues were ongoing and expressed concern about the level of progress being made. The members considered the issue of "perception" of anti-social behaviour and the point was made that what was considered to be anti-social behaviour was sometimes subjective and due to intolerance. The working group were informed of the statistical information provided by the West Midlands Police which had identified "hot spot" areas in the Borough to enable better targeting of activities to address this, although one of the issues reflected in the data was that of antisocial behaviour occurring in blocks of flats and communal areas. The working group were advised of the joint work being undertaken through the Joint Activities Group to target this. The working group discussed that the solution to tackling anti-social behaviour in the central area was to take a longer term approach and actively engage young people in alternatives to loitering on the streets.

15. Work-streams and organisational arrangements

Members of the working group discussed the work-streams and communication methods and opportunities which enabled elected members to keep updated and involved with activity to renew communities in central area. Members were advised how these arrangements enabled the engagement of communities and service providers in meeting the objectives of the Community Renewal Plan for this area. A flow chart was provided that illustrated how the various work streams and activities fitted together to enable a more strategic overview of community renewal work, with an emphasis on avoiding overlap and duplication of activity and of encouraging community engagement in the delivery of the plan.

Connecting Communities

16. The programme is a central government initiative designed to promote community cohesion by reducing the alienation of traditional working class areas affected most severely by long term unemployment and deprivation and to ensure that residents are allowed a bigger say in local issues and in addressing local concerns.
17. Castle and Priory Ward has been included in the Connecting Communities programme and has been allocated £70,000 to be committed and started before

the end of March 2010. Connecting Communities also attracts the services of a Local Improvement Advisor to support it and also a “community champions” programme.

18. So far the programme has been divided into several project areas which include young people, communications, perceptions of lettings and training and job opportunities, and a small community chest. It is planned that as the programme develops additional project areas will emerge as a result of engagement with the local people.
19. On Monday 1st March a participatory budgeting pilot was held at Wrens Nest Community Centre to allocate the Community Chest. Small grant programmes of (1) Enterprise, (2) Community and (3) Youth were set and groups were invited to apply for funding for their project.
20. Each group was invited to attend the event held and in turn describe how they would use the money applied for. The other groups then awarded points to the proposal based on the set criteria by voting. 14 groups applied for funds from across the ward including groups from Priory, Wrens Nest and The Greens.
21. 6 of the groups were pensioners groups including a group of retired engineers and craftsmen who now run a woodworking club in the area. One 89 year old pensioner who ran the tea dance club commented that she had been running the club for more than 20 years and this was the first time that anyone had ever given her anything towards it. Young people in the area were successful in applying for funds to run activities for 8-12's and 2 enterprises were also successful.
22. The event was a great success in terms of cohesion, with all groups in the community category choosing to donate some of their funds awarded to the last group, in order to make up their amount. The myths of conflict between the estates were laid to rest and young people were observed to give their highest scores to pensioners groups and, pensioners were observed to challenge those who thought young people had no rights play.
23. The event was heralded as a great success and the results and final report will be made available to elected members.

Finance

24. The Area Committee Community Renewal Plan is developed in line with the overall Council Plan and priorities whilst encouraging innovation in the commissioning of activities from a variety of partners which will add value and achieve objectives for their area.

Law

8. The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to establish a Local Strategic Partnership to address collaborative working and develop a community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy. Community Renewal is part of that approach.
9. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1980 enables the Council to do anything which is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well being of the area.

Equality Impact

10. The objective of Community Renewal is to promote inclusion and social cohesion. The Community Renewal strategy targets those most in need in terms of deprivation and socio economic exclusion.
11. Information is collected through each Community Renewal intervention or consultation to monitor the inclusivity and difference made for various groups and people involved. Where inclusion is an issue Area Community Renewal Officers engage through various community or interest groups locally to design appropriate responses to different circumstances
12. Where children and young people are involved they are directly consulted and frequently design the response to local issues

Recommendation

13. That Committee Members note the report and support the recommendations of the Community Renewal Working Group.



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Linda Sanders
Director of Adult Community & Housing

Contact Officer: Susan McGavin
Telephone: 01384 813713
Email: susan.mcgavin@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers
Community Renewal Strategy
Central area community renewal plan