

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	8 JULY 2014	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	WORKING BETTER WITH YOU IN NEIGHBOURHOODS		
LEAD MEMBER:	COUNCILLOR LIZ TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS
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1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' for endorsement.
- 1.2 The Council is committed to working with local communities and partner agencies to improve the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods need to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents and to be safe, well run and attractive places in which people want to live and work. They need to be inclusive places where local people are empowered to shape, feel ownership and contribute to the life of their neighbourhood.
- 1.3 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' sets out the Councils' vision and approach to neighbourhood working and to working with local people to identify and tackle the issues that matter most to them in their local areas.

2 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee endorse the approach and commitments outlined in 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods'.
- 2.2 That the Committee welcome the implementation of new area-based teams to provide a greater neighbourhood focus to ensure the effective coordination of services for local residents, building on the success of the Love Clean Reading programme.

- 2.3 That the Committee welcome the budget provision to support and enable communities to improve their neighbourhoods.
- 2.4 That the Committee agree that 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' is a living document forming a basis for continued dialogue with stakeholders to continue to develop the Council's approach to neighbourhood working.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Where we live and the quality of our immediate environment has a huge impact on our quality of life and wellbeing. This includes the physical environment - the cleanliness of our streets, places for children to play, green spaces and so on; but also how we feel about our neighbourhood - whether we feel safe, have a sense of community, and get on with our neighbours. This is common sense - but is also supported by a raft of international evidence.
- 3.2 Research also demonstrates that empowerment that helps individuals and communities to exert control over the circumstances that affect their lives, thereby improving local wellbeing. Neighbourhood and community empowerment has been found to have three effects which increase wellbeing:
- providing greater opportunities for residents to influence decisions affecting their neighbourhoods
 - facilitating regular contact between neighbours
 - helping residents gain the confidence to exercise control.
- 3.3 The Council has a key role as both service provider and enabler, and is committed to working together with local communities and partner agencies to improve the quality of life in Reading's neighbourhoods. 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' is produced in this context and sets out the Council's vision for and approach to creating and supporting thriving and empowered neighbourhoods.

4 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The Council's vision is to create cohesive, attractive and thriving neighbourhoods where people want to live and work, and to address inequality by closing the gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods. The Council will work with communities and other stakeholders to achieve this and to ensure the delivery of joined-up services at a local level. Both our engagement and delivery will reflect that neighbourhoods have different needs and characteristics.
- 4.2 A number of key principles underpin the Council's approach:
- To 'think neighbourhood', ensuring that we have a holistic understanding of the needs of local areas and how these impact on each other, and that we

take a strategic approach to meeting these needs, not confined by service boundaries

- Ensuring an integrated approach to delivering services across Council departments and other agencies - joining up services on the ground rather than working in silos
 - Engaging with communities to understand their needs, their experience of services and what works to inform service provision and approaches to tackling local issues
 - Working collaboratively with and empowering communities to make the changes they want in their neighbourhoods, to develop services and to support each other.
 - Targeting resources effectively - with more resources focused on those areas of greater need
 - Intervening early before issues, needs and costs escalate - reducing future demand on public spending and not simply trying to put things right afterwards
- 4.3 The Council acknowledges and accepts that there is no simple or agreed definition of a 'neighbourhood', and the local authority's approach recognises that definitions and boundaries will vary depending on context.
- 4.4 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' sets out the Council's commitments to improve the quality of life in Reading' neighbourhoods, creating inclusive places where local people are empowered to shape, feel ownership of and contribute to the life of their neighbourhood. These include:
- **Local information:** Maintaining, developing and publishing local Ward data and 'place profiles' incorporating 'soft' intelligence about the experience of local residents and feedback from consultations and surveys. This information can be used to understand local needs and will also make it easier to assess change and the impact of action at a local level against key indicators over time.
 - **Patch-based working:** Creating new area-based teams to bring together all of the elements of 'caring' for the streets within the same service. . Areas will be based on Ward boundaries and the teams will offer better customer service with increased flexibility, reducing duplication and costs, taking a 'one Council approach' with a strong resident-focused ethos and a commitment to getting it right first time. Each area will also have designated community safety, Housing and neighbourhood involvement officer contacts as part of wider 'virtual' teams. This means that local people will know who to contact for help in their area with named individuals in a local team.
 - **Community Hubs in local centres:** Reviewing the configuration of services provided at a local level to identify opportunities to co-locate and better join-up neighbourhood services, including in 'community hubs' in key local centres.
 - **Working with local communities:** Supporting local communities to make the changes they want in their neighbourhoods, to develop local initiatives and to support each other. With limited resources, the Council will target resources to make a difference in the most deprived areas, but will continue to ensure that support is available to community groups in all areas of the town to take action and get involved in their neighbourhood.
 - **Participatory budgeting:** Continuing to ring-fence budgets for local people to

bid for to tackle local, neighbourhood priorities, particularly in priority neighbourhoods.

- **Partnership:** Supporting stakeholders and partners to work together collaboratively to tackle issues at a local level to harness their combined energy, develop the best solutions and make most effective use of resources.

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' articulates the Local Authority's commitment to engaging residents and other stakeholders at a local level. It highlights the importance of engendering local ownership of a neighbourhood area, maximising opportunities for residents to get involved in finding and implementing solutions to local issues and in initiatives to improve the local environment. It sets out a range of case studies which exemplify the Council's approach.
- 5.2 The document itself is intended to be a statement of current practice and developments. It provides a basis for further and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders about neighbourhood working.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council directly funds a team of Neighbourhood Initiative Officers to support local communities to bring about social change and improve the quality of life in their local area.
- 6.2 The Council provides core infrastructure grants to Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) and the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE) to enable them to support smaller and emerging communities and community groups.
- 6.3 Reading Voluntary Action and the Council have also worked alongside residents groups and neighbourhood based organisations to establish the Reading Neighbourhood Network (RNN). RNN provides peer led support to over 40 neighbourhood groups, through encouragement, advice, practical support and training. Aided by their acclaimed website, RNN plays a key role in disseminating information and getting people connected.
- 6.4 The proposed approach to neighbourhood working will make most effective use of staff resources at a time of reduced funding, whilst improving customer service.
- 6.5 The approach supports close working with local communities and particularly deprived neighbourhoods, and therefore the early identification of issues and reduced upstream costs.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal implications.

8 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The approach detailed in 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' will ensure both the most sustainable model of service delivery going forward and will support the creation of sustainable and vibrant neighbourhoods in the town.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 Reading Borough Council's Statement 'Working Better with You in Neighbourhoods' 2014.