

## **BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan**

### **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (COMMUNITIES) TO CABINET ON 17 OCTOBER 2018**

#### **CHANGE TO THE WARD ALLIANCE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK**

##### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report outlines proposed changes to the Governance relating to the operation of the Ward Alliances, part of the Council's Area Governance arrangements. The report seeks Cabinet approval for the proposed changes.

##### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Cabinet approves the changes to the Ward Alliance Governance Framework as outlined in Section 4 of this report from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018.**
- 2.2 **It is recommended that Cabinet delegates responsibility for the review process outlined in Section 4.10 of this report to the Elected Member with Portfolio for Communities and the Executive Director (Communities).**

##### **3. INTRODUCTION**

- 3.1 The Ward Alliance Governance Framework which sets out the terms of reference for the Ward Alliances was first introduced as part of the new Area Governance arrangements approved by Cabinet and Full Council in 2012 (Cab.10.10.2012/6, Cab.21.11.2012/6 and Cab.8.5.2013/7.1) and put into place from June 2013.
- 3.2 Although other aspects of the overall Area Governance Framework have been reviewed since then (Cab.22.19.2014/8.1) the guidance agreed to support the Ward Alliances has not been reviewed until now.
- 3.3 The 19 Ward Alliances have now been in operation for five years, and have formed part of the recognised successes of the Area Governance arrangements; contributing to the Corporate priority of 'Strong & Resilient Communities' by:
- Involving over 200 citizens as active members of Ward Alliances
  - Funding 2028 Ward Alliance Fund projects, which promote the involvement of citizens in activities which build the strength of their local areas
  - Contributing strongly to the 17,364 volunteers who have taken part in locally based social action through Love Where You Live since 2014 & who have given volunteer hours worth over £1 million
  - Helping to support the development of 86 new community groups since 2016 (earlier figures not available)

- 3.4 As part of the overall Area Governance arrangements, the Ward Alliances have also been recognised as national good practice, with numerous enquiries from other local authorities over the past 2 or 3 years. In 2017, this was formally recognised when Barnsley Council won the prestigious Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Award for Community Involvement for its Ward Alliances, which were praised for “inspiring Barnsley’s communities to make a real difference”.
- 3.5 However, it has become apparent in five years of operation that some aspects of the Ward Alliance Governance Framework need amendment to reflect the lessons learned in the interim, and to provide updated guidelines which offer clarity around areas which had not been identified at the outset.

#### **4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION**

- 4.1 A number of changes have been made to the Framework and its supporting documentation and processes. They have been made to bring the Framework up to date with the realities of the way in which Ward Alliances operate five years from their inception, and to attempt to close gaps in the guidance.
- 4.2 The main changes can be categorised under 7 headings:
- Chairing arrangements
  - Decision making & required levels of quoracy
  - Applications for membership
  - Induction of new Ward Alliance members
  - Renewal of Ward Alliance membership
  - Formalised review process for the Ward Alliances
  - Formalising the involvement of the Executive Director (Communities) and the Portfolio Holder (Communities) where there are significant concerns

##### **4.3 Chairing arrangements**

The current Framework requires for the Chair of a Ward Alliance to be an elected member and this remains unchanged under the new proposals. However, because the new quoracy levels as outlined in section 4.4 below require only one elected member to be present for the meeting to go ahead, this means that this single elected member will act as Chair at any meeting.

Section 2.7 of the revised framework also proposes that the Chair and Secretary are jointly responsible for ensuring that the notes from meetings adequately capture decisions made but also for making sure that the notes anonymise discussions held to protect Ward Alliance members when notes are made public.

Some Ward Alliances choose to rotate their Chairing function between the three ward members. Section 7.2 formalises this arrangement for Ward Alliances wishing to do this, but sets down the need for agreement on who will be chairing prior to Ward Alliance meetings, to enable the elected member in question to be fully involved in agenda setting for the meeting.

#### 4.4 Decision making & levels of quoracy

The existing Framework requires one third of the membership (including a minimum of 1 of the 3 elected members and 2 community representatives) for any Ward Alliance meeting to be quorate and able to make decisions. This has caused a number of issues in practice, where members have been unavailable to attend and has meant that Ward Alliance business has not been able to progress.

The proposed changes in Section 8.3 of the Framework would alter the quoracy requirement, so that decisions can be made so long as one third of the overall membership and at least one elected member are in attendance (one from each ward where two Ward Alliances are combined).

Section 8.3 also outlines more clearly the proposed quoracy arrangements for joint Ward Alliances, with a proposal that at least one elected member and community representative from each ward are present for the meeting to be quorate.

All Ward Alliance members are required under the current arrangements to declare any interests in matters considered at meetings. However, this probably is not well understood, particularly by community members. Paragraphs 8.8 and 8.9 have therefore been revised to give more information about why interests need to be declared and that this applies equally to individuals, their companies or employers.

Paragraph 8.10 outlines proposed Moderation Panel arrangements in the event that complaints are received about the allocation of the Ward Alliance Fund.

Section 5.11 also outlines a proposed process for the separation of a joint Ward Alliance wishing to revert to becoming two single Ward Alliances, where there is a consensus or two thirds majority vote to do so.

#### 4.5 Applications for membership

The existing Framework outlines a clear process for the three elected members within a ward to score and approve applications for those wishing to join their Ward Alliance. However, in practice this process has not always been followed correctly, with some prospective members being accepted or rejected without following the agreed process creating challenges, opening the council up to complaints of inequity.

The proposed changes in Sections 5.2 of the Framework retain the existing process of written application from prospective members and their scoring. However, where Ward Councillors reject an application for membership and where a complaint is received, it is proposed in Section 5.3 of the Framework that a Moderation Panel is established which would review the information and make a final decision on the application.

The Moderation Panel would comprise the Portfolio Holder for Communities, the Area Chair for the area within which the Ward Alliance sits, and either the Executive Director for Communities or the Service Director for Safer, Stronger & Healthier Communities.

Where the Area Chair is also the Chair of the Ward Alliance in question, another Area Chair will be asked to sit on the panel to avoid any possible conflicts of interest.

Section 5.2 also outlines a proposal to ensure that as far as is possible, the membership of each Ward Alliance broadly represents the community it serves in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity and other protected groups under equalities legislation. This section also allows for Ward Alliances to undertake targeted recruitment to its membership where imbalances exist, in line with current equalities legislation.

#### 4.6 Induction of new Ward Alliance members

The existing Framework does not make any reference to the induction of new Ward Alliance members, and in practice, the induction of new members has not always happened.

The proposed changes include provision in Section 5.10 for the formal induction of all new Ward Alliance members (including new elected members) by the Ward Alliance Chair and supporting Community Development Officer from the Area Team, including an introduction to the Ward Alliance Governance Framework and a full skills/training needs analysis; documentation for which is currently under development.

#### 4.7 Renewal of Ward Alliance membership

The existing Framework outlines that the 'term of office' for a community representative shall be one year. In practice, this has not happened widely and has proved unsettling for those majority who are happy to remain on their Alliance as longer term productive members. In the small number of wards where there are applicants waiting to come onto the Ward Alliance, these extra members have been able to be appointed by increasing the size of the community representation on the Alliance beyond the minimum of 6.

The proposed changes in Section 5.5 replace this 'term of office' with a requirement that all Ward Alliance members wishing to stay on their Alliance for a further year are asked to 're-confirm their commitment to the Ward Alliance' on an annual basis.

In addition, the proposed changes require that this re-confirmation is sought only where Ward Alliance members have fulfilled their agreed role as outlined in Section 6.3 of the Framework.

Any members who fail to seek re-confirmation this will have their membership terminated as outlined in Section 6.1

In addition, Section 5.6 outlines the proposed process to be used by elected members to decide who should be approached for re-confirmation of membership and to inform those who will not be reconfirmed.

Section 5.7 outlines a Moderation Panel procedure to be used in the event of a complaint being received from a Ward Alliance member who has not been approached for re-confirmation.

#### 4.8 Formalised Review process for the Ward Alliances

The existing Framework suggests that an annual 'self-conducted review' may be undertaken by Ward Alliances. In practice, an annual requirement is clearly too

frequent for a body which meets only 6 times per year, and application of this review process to date has been inconsistent.

The proposed changes in Section 2.6 require each Ward Alliance to be formally reviewed every 2 years, using a standardised approach and with support from Area Teams.

#### 4.9 Formalising intervention in cases of concern

The existing Framework makes no reference to either Councillor or senior officer intervention where there are significant concerns about the way in which a specific Ward Alliance is operating. The majority of Ward Alliances have been working well, but there have been a small number of examples where some have seemed unable to resolve issues which were holding back their development.

The proposed changes in Section 8.10 allow for the Portfolio Holder (Communities) and the Executive Director (Communities) to deal with significant concerns about the operation or progress of a Ward Alliance ( which includes concerns about the allocation of Ward Alliance Funds ) where informal resolution has not been possible with the respective Ward Alliance Chair or Area Chair.

#### 4.10 Regular future review of Ward Alliance Governance Framework

In order to ensure that good practice continues to develop within the Ward Alliances, the Ward Alliance Governance Framework needs to be reviewed on a regular basis to support this. It is proposed that the Framework is formally reviewed every 2 years.

#### 4.11 Payment of honorarium for Ward Alliance Secretary role

In the current Framework, an allowance of £500 per year is made available for each Ward Alliance Secretary. Takeup of this allowance has always been patchy, with around 35% of Secretaries operating on a voluntary basis and 65% currently in receipt of the allowance.

In order to recognise that many Secretaries are happy to continue on a voluntary basis, whilst others choose to claim the allowance, it is proposed that Section 7.1 of the new Framework enables those wishing to continue to claim an honorarium payment to do so, and leaves the choice of whether or not to claim to the Secretary themselves.

Section 7.1 also makes clear that only community representatives are eligible for an honorarium payment – elected members wishing to undertake the role of Secretary can do so only on a voluntary unpaid basis.

However, it is also proposed that payments are authorised only when the Area Manager for the Area has confirmed with the respective Ward Alliance Chair that the Secretary has fully carried out the duties within the role.

An outline of the Secretary role currently exists, but will be reviewed to ensure that there is clarity about what is expected from the role.

#### 4.12 Resolution of issues with allocation of Ward Alliance Funds

The Ward Alliance Fund of £10,000 per ward per year is now heavily oversubscribed in most areas, and because of this it is not unusual for applications to be rejected or only partially supported. In the vast majority of cases, this is not problematic and the decision is reached using due process to the satisfaction of all.

There is currently no process in place for dealing with applications where there is a significant concern about whether due process has been followed and fairly applied. To resolve this, it is proposed that where any complaint is received, Section 8.10 of the revised Framework allows for the Portfolio Holder (Communities) and the Executive Director (Communities) to deal with significant concerns.

### **5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

5.1 A number of alternative options were considered around levels of quoracy, chairing arrangements, the application process for membership and the moderation of this process. Through consultation with the colleagues outlined in Section 12.1 of this report, it is recommended that the proposed changes represent the best way forward to maximise the future development of the Ward Alliances.

5.2 The 'do nothing' option was also considered, but rejected because of the need to fill gaps which currently exist within the current Framework, and which will potentially hinder the development of the Ward Alliances in the coming years.

### **6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS**

6.1 The proposed changes to the Framework have been designed to make the operation of the Ward Alliances and the activities they support more efficient. As such, local people should benefit from seeing that activities to support the community they live in are delivered more quickly and responsively as a result.

### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no financial implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework.

### **8. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no employee implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework. All duties covered by the Framework are already undertaken by Stronger Communities staff.

### **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no legal implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework.

### **10. CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no customer or digital implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework.

## **11. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no communications implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework

## **12. CONSULTATIONS**

- 12.1 The proposed changes to the existing Framework outlined in Section 4 of this report have been pulled together a working group of staff within Stronger Communities who work closely with the Ward Alliances. They have also been reviewed by the Portfolio Holder (Communities), Executive Director (Communities), Service Director (Safer, Stronger & Healthier Communities), Service Director (Governance & Member Support) and the Head of Stronger Communities Service. All Ward members have also been consulted on the draft framework and amendments made in the light of comments received.

## **13. THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

- 13.1 The Area Governance arrangements (of which Ward Alliances form a part) make a strong contribution to one of the three Corporate Priorities – Strong and Resilient Communities. Within this, it reports into the Performance Management indicator around 'People volunteering and contributing towards Stronger Communities'. The Area Governance arrangements also contribute to 2 of the 8 key areas of change identified in the Corporate Plan – Area Councils (working with communities to unlock ability, capacity & drive, communities and elected members working together) and Driving Behaviour Change (engaging with communities to inspire real change, clarifying our role as a modern Local Authority).

## **14. PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

- 14.1 The Ward Alliances currently support a range of activities which promote equality, diversity and social inclusion. The proposed changes to the Framework will enable these activities to be more quickly and responsively developed and delivered.

## **15. TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY**

- 15.1 The Ward Alliances currently support a range of activities which tackle poverty on a local level and which are included in the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The proposed changes to the Framework will enable these activities to be more quickly and responsively developed and delivered.

## **16. TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES**

- 16.1 The Ward Alliances currently support a range of activities which tackle health inequalities locally. The proposed changes to the Framework will enable these activities to be more quickly and responsively developed and delivered.

## **17. REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER**

- 17.1 The Ward Alliances currently support a range of activities which support the reduction of crime and disorder locally. The proposed changes to the Framework will enable these activities to be more quickly and responsively developed and delivered.

## **18. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

- 18.1 There are no risk management issues created by the proposed changes to the Framework.

## **19. HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES**

- 19.1 There are no Health, Safety or Emergency resilience implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework.

## **20. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

- 20.1 Proposed changes are compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights

## **21. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY**

- 21.1 There are no conservation or biodiversity implications created by the proposed changes to the Framework.

## **22. LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Proposed new Ward Alliance Governance Framework

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Financial Implications/Consultation



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*(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer  
where no financial implications)*