

## **What is a Neighbourhood Partnership?**

Neighbourhood Partnerships are local governing bodies, which have been developed to set priorities for their area and to make and influence key decisions which will have an impact on their areas. There are 14 partnerships across the City and each area is made up of two or three electoral wards. The populations served by these partnerships range from 20,000 – 40,000. They meet 4 – 6 times per year and are supported by staff from Bristol City Council.

## **What is a Neighbourhood Committee?**

Within the Neighbourhood Partnership, local Councillors from the area form a Neighbourhood Committee. Though all members of the partnership are involved in all aspects of decision-making, only Councillors can make the final decision regarding actual spend of public money (devolved budgets from BCC). This is a legal requirement.

## **What is a Neighbourhood Forum?**

In order for the NPs to make good decisions, which reflect the needs of the neighbourhood as a whole, the members of the partnership need to hear the voices of their wider population. The Neighbourhood Forums are a type of public meeting, much less structured and less formal than the Neighbourhood Partnership, where anyone from the neighbourhood can come and raise their issues, concerns about services delivered in their area or ideas for way to improve their neighbourhood. Service related concerns can be addressed by the relevant officers from partner organisations who are supporting the process either directly, or through the Neighbourhood Delivery Team (see below). Wider thoughts and ideas can be considered by the Neighbourhood Partnership and included in their priorities for action.

## **What is a devolved budget?**

Bristol City Council's political leadership has decided that they want to enable decisions about some public money to be made more locally. They have agreed a set of BCC budgets, which are to be under the control of the local Neighbourhood Partnerships. Decisions on how those budgets are spent are now made in the neighbourhood rather than in the Council House. So far, we have devolved elements of the Highway maintenance and minor traffic works budgets, Wellbeing small grants funding, Clean and Green budget and we are currently in the process of devolving Section 106 funding.

## **How do NPs work?**

Basically, the members of the Partnership set the agenda for their meeting, which may include local issues of interest and some decisions on devolved funding from BCC. If there are any papers to be considered, these will be sent to the members of the governing body 10 days in advance of the meeting. These will also be available to any members of the public via the BCC website. At the meeting (mostly held in the evenings in a local venue), the Chair will lead the Partnership and any other members of the public attending through the business discussions and any decisions to be made. All decisions are recorded in a set of minutes. All formal decisions regarding the spending of public money will be made by the Councillors. Each Neighbourhood Partnership has an agreed Terms of Reference, which sets out how they should operate.

## **Can members of the public take part in the Neighbourhood Partnership meetings?**

Yes and many do. People are welcome to attend the meetings and observe the business. Where time permits (and at their discretion), the Chairs will often take comments from the members of the public and include them in the discussions. Decisions are made by members only, though often the members will take a show of hands in the room to indicate the views of those attending. Members of the public can also submit public forum statements or questions in advance of the meeting to be considered during the meeting.

## **Who are the partners?**

Everyone who lives and works in the Neighbourhood Partnership area can be seen as a partner, because everything the Partnership does should be for the benefit of the neighbourhood. In terms of those who are part of the governing body itself, there are usually about 20 “members”, who must include resident representatives (either as individuals or as part of local community organisations) and all the local Councillors. Over and above these, each Neighbourhood Partnership may have different members depending on the neighbourhood. These may include local businesses, other community organisations, local Parks Groups etc etc. Key public sector services are also involved with the Partnerships including the police, health, fire and rescue, etc

## **What officers does a Neighbourhood Partnership have?**

Each Partnership will have a chair and vice chair. These roles can be held by any of the members of the governing body. These do not have to be held by Councillors. Currently, half the NPs have resident chairs, half of them are chaired by Councillors. As the NPs develop, they may decide that they want to

have other officers such as Treasurer and Secretary, however this will be determined by each partnership as it develops and to suit its' needs.

### **How do NPs decide on their members?**

Not all NPs do this the same way. For example, the Henleaze, Stoke Bishop, Westbury-on-Trym NP holds annual elections, whereas other NPs have reps nominated by local community organisations sitting on the NP. For details about a particular partnership, you can find out from the website or you could contact your local Area Coordinator.

### **How often is the membership decided?**

This will be agreed at the annual meeting of the Neighbourhood Partnership. The next scheduled annual meeting will be during June and July 2011.

### **Can an NP have its own website?**

Yes and several have done so. The aim is that all will have their own site over the next 12 months. There is also a central set of web pages under either Bristol City Council or Bristol Partnership where people can access general information, papers and contacts.

### **Can one NP work with another NP to achieve shared goals?**

Yes they can and some have already started to do so where this makes sense locally. Eg. With regard to issues that cross ward or partnership boundaries.

### **Why do it?**

To bring the decisions and influence over what happens in a neighbourhood much closer to the people it really affects.

### **Declarations of interest – when do councillors have to declare?**

The usual rules apply to councillors attending NP meetings. Councillors will have a personal interest if a matter affects their well-being or finances (of that of a family member or close associate) more than most other people in the neighbourhoods (including those who live, work or have property in the Neighbourhood)

### **Can the councillor chair of the NC alternate / rotate?**

The Leader of the Council would prefer the councillor chair to be appointed for the municipal year – to ensure consistency and a link for officer liaison.

However, some NCs are very keen to have a revolving chair. If an NP's councillors decide to appoint its councillor chair on a rotating, or other temporary arrangement, then it needs to be understood that the councillor chair appointed at one meeting holds office until another member assumes the role at a subsequent meeting. This means that officers will have a point of contact with whom to discuss issues of relevance to the NP in general and the forthcoming agenda in particular.

### **How do Neighbourhood Partnerships fit with the councillor call for action?**

The councillor call for action process already incorporates NPs as follows:

1. The councillor tries to resolve the issue;
2. if the issue remains unresolved it is placed on the NP agenda (subject to the meeting being held within a reasonable time);
3. If the matter is not resolved at the NP meeting, it will be referred to scrutiny.

### **Can councillors be personally liable for accidents that occur as a result of their decisions?**

If councillors act in good faith and without negligence they will not be personally liable. In other words, unless councillors make a decision that is manifestly unreasonable and contrary to officer advice, they will not be liable. If councillors do take such a decision, the expectation is that the Monitoring Officer or Chief Finance Officer would intervene to prevent the decision being implemented. The council's public liability insurance will cover the costs of defending both civil and criminal claims against the council and/or councillors. (Councillors would have to repay these legal costs if found guilty of a criminal offence.

### **Can NP councillors decide to spend their budget on any contractor, or does it have to be council approved?**

The normal rules and processes relating to council procurement and commissioning will apply. For example, when spending £2.5 – 10K, it will be necessary to obtain three quotes before making a decision (unless the relevant 2nd tier officer gives authority in writing to do otherwise). Officers reporting to NPs on spending decisions should ensure they are familiar with the council's procurement regulations and processes and are able to advise the meeting.