

Making a difference in neighbourhoods through improvements in learning opportunities: Advice to districts

We already know most of what we need to know:

we know the national policy intentions around neighbourhood renewal – key is that by 2020 where one lives where will much less of a determinant of life chances of residents

we know (if not quite fully) some of the operationalising mechanisms in Birmingham

we know what/who/where needs support; the gaps to be closed; and the trends over time

we know what some of the puzzles are

we know at least 80% of what creates stronger menus of choices; better resilience etc

we know (again, not quite fully) who might be, or could possibly be, working on it

we know the expectations over the next 1 year, 3 years, 13 years

We know the most effective points of leverage:

Better outcomes for children 0-5 and their families

(especially families with 'vulnerable' children)

support resources put into every relevant community setting

training staff; volunteers to fulfil support roles

all Under 5 places/opportunities filled

More out-of-school developments to enable young people to make positive contributions and make easier transition to adulthood

access to extra opportunities for more people; local outreach

support/training for young people to have community roles

promotion of young people in positive ways, having positive ways forward

Closed attainment gaps between underachieving groups and city averages

resourcing/supporting supplementary and out-of-hours activity stock/resources in community venues

links across agencies to get best network of opportunities

'catch up' activities for those at risk of falling behind

additional sessions focusing on extending horizons, raising aspirations

community use of existing city resources (such as museums, arts venues, libraries, parks, ...)

Raised GCSE/Level 2 attainments

thinking skills; planning skills, for young people 14-19

access to resources for assignments, coursework, extended learning

Increased range and volume of family activities and activities to include particular groups of children

increased take up of existing community facilities by families
family 'health check' sessions, with follow on activities to do
promotion of support services and activities; easy access to support when needed
families doing arts; sports; languages in community settings
families able to support children in 'everyday' ways, as part of everyday life

Local residents taking increased community roles

supervising groups of children safely from homes to school/holiday schemes
school governors; community group members/leaders

In 07-08, specifically, there is a Birmingham expectation (across all neighbourhood renewal themes) that:

much of the current activity will have ended (having done the job), or been picked up as mainstream activities
we should be able to begin to see the differences showing through from all of our investments
there will be no stacking up of personnel/ employment issues that might create problems in future

so that from 08-09 onwards:

Birmingham neighbourhoods are set firmly on-route so that any 2020 aspirations might be reached
Activities under this particular banner are seen as 'all part of the one job', with other developments, in moving things forward

Threads emerging from today.

There are five recurring threads, that link with each other:

PLACE

Is important. In 2000 place mattered too much re people's life chances. Currently there is a focus on 'place-making'; flourishing small areas etc, recognising that there can be substantial shifts of populations across localities.

- * **Need to keep remembering the broader policy purposes (long term) beyond the day-to-day tasks of plans/ targets/ meetings/ activities/ fundings etc.**

CHANGE

Some can be immediate; some will be longer term. Despite ongoing local management changes etc, there is 'all one job' to be done which is a mix of shifting city averages to be at, or above, national average and targeting intervention at small area hot spots.

- * **Need to keep a two-way interplay between localised strategic approaches and city wide Local Area Agreement; with a focus on systems change not project-by-project activity.**

KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

This is more than simply getting data (although there may be some making easier access to existing data – on 'open access for all' basis). The task is to go beyond the data, to make sense of what it is telling us, to try to disaggregate (by Super Output Area; by types of clients etc) so that get do-able responses.

- * **The question now is – we have the data: so what? If there are known puzzles to be solved, no shortage of data, local expertise (that has always been there) etc: why can't we get better outcomes more quickly?**

LOCAL LINKAGES GIVING ADDED OUTCOME

This kind of local development work isn't being done on a recent blank sheet. Activity has been happening for a long time (pre NRF; pre CYP Plan etc) – but was often activity done in parallel not linked across. There are separate threads and we need to let people deliver excellently on their thread but there are times when aligning the threads gives better strength to each. We have moved beyond simple mapping; beyond tick boxes; to use of shared planning; and the next step must be delivery of change for large numbers of people.

- * **It is about refocusing and getting more momentum; going faster, deeper, wider than before – but need smarter systems/**

bureaucracies to keep up with smarter thinking and smarter delivery.

STRETCH; ACCELERATION AND GETTING THERE

To make a difference in localities need to be working on a number of aspects (housing, health, environment, safety, worklessness). Today has focused on learning so is about the learning aspects of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. As an ambitious city, whatever the national trends, there is an aspiration to 'get there' – beyond the obvious targets; as part of the day job; with proper roles for voluntary/community activity. There are always going to be challenges – but there should also always be real achievements.

*** Birmingham has moved considerably over the last few years. It is in a much better place now to look around, regroup, and take the next leap forward to 2010, 2015, 2020 etc – and see where we can get to in delivering the 'place having less of an impact' locally and city-wide.**