

## **Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

### **1. Options for the Future**

The Management Committee will need to give consideration to the following issues:

#### **1.1 The Association**

Confirmation that all funding does come to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> March.

The availability of the admin worker on a part time basis

The availability of the Print Shop worker on a paid or voluntary basis.

Confirmation that access to the BANF office facilities will remain but on what basis and for how long? They are underused at present and could be leased/hired out to generate additional revenue.

To identify the skills that are needed to manage the Association as it is now, to plan for its development and to manage the possibility of paid staff at some stage in the future.

To confirm that one full time paid manager and one part time admin assistant would be the minimum requirement.

A review of the Association to demonstrate that it does have a clear role to play on behalf of the Forums.

A sound business plan will be the basis for any funding bid in the future, but does the Management Committee have the skills and experience to do this?

There may be a need to consider making changes to the current Management Committee and appointing new Committee members with the necessary skills.

BANF is a company limited by guarantee. Charitable status would have benefits but would also involve increased administration.

Explore the opportunities of forming partnerships with another voluntary and community organisation like BVSC or the Digbeth Trust.

The Association could move towards positioning itself more as an independent, voluntary organisation and as the focal point for the Community Sector as a whole.

Formalise the mechanism for communicating with and consulting with elements within the Birmingham Strategic Partnership and promote the value and contribution that Forums make to this group.

Raise funds not only for the Association but also on behalf of Forum members as a whole.

A modern, more attractive and appealing image is needed to attract new members.

## **1.2 The Forums**

Internal promotion of Forums to the City Council.

Increase Forum numbers to give 75% coverage – an additional 20 Forums.

Encourage each Forum to fund raise locally.

Develop a modern and more appealing image.

Communicate to Forums on a regular basis – electronic or by Newsletter.

## **1.3 The Print Shop**

Carry on with existing machines, but increase prices to achieve a minimum of full cost recovery.

Increased prices, in a very competitive market may result in a loss of some Forum business.

Raise the profile of the Print Shop and relaunch/reposition it as a Social Enterprise complete with a design facility and with promotional material featuring a new logo to attract new business.

New business to be derived from charities and community organisations in the Birmingham and West Midlands area.

Future profits to be directed towards supporting the development of Forums at a local level.

The alternative to all of the above is to close the Print Shop and eliminate the risk of losing £22,000 per annum.

This option would involve one redundancy and the potential problem of disposing of the print machines.

There would then be a need to identify a cost effective printer(s) with design capability to handle Forum business in the future.

## **2. Business Plans**

### **2.1 Background**

The value of the 70 Neighbourhood Forums to the City Council is far greater than the average grant of £500 that they are able to claim each year. The 2008 Survey gives a clear indication of the range of issues that Forums deal with on behalf of their local communities.

It is also clear from the Survey, and from individual meetings and discussions, that the Forums do need the help and support of a central BANF office in a number of areas that include training and access to the Print Shop.

If there is a requirement to increase the number of Forums to a level that might for example give 75% coverage across the City, then there will be a need for a BANF office to recruit and provide the necessary support and training for 20 new Forums in the early stages of their development.

Without a central BANF focus it is likely that many Forums would cease to exist. It cannot be emphasised enough that the Forums are all run on a voluntary basis, as is the BANF Management Committee, who in addition to running their own Forums, give additional time and energy to running the Association. It is estimated that there are 800 volunteers actively involved with Forum activities.

It may be asking too much to expect BANF Management Committee members to make additional time available to participate in training, in order to improve their administrative skills in specific areas.

If BANF was to be run without the support of a central office then it would surely become one of the largest organisations in the U K to be run entirely by volunteers. Even small charities have a core paid staff to handle basic administrative details.

Given that many Forums struggle to attract new members and a reasonable attendance at public meetings, it is suggested that the Neighbourhood Forum 'movement' could be given new and additional impetus, to the benefit of the community and the Council, by Council publicity to raise awareness of Forums around the City.

It may have been taken for granted that communities are aware of the role and activities of their local Forum, but it is likely that with a moving population, many will be unaware of 'who they are and what they do'. It would be asking too much to expect local Forums to undertake a profile raising campaign with funds that are already extremely limited.

BANF in effect is a significant voluntary group that works on behalf of the City Council and should therefore be recognised and supported accordingly as it 'strives to improve the quality of life for all the people of Birmingham'. (Objects of the Association).

The only potential source of additional revenue in the short term is likely to be derived from the Print Shop with a properly costed pricing structure. The Print Shop could in time generate sufficient revenue, not only to cover its own costs, but also to make contributions to Forum activity.

To be in a position to generate additional revenue, there will be a need to 'invest' in some promotional expenditure to enable the Print Shop to raise its profile to attract new business.

With this as a general background the following business/development plans are suggested:

## **2.2 The Association**

### **2.2.1 Immediate Communication**

31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 is the date when past funding arrangements end, with the result that there will be no paid staff in the BANF office to answer telephone calls or to support the Forums.

It is assumed that funding will also not be available to employ the Print Shop worker.

The BANF office will continue to be available for use by the Management Committee and other volunteers.

An announcement should be sent by the Management Committee w/c 31<sup>st</sup> March to all Forums to advise them that until further notice the BANF office and Print Shop will not be staffed on a regular basis.

The announcement should also state that discussions are underway with the City Council to explore ways of continuing to run the BANF office and Print Shop with paid staff.

### **2.2.2 The City Council**

An urgent meeting to be requested with the City Council with a view to making the points expressed above.

In summary this states that without the funding of paid staff, to support the Management Committee and the Forums, there is a likelihood that BANF would cease to exist and the number of Forums would decline.

The following staff are required at an estimated cost of £95,000 per annum:

- BANF Manager
- Admin Assistant
- Print Shop Worker

Although the BANF office is provided at no cost, the operation of the Association will incur annual expenses, which based on the Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 will amount to £54,083

BANF will therefore require annual funding in the region of £150,000.

### **2.2.3 Short Term Plans**

Once the meeting with the City Council has taken place and a level of funding has been agreed, the way will then be cleared to construct a detailed plan for the 2008/09 financial year, under the leadership of a new BANF Manager.

If the City Council's decision is not to support BANF with funding, then a possible course of action would be to close the office and the Print Shop, and to support Forums via the Management Committee, all working from home, each with the responsibility of mentoring around five Forums, as and when there is a need.

There would appear to be a need to review the current Management Committee to ensure that members are able, willing and 'fit for purpose' for prioritising and tackling the Options for the Future as identified in paragraph 1.1.

### **2.2.4 Longer Term Plans**

A sound business plan will be the basis for any funding bid in the future.

Explore the opportunities of forming partnerships with another voluntary and community organisation like BVSC or the Digbeth Trust.

Consider positioning BANF as an independent, voluntary organisation and as the focal point for the Community Sector as a whole.

## **2.3 The Print Shop**

### **2.3.1 The City Council**

There is clear evidence from the 2008 Survey that the facility of the Print Shop is a much needed resource for the majority of Forums.

It is also clear that the print shop has not been close to covering its own costs, let alone being in a position to contribute towards BANF office costs or to the financial support of Forums.

The immediate priority is to secure the short term future of the Print Shop by the City Council. The projected figures for 2008/09 show that the Print Shop will make a loss of £22,255

### **2.3.2 Price Increase**

Print Shop prices should be increased as per the detailed proposals. In view of the fact that increases will range from 25% up to 62.5%, but still remain competitive, there may be a reluctance to implement the increases in one move. Staged increases would be another option.

An alternative would be to retain prices at the current level for Forum members but implement the proposed rates for non Forum business.

### **2.3.4 Free Service**

The Free Service should be ended and a flat rate of £11.50 should be introduced to cover material and supervision costs for each time the Free Service is used.

A simpler alternative might be to charge an annual 'registration fee' of £46.00.

### **2.3.5 Current Business**

When funds permit, to progress the development of templates for newsletters and publicity material, complete with new logo as per quotations received.

### **2.3.6 New Business**

New business to be derived from charities and community organisations in the Birmingham and West Midlands area by the promotion of the Print Shop as a Social Enterprise.

This will require the promotion of the services that are available in the form of a leaflet, to be mailed and distributed widely.

The design, production and distribution of a leaflet might cost in the region of £2,000.

The Print Shop will also require additional support, especially admin related to cash collection/invoicing. Learning and Skills Council may be able to help. If additional work is generated by the promotion of the Print Shop services available, then a trainee may also be required.

**Hugh Thomas**  
**11<sup>th</sup> April 2008**