

Report of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

Next Steps in Neighbourhood Working

Summary

1. This report proposes further development of the Council's approach to neighbourhood working.

Recommendations

2. Cabinet are asked to:
 - Approve the direction of travel set out in paragraphs 7-23
 - Agree to receive further reports on the detail of these proposals.

Reason: To update Cabinet on the Council's commitment to the creation of a new relationship with its residents and communities.

Background

3. City of York Council is committed to creating a new relationship with its residents and communities. We recognise that public expectations and requirements in respect of public services are changing and will continue to evolve. York's residents and communities will increasingly want services tailored to their need and to have involvement and choice in how those services are provided.
4. The Council, faced with the combination of these changing public expectations and financial pressure, and given its commitment to empowering local residents, wishes to:
 - Involve communities at ward level in decisions about how local services are delivered, their priorities for those services, and how any savings required may be achieved
 - Enable local communities to have a greater control of who provides the services they need
 - Devolve more resources to wards to support the above objectives
 - Involve the local community and voluntary sector as the voice of communities, investing in its capacity as a source of expertise and as service providers

5. We already have a strong tradition of community engagement through Residents Forums, Community Conversations and partnership work at a ward level through Ward Teams. We now need to consolidate and deepen our approach to deliver on all the above objectives. Ward members must be at the heart of our approach, providing the necessary leadership in their wards. The approach needs to be that:
- 'Members create a framework for wards, with goals and priorities for action, and within that framework a wide range of groups, organisations and individuals do their own thing, but they all contribute to action and to the goals of the wards.'*¹

What we have in place

6. We currently have some strong building blocks in place:
- Ward Profiles – with data, demographics and ward statistics
 - Ward Priorities – set using data, local knowledge and feedback from residents
 - Community Conversations – events that helped to establish issues of local importance
 - The Communities and Equalities Team, working with other Council teams and community partners on ward issues
 - Resident Forums – public meetings designed to be flexible in style and frequency
 - Ward Teams – partners in the ward coming together to deliver on the ward priorities
7. At the same time further development is needed to aspects of our approach:
- In some instances ward priorities are too broad / woolly to be truly effective
 - Ward members are not all providing effective local leadership along the lines suggested by the vision statement set out in paragraph 5 above, where members' roles are defined in terms of overseeing and setting direction and residents act as 'local experts' working with members to solve problems
 - Public meetings have variable levels of attendance and publicity about ward activity doesn't reach all residents
 - We have not used the current ward approach to address the big *rewiring* issues such as how place based services will be restructured

¹ From the "Model of Ward Accountability" - stage five – See Annex 2

- We have not devolved any control of mainstream services to ward level
- We have not used the current ward approach to tell residents clearly about the financial pressures facing the Council and what they mean for their ward

Direction of Travel

8. We now need to develop our approach, supporting ward members as community champions at ward level with appropriate tools and resources, so that they can:
 - Effectively communicate to their wards the implications of the Council's financial position and its *Rewiring* programmes for their communities and involve them in taking the local decisions that flow from these
 - Develop focussed local priorities based on the needs of residents and take forward the actions to deliver on these
 - Help restate the relationship between communities and the Council such that the Council will enable communities to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on Council services

Proposals for Developing York's Approach

9. To support this approach we need increasingly to devolve control of resources and services to wards. Whilst not all Council services will ever be suitable for control at a ward level many will. Possible bases for implementing devolved control would be:
 - Dividing a particular resource between wards and allowing the ward to direct its deployment and/or create cashable savings that can be directed into addressing greater ward priorities. This will be suitable for budgets that are currently spent in all wards but where it is not essential to have a standard, city-wide level of service.
 - Creating a pot from a particular Council budget area into which wards can bid on the basis of their priorities and need. This is likely to be suitable for budget areas which are currently centrally administered and which are spent in only some parts of the city at any one time.
 - Involving wards in the long-term planning of a service, incentivising the ward where they can assist in delivering savings. This may be more suitable for budgets such as waste, where a city-wide standard is appropriate but where residents can assist, through their choices and actions, in delivering savings.

10. Annex 1 shows a range of budgets and suggests a phased approach to devolving resources to wards. The depth and sophistication of the approach would increase at each phase. The first budgets to be devolved are likely to be in the area of public realm with resources within areas such as adult social care being considered in later phases. It is proposed to bring further reports back to Cabinet with specific proposals. By involving wards through devolved budgets local decisions can be taken that guide the delivery of savings, directing resource to where its most needed, removing unnecessary tasks and expenditure, and involving communities and the voluntary sector in alternative solutions to Council delivery.
11. Resources available to wards will be as follows:
12. **Ward Budgets:** It is proposed to retain the current ward budgets so that ward members have a flexible resource to pursue ward priorities. It is proposed to keep the current rules around their use but open up eligibility to Parish Councils where they have a stake in a project and are also providing some resource.
13. **Devolved Budgets to Promote Community Led Solutions:** It is proposed that control of budgets in the area of public realm (parks & open spaces, grounds maintenance and cleansing) be devolved to wards in the first year. This would be done on the basis of current spend in the ward. In the first year, the ward would take an oversight of the budget and how it was spent. Furthermore, the public realm team will be seeking savings in the region of £750k over the next three years; ward decision-making will assist in this and the ward allocations will be adjusted accordingly.
14. It is proposed to pump prime the process of wards developing local solutions through the £250k Environmental Improvement Fund. Devolved to wards this will promote community led solutions in the area of public realm and open spaces. The funding might be used for:
 - Helping a community group to take on management of a piece of local open space
 - Undertaking a local clean-up
 - Getting a community space in good order so that the community could then manage it
 - Changing the planting or other arrangements to make a space more attractive and easier to maintain in the future

15. Devolving the public realm budget to wards in this way will allow them to:

- Identify priorities for expenditure in this area
- Identify where savings can be made
- Take key decisions on resource allocation based on their priorities
- Use the 'pump priming' money to develop community solutions which will deliver savings down track

It will be important that simple, non bureaucratic systems are put in place that ensure that devolving budgets does not result in increased unit cost and therefore reduced value for money and that encourage the development of community-led initiatives.

16. This initial approach at phase 1 will allow more sophisticated devolved control mechanisms to be developed in later phases. This may involve services, for example public realm services, being reorganised into more flexible forms of delivery, for example through hubs, (see below). This in turn may create the potential for wards to create more cashable savings that they can then divert to other ward priorities.

17. Other budget areas such as those relating to young people would be available for wards to bid to at phase 1 (See Annex 1). A clear bidding process would be developed with appropriate deadlines to ensure equity. Additional budgets would be added in later phases.

18. **Capital Grants:** It is proposed that a capital pot is also allocated for wards to bid into to develop community led initiatives in the area of public realm. As part of the review of Place Based Services the Council is looking to transfer the management of open space to local communities. Such a transfer would reduce both day to day and long term costs and enable the Council to achieve savings. In order to transfer spaces to the community investment may be required in land, buildings, equipment or infrastructure to reduce running costs and make them more attractive to take on. To support this work, section 106 funds could be added to Council funding to create a fund that will allow the necessary investment in the assets to take place pre transfer. A report will be brought to Members during 2015 to approve specific proposals.

19. **Developing the Community and Voluntary Sector:** It will be important to continue to invest in the capacity of the community and voluntary sector within our approach. Ward budgets will continue to provide a key source of funding for small voluntary organisations at a

local level. It will also be important to create a more strategic fund which will develop the voluntary sector's capacity to develop innovative solutions to priorities addressed across a number of wards and in solutions that the sector itself initiates. Following completion of the previous 3 year Community York Fund programme a new voluntary sector capacity building fund is proposed for 2015/16 at £200k. It is proposed to bring detailed criteria for this back to members. Continued involvement of the voluntary sector in administering the fund will ensure that best use is made of the available funding including exploring the potential for a more joined up approach with external funders such as the CCG's community wellbeing funding.

20. Funding agreements will be maintained with the core infrastructure organisations (CVS, CAB and the Welfare Benefits Unit) broadly at previous levels, with just small efficiency savings being required. It is proposed that service level agreements will be brought to the relevant cabinet member focusing on support to the approaches set out in this paper.
21. **External Funding:** We are actively pursuing the Community Led Local Development Fund, having successfully got through the first round of bidding, to further develop opportunities in 8 identified Lower Super Output Areas. If successful this would see an additional £1.2million to enhance the approach outlined in this paper.
22. **Community Development:** It is evident that some communities have greater capacity than others in terms of the community and voluntary sector organisations operating in their areas and in the readiness of the community to get involved in developing their own solutions and managing resources accordingly. It is therefore proposed that funding is allocated to support a number of community development workers. These would be deployed in co-operation with partner organisations in the city such as JRF to help target communities develop appropriate initiatives to further identified priorities. A detailed paper will be brought back to members with regard to deployment of this resource.
23. A Community Development Network will be maintained with partners across the city in order to improve sharing of data and intelligence to support partnership working and community action.
24. **Staff and Member Development:** All front-line workers will need to be equipped to engage with communities and help to capacity build. This will begin from the current core roles, for example Communities

and Equalities Team officers, Smarter York officers, and extend to Youth and Community Workers, Estate Managers, and beyond.

25. A member led development programme will be created allowing ward members to share their good practice with each other.
26. **Community Hubs:** Wards may choose to work together in clusters in order to make better use of their resources. The Community hubs initiative will be developed in such a way as to support this and to enable communities to manage their devolved resources effectively. Public realm services will increasingly be reorganised around hubs in order to make them more responsive to ward need.
27. Community Hubs are currently being identified, ensuring that they are the right place to serve a local geographical area. Potential buildings include libraries, community centres, church halls, children's centres, schools, sports facilities, health properties and so on. We will support the development of a network of hubs that respond to the needs of particular communities, bringing partners together from all sectors to work with residents on their priorities. Attributes of community hubs will include:
 - Realigned Council service provision (e.g. public realm services) able to respond to community need on a more flexible basis and providing a single point of co-ordination for community management
 - Modern, outward looking, welcoming, customer first, flexible spaces where local residents can come together for a wide range of community activities
 - The transition of other Council and third sector community based services into the hub
 - New "paid for" services for example linked to economic growth, new jobs
 - Opportunities and resources to support residents to get involved in their community and the decisions that affect its development
28. **Engaging with Communities:** Ward members will increasingly engage with their communities in a variety of informal ways appropriate to their circumstances. This may continue to include holding Resident Forum meetings but this will no longer be a requirement. Instead, Ward Team meetings will be formalised and will be open to the public. This will become the key forum where local decisions are taken and action plans progressed. Action notes will be produced and followed through. Ward members will be supported in

producing a proactive agenda to identify and address key issues in the ward.

29. The Communities and Equalities Team will be reviewed to ensure that it is well placed to support the proposed approach. To provide sufficient resource to support the ward teams, staff in other teams, such as Smarter York officers, will also be deployed as ward team co-ordinators / champions.
30. It is proposed that publicity budgets currently used to produce Your Ward be used to develop and enhance current local communications, e.g. local newsletters. A communications strategy will also be developed to support the over-arching Council approach.

What will it Look Like?

31. Once this approach is fully adopted and embedded we will see a bespoke approach in each ward, reflective of the local community, with:
 - Local members working as informed community champions leading ward teams in the delivery of sharp, well informed priorities
 - Resources increasingly devolved for decision making at ward level with residents leading in making better local use of resources and which in turn deliver savings for the Council
 - Residents taking on more of their own services e.g. through asset transfer
 - Residents getting involved in a wide range of engagement opportunities
 - Residents increasingly getting involved in local decision making and initiatives
 - Strong links to service and partner organisations e.g. Residents Associations and Parish Councils
 - Community development capacity ensuring that all communities are able to take up opportunities
 - The ward team will have the right to call on the full breath of council resources
 - Good two way communication between the community and the Council
 - High levels of volunteering
 - Increased pride in the local area

- Council services held to account locally and increasingly redesigned to meet local need

Next Steps

32. It is proposed that more detailed reports are brought back to Cabinet on each aspect of these proposals in the light of the allocation of resources through the budget process.

Implications

33. **Finance:** The report identifies that the first phase of the initiative will include Parks and Open Spaces, Grounds Maintenance and Cleansing. It will be necessary to undertake an exercise whereby these budgets can be disaggregated so that they can be efficiently delegated without creating additional bureaucracy.
34. With regard to the financial proposals in this paper the following items are considered in the Financial Strategy paper on this agenda:
- The voluntary sector capacity building fund (Community York Fund)
 - The Environmental Improvement Fund
 - Capital grants
35. **Equalities:** A community impact assessment is attached. The action plan points to the need for a wide variety of methods being required to enable the engagement of all residents in ward priorities and action planning. It also suggests the need for multiple channel of communication. These aspects will be reflected in the detailed plans that will be brought to members.

Contact Details

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Report Approved ✓	Date: 2-02-15
Specialist Implications Officer: Patrick Looker, Finance Manager	

Wards Affected:	All	✓
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For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: [Document/reports/cabinet/Neighbourhood Working January 2015.docx](#)

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Grid showing phased approach to devolving resources to wards

Annex 2 - The “Model of Ward Accountability”

Annex 3 - Community Impact Assessment