

Cabinet

2 April 2013

Report of the Cabinet Members for Crime and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Tourism

Neighbourhood Working

Summary

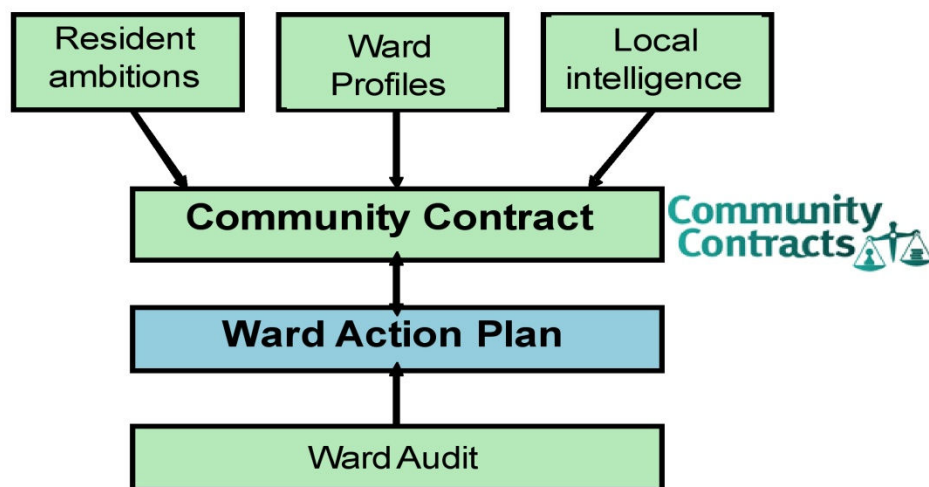
1. This report proposes a refresh of the Council's approach to Neighbourhood Working, to come into effect in June following the current round of annual meetings. The report draws on learning over the last twelve months to propose an update to the model including:
 - The establishment of Resident Forum meetings in place of Ward Committees
 - A refresh of the Community Contract
 - A revised mechanism for how ward funding is spent
 - A strategy to engage residents
 - Priorities for the new Communities and Equalities Team to support members in delivering the above

Background

2. Since the last report in January 2012, which set out the current model of Neighbourhood Working, we have:
 - Implemented a new staffing structure for the Neighbourhood Management Unit: This is now in place and delivering annual savings of around £275k.
 - Successfully procured Your Consortium to administer the Council's voluntary sector funding: In its first year the Community York Fund has funded 14 organisations (the majority funded for the first time) to deliver projects ranging from, informal education, engaging disadvantaged communities, to an initiative that empowers young people to inspire their communities to tackle local issues through creative arts and media campaigns.

- Implemented new arrangements for ward funding: Directing funding to ward priorities.
- Introduced Community Contracts: Focusing on the action plans and getting the right partners round the table at ward team meetings to tackle the ward priorities.
- Implemented informal ward committees: Providing Ward Councillors with support to engage with local residents on a range of issues linked predominantly to the ward priorities.
- Provided a range of leadership training opportunities for members including an LGA facilitated policy café and an offer of 1:1 sessions for the members in attendance to explore some of the challenges specific to wards.
- Launched the York Equality Scheme: York's vision for an equal, inclusive, and welcoming council and city, accompanied by, the development of plans with our communities of identity.
- Secured £1m worth of 'Big Local' funding for Tang Hall over the next ten years.

3. We now have a clear system with the following components:



Consultation

4. Feedback has come from residents and councillors through the formal and informal ward committee meetings, held throughout this civic year. Key points are:
- Some felt that it was not helpful to move the annual meeting on to a formal committee basis supported by Democratic Services
 - The style and format of the informal meetings has received mixed responses from councillors, with some preferring a more formal approach

- Some councillors, in parished areas, felt that the system is not well suited to effectively work with parishes
- Some councillors were unclear about how ward funding could be used in terms of the types of projects and organisations that were eligible
- Your Ward was not able to provide enough information in relation to the format and content of the meetings and meeting dates were not advertised enough in advance

Proposals

5. In response to the consultation the updated system will look like this:
- **Ward priorities** - Members will set their ward priorities based on feedback from residents and partners, local knowledge, statistical data and other ward information.
 - **Community Contract** - Members will create a bespoke contract that is representative of the ward in terms of its look and content. They will decide what it's called (but keeping the Community Contract logo). Short and sharp (with services standard moved into a separate document) it will contain relevant information about the ward including key challenges, priorities, case studies, volunteering opportunities, community groups, facilities and projects. Contracts will be made available online, in libraries, community centres and other key community facilities within each ward.

Following the first phase which covered Acomb, Clifton, Dringhouses and Woodthorpe, Guildhall, Heworth, Holgate, Hull Road and Westfield wards we will develop them for all wards.

We will develop a bespoke approach to community contracts for wards that incorporate parished areas reflecting the role of parish councils. We will support community groups to engage in the process e.g. resident associations.

- **Ward Action Plan** – Members and partners will work together to develop projects and initiatives that will address the ward priorities. These will be captured in the ward action plan and used at a Ward Team Meeting to track progress.
- **Ward Team Meeting** – Members, partners and officers will meet regularly (suggested every 6 weeks) to work on the ward action plan. Representatives at the meeting will be partners, officers and any organisations that can help address the ward priorities.

- **The Resident Forum** – Member will hold an annual meeting to feedback on the previous year’s achievements, explain the priorities for the year ahead, launch their community contract, outline their ward funding arrangements, and elect Ward Planning Panels where required.
- **Other Resident Meetings** - Members may chose to hold further residents meeting and events within their ward, in a style that is appropriate to audience and topic that enables resident involved.
- **Ward Funding** – Members may choose to spend their ward budget over the year either by:
 - i. inviting groups and organisations that can help to address the ward priorities to bid to the pot and using the Residents Forum to inform and consult residents on the process, or
 - ii. directly commissioning local groups to carry out projects that members have identified will address ward priorities through the Ward Team
 (Or a mixture of the two).

Existing rules will remain so that funding will be allocated only to organisations based in the ward and providing services in the ward. Eligible organisations will be from the voluntary sector, community initiatives, residents associations, community halls, sports and other clubs. Parish Councils and public agencies will not be eligible

6. The refined neighbourhood working model will provide members with a clear understanding of the process and the many ways in which they can engage and involve residents and ensure the active involvement of partners, including community groups, in influencing and help address ward priorities.
7. The updated model will be more effective in parished areas, enabling bespoke arrangements to be put in place that enable parish councils to have their voice heard more easily through working in collaboration with their ward members and in conjunction with the ward team.
8. The model will lead to an increase in the number of effective community groups operating within ward enabling support to be provided and funding to be sourced where new groups are addressing ward priorities.

9. Above all the updated model will improve accountability, with more residents getting involved in local democracy and more opportunities for them to hold members and other organisations to account. The outcomes for residents will be:

- Strong leadership from their elected member
- Residents getting involved in a wide range of engagement opportunities
- High numbers of residents who believe they can influence decisions in their area
- High levels of volunteering
- Increased pride in the local area
- More examples of resident action to solve local problems
- Residents taking on more of their own services e.g. through asset transfer
- Council services held to account locally and increasingly redesigned to meet local need

Why change the name to Resident Forum?

10. It is clear that keeping the 'Ward Committees' is holding members back from embracing the changes in neighbourhood working and from taking the lead in putting in place more flexible arrangements that suit them and their wards. It is essential that there is a decisive rebranding in order to:

- Remove the term 'ward committee' and all its connotations
- Put in place a more flexible approach where ward councillors, supported by officers from the Communities and Equalities Team, will plan, organise and promote a programme of engagement events.

What the Communities and Equalities Team will do

11. The Communities and Equalities team will support members to:

- Plan and run ward team meetings to tackle ward priorities
- Plan and support their annual Residents Forum
- Set programmes of events and advertise them using a variety of methods not just relying on Your Ward
- Develop a menu of meeting style ideas and a tool kit of engagement methods for councillors to consider that will enable them to engage with the residents within their ward

- Support Members in distributing ward funding

12. Practical steps to assist Councillors will include:

- Your Ward/Your Voice: There will be 3 editions of this publication per year, with a clear timetable as to when they will be produced and distributed. Your Ward will be a generically produced publication that will contain information about up and coming Resident Forum meetings, any community engagement events, plus stories that relate to projects and initiatives that are taking places within wards that relate to addressing ward priorities. One of the three editions of Your Voice would promote the new way of working.
- Review the use of the Customer Contact Centre for members with a view to create a direct access route for members.
- Provide members with a monthly contact centre report that is ward specific to keep members informed with progress and spot trends that may help to shape ward priorities.
- Further develop the ward section of the Council website to include the new streamlined community contract, a timetable of when formal annual Resident Forum meetings will take place, plus any additional community engagement meetings that councillors wish to promote and updates on projects and initiatives from within the ward. Pages will also highlight information about how residents can get involved from, volunteering opportunities, to online consultation surveys.
- Explore Community Information Hubs to be introduced in libraries: designated spaces for resident to go to find out about what's happening in their ward, ways they can get involved, and how they can take part in community consultation.
- Use of Facebook and Twitter to promote the Residents Forum, events and activities, as well as community notice boards to display posters and leaflets.
- Develop ward email lists, with a subscribe by email option for ward pages, in order to advertise ward events. Systems will be put in place to collect and manage email addresses.

Ward Credits:

13. For 2012/2013 a “credits pot” of £19k was created, designed to be used to commission new services, either from within the Council or from other partners / sectors, to deliver on priorities identified in wards with the highest levels of deprivation.

In line with the Financial Inclusion Strategy the credits pot has been distributed to Acomb, Clifton, Heworth, Hull Road and Westfield to supplement the ward budgets.

Options

14. The principal options available to Members are to:
 - Adopt the new model as proposed
 - Retain the status quo
 - Adopt an amended version of the model

Analysis

15. The new model proposed is recommended as it provides better opportunities for ward members to work with residents to establish local priorities and for residents to come together to develop and deliver their own innovative solutions. The streamlined Community Contracts will assist service providers to work together to deliver efficient services shaped by residents.

Next Steps

16. To facilitate the above it is proposed to recommend to Council amendment of the Council's constitution to remove Ward Committees as follows:
 - (a) Remove general references to Ward Committees
 - (b) Replace existing Article 11 with a new article on the governing principles for Resident Forums
 - (c) Remove paragraph 9 of Part 3 (Responsibilities of Committees) from the Constitution
 - (d) Add an appropriate function to the responsibilities of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods:

“to agree the allocation and distribution of ward funding, in consultation with Members of each Resident Forum”
17. Proposed terms of reference for Resident Forum meetings are attached. As with other similar bodies there is no requirement for these to be enshrined within the Constitution. This will provide a framework for the Partnership to operate whilst allowing the flexibility for it to work and respond appropriately.

The Communities and Equalities Team

18. The Communities and Equalities Team brings together the Neighbourhood Management Unit, Equality and Diversity Unit and

Play Team. In addition to supporting Ward Councillors to deliver the neighbourhood working approach, the team also:

- Supports community groups including Parish Councils, Residents Associations, Community Centre Management Committees and local voluntary and community groups.
- Manages and distributes funding via contracts and grants e.g. Health Watch, Your Consortium, Citizens Advice, Play Grants
- Provide a range of specialist training, workshops and events
- Supports and develops projects that address local priorities covering topics such as volunteering, equalities, democracy and social inclusion.

Council Plan

19. The Neighbourhood Working model is key to delivering the Stronger Communities priority within the Council Plan and its key priorities:
 - Community Engagement – more residents will understand and be engaged in planning, budgeting, priority setting and problem solving in their communities
 - Stronger voluntary sector – there will be a strong volunteering infrastructure with increased levels of volunteering in the city and opportunities for not for profit organisations to deliver services
 - Safer inclusive communities – we will achieve safe, resilient and cohesive communities where no person or community feels left behind or disadvantaged
 - Improved community infrastructure – we will establish an appropriate infrastructure including housing, leisure, schools and businesses supporting opportunities for capacity building, work and enterprise
 - Healthy sustainable communities – we will create healthy and sustainable living options in communities
 - Communities where young people flourish – we will consult with young people to build communities that reflect their needs

Implications

20. **Finance:** The base budget for Ward Committees for 2013/14 is now £75k. The Ward Credits Pot contains £19k. There are no budgetary implications arising from these proposals.
21. **Equalities:** We have completed a CIA of Ward Committees and developed an action plan to make them accessible to all. The CIA is

now being further developed to include the Community Contract process.

22. **Human Resources:** To deliver the new arrangements the staffing structure of the Communities and Equalities Team will be revised slightly to ensure that there is a fully generic neighbourhood manager role and to shift the balance of roles in favour of more engagement staff. This revision will be carried out by the Director of CANs under delegated powers in line with the Council's Management of Change procedures.
23. There are no additional Crime and Disorder, IT, Planning, Property or other implications.

Risk Management

24. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score all risks has been assessed at less than 16. This means the risks need only to be monitored.

Recommendations

25. Cabinet is recommended to agree to:
 - The establishment of Resident Forums in place of Ward Committees through a recommendation to Council to alter the constitution as described in paragraph 12 of the report and including a revised mechanism to agree the allocation of ward funding as described in paragraph 15
 - A refresh of the Community Contract as described in paragraph 20
 - The distribution of ward credits as set out in paragraph 18
 - The strategy to actively engage residents as described in paragraphs 11 and 12

Reason: To actively engage York's residents in their wards.

Contact Details

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	Report Approved	✓	Date 20 March 2013
Specialist Implications Officers: Sarah Kirby Principal Accountant			
Wards Affected:			All ✓
For further information please contact the author of the report			

Annex: Terms of Reference for Resident Forum Meetings.