

**Executive**

30 July 2015

Report of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

## **Listening to Residents: Ward Committees**

### **Summary**

1. This report sets out a new approach to community engagement through working with local neighbourhoods and the establishment of revised ward committees.

### **Recommendations**

2. The Executive is asked to agree:
  - The new approach to community engagement including revised ward committees
  - The allocation of increased funding to these ward committees
  - The production of ward fact sheets in order to support ward councillors and explain the process to residents
  - The production of a range of local service choices giving options for how the ward committee funding pot can support local communities
3. The Executive is asked to give a view on which of the options set out in paragraph 8 for the constitution of ward committees they wish to see implemented

Reason: To support the Council's commitment to working with local communities and devolving power and budgets to residents.

4. The Executive is asked to approve the virement of £150k from Health & Wellbeing Directorate to Communities and Neighbourhoods Directorate representing the transfer of that element of the Adult Social Care Community Fund to Ward Committees.

Reason: In accordance with Financial Regulations

## **Background**

5. The Council's approach to neighbourhood working aims to support ward members so that they can:
  - Work with local communities to develop local priorities and help deliver on these
  - Help empower local communities and devolve more budgets to residents
6. It is proposed that ward committees are re-instated with increased funding at the heart of this approach in order to strengthen engagement with residents.

## **Next Steps**

### **Ward Committees:**

7. Ward Committees will be re-established so that the Council can work in partnership with residents to tackle local issues. Additionally they will improve the Council's accountability to residents, providing opportunities to influence services at the local level. They will be chaired by the ward councillor(s) in each ward and will:
  - Engage residents on issues affecting the ward and draw up priorities to address these issues
  - Agree expenditure and services from budgets allocated to the ward
  - Stimulate community schemes that tackle local issues
  - Engage with local residents about some of the big issues facing the Council
  - Work with communities to scrutinise the delivery of local services
  - Select ward planning panels where required
8. There are two main options with regard to how Ward Committees could be established within the Council's constitution:
  - a. They could be formally constituted as committees
  - b. They could remain informally constituted relying on the delegated authority of the relevant chief officer to implement the wishes of the committee (subject to Council policy and procedures), for example its spending decisions
9. Option a) is the more formal route. If this were chosen it would mean that single member wards would be grouped with other wards in order to create a committee with the minimum requirement of two members. Under this option all decisions would be taken through formal

meetings. This requirement to use formal meetings could have negative consequences for equalities as the equalities impact assessment shows that formal meetings are not particularly inclusive and a greater variety of more informal engagement methods are needed to reach all sections of the community.

10. If option b) were chosen ward members could make decisions much more flexibly with those decision implemented between meetings under officer delegation. It would mean that there would be less reliance on formal meetings allowing members to use a greater variety of meeting styles and events which, experience shows, are more effective at engaging all sections of the community. Grouping of single member wards would not be required.
11. It is proposed that a minimum of one formal Ward Committee meeting is held per annum. Wards may wish to set a programme of additional meetings / events for the year but it will be for ward members to determine. For this financial year 2015/16, the formal ward committees will take place in the autumn. In future years, formal meetings would be more effective earlier in the financial year so that budgets can be allocated and projects allowed the maximum possible time to be delivered.
12. The formal Ward Committee meeting will follow any public consultation undertaken by ward members on proposed schemes. At the formal meeting members will feedback on the previous year's achievements, discuss the priorities for the year ahead, decide on which ward projects to fund, make any other devolved budget decisions and select Ward Planning Panels where required<sup>1</sup>.
13. Ward members will also engage with their communities throughout the year in a variety of ways, appropriate to their circumstances. Ward profiles will provide members with information about the demographics of their ward to help determine the appropriate method of engagement, for example, if there is a high percentage of young people in the ward the councillor may consider methods that engage local school and community based organisations. Councillors may also consider existing or ongoing consultation and engagement work lead by partner organisations e.g. Healthwatch.
14. The Communities and Equalities Team will be able to support up to 4 meetings / events per annum per ward and advise on other forms of engagement; however, if members go for a high proportion of formal

---

<sup>1</sup> Planning Panels operate in non parishes areas made up of local volunteers that comment on current planning applications.

meetings this is likely to over-stretch the resource available. The position will need to be assessed in January (see paragraph 25 below) in the light of experience.

15. Members may also choose to have joint ward meetings with another ward where priorities cross boundaries.

#### **Ward Teams:**

16. Members, partners and officers will hold regular (suggested a minimum of 6 per year) Ward Team meetings to work on projects that address the ward priorities. These meetings will also provide an opportunity for liaison between ward partners. They should complement any Ward Committee arrangements. Representatives at the meeting will be those officers and organisations that can help address the ward priorities. The Ward Team will help the ward councillors by bringing to the table:

- Feedback from residents about their views and ideas,
- Local knowledge from partner organisations,
- Statistical data and other ward information in the form of a ward profile,
- Awareness of key agenda that would not normally crop up in ward meetings such as resident health and experience of adult social care services
- Ideas for projects and solutions.

These will help highlight priorities for the ward member(s) which will guide use of the ward budgets.

17. Each ward team will have a ward co-ordinator who will be drawn from the Communities and Equalities Team or another service area relevant to the ward's priorities. The ward councillors will champion their ward at the Council to ensure issues are tackled. To share the learning of the approach and tackle key issues at a ward level there will be a standing item on the Service to City agenda, a forum that brings together senior managers from across the authority.

#### **Devolved Budgets:**

18. It is proposed to devolve additional budgets to wards in order to create a single, enhanced pot that wards can use flexibly to help address their priorities and to develop community initiatives which benefit local residents and may reduce reliance on Council services. The new, revised ward committees will have a significant overall increase in budget. The ward pot will be made up of the following areas:

- The general “**Ward Budget**” of £150k allocated to each ward committee on a per capita basis.
- A “**Pride in York Fund**” totalling £450k (reallocating the former “Environmental Improvement Fund” and £200k growth fund for reactive street services) made up of 2 parts: i) £250k on a one-off basis and ii) £200k per annum on a recurring basis:
  - i) The one-off fund would be allocated to wards, based on current grounds maintenance spending. It would be used to provide grants to partner, community and voluntary organisations to develop initiatives that benefit the community and help reduce the reliance on Council services. The reason for this method of allocation is that in the budget process the Council agreed savings from its public realm budgets of £250k a year for each of the years 2015-18. Whilst an element of the saving can be made from efficiency savings it will also be necessary to change the tasks carried out in wards. It is therefore proposed to allocate this budget in proportion to the current activity in each ward and therefore the level of saving to be made.

Wards will be consulted about the current grounds maintenance activity in their localities, so that they can state their priorities and assist in delivering required savings through the use of their budgets.

- ii) This fund will enable wards to commission projects and initiatives that improve the local environment and street level issues in the ward. As it would be a recurring fund it could be spent on council services if the ward wished. It would be allocated to wards based on a per capita basis alongside the general ward budget.

Those wards that receive the highest amounts from the Pride in York fund will receive additional support from the Environment Officer team to help them develop schemes and initiatives.

- A “**Community Care Fund**” of £75k per annum (taken from the Adult Social Care Community Fund) will be devolved to wards, on a per capita basis, over 2 years in order to support the prevention or delay of people needing to access formal care packages and statutory support (or, where people already have formal care, preventing the need for this to increase). Wards can have an important role in this through facilitating community level activity that helps people to receive the right level of support, at the right stage, reducing the need for Council care services.

We are aware, from current demand and feedback, that support in the following areas can enable people to stay living independently in their own homes for longer:

- Reducing social isolation and loneliness
- Prevention of falls
- Nutrition
- Transport
- Practical support and handy person services
- Support for carers

Wards will be provided with information that helps them to understand the picture in their ward. It will be expected that wards develop a priority to reflect this picture and to guide the use of this funding allocation.

19. The detail of the allocations is shown at Annex 1. These pots added together will give wards a single, flexible budget that they can spend as they see fit within Council policies and procedures. The budgets may be used to give grants or to buy services. Initially, where a ward wishes to buy services it will be from a Council department, subject to the ability of those departments to supply additional services at an economic cost. A range of local services options will be developed to guide wards in this regard (see Annex 2). This list will grow and develop as the requirements of wards become clearer and will be expanded to include purchasing options outside of the Council under the Council's framework agreements. This will ensure that the Council's best value and statutory obligations continue to be met. Ward budgets must not be used in any way that increases the Council's revenue costs.

20. Examples of initiatives that ward funding could support include:

- Helping a community group to take on management of a local project e.g. looking after a piece of local open space
- Undertaking a local clean-up
- Changing the planting or other arrangements to make a space more attractive and easier to maintain in the future
- Forming a volunteer group to ensure older and/or vulnerable people have access to a regular nutritious meal
- Supporting affordable and accessible transport options so people are able to access services

- Providing a grant to a local group or Parish Council in order to provide an additional service for a community or group of residents
21. In addition to the devolved budgets there are other ways that wards will be invited to make decisions about the allocation of resources:
  22. **Ward Highways Programme:** The process for allocating highway improvements will be partly localised through the new ward committees. Highways funding is currently allocated to schemes using a risk based approach whereby highways inspectors assess the condition of the highway against a range of risk factors to identify potential schemes in order of priority against those risks. Schemes are then funded down the priority list until the available funding is exhausted. This approach could be enhanced through the ward committee process. Ward committees will be invited to use the knowledge of residents about local highways, footpaths and cycle ways to identify possible schemes that, whilst they did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the Council's main programme, nonetheless would provide improvements that are considered important by local residents.
  23. It is therefore proposed to top slice £125k from the annual highways maintenance budget and £125k of Local Transport Plan capital to create a £250k ward highways programme. See Annex 1 for the amount that this will provide per ward. In November, wards will be informed about schemes to be included in the main highways programme and invited to propose additional schemes that they would like to see undertaken in their wards from their allocation, to be programmed over the following year. Wards could choose to defer their allocation to a following year in order to fund a larger scheme in that year. It would be expected that these would be schemes that perhaps did not meet the threshold for inclusion in the main programme at that point of time but where repairs were needed and they were identified as important by local residents.
  24. It is proposed that work is undertaken to identify further budget areas that could at least in part be devolved to wards, for example public health budgets. In the meanwhile wards will be increasingly engaged in discussion about the relevant issues for their localities and in developing appropriate responses. The Public Health team will take the lead in providing ward co-ordinators for 3 wards enabling them to pilot an approach at ward level joining up local issues with a public health approach.

## **Monitor and Review**

25. To support the implementation of devolved budgets, a number of processes, factsheets (see Annex 3) and member briefings will be developed to ensure that there is a clear and transparent approach and quality decision making processes for ward spending. The approach will be kept under review and a report brought back after 6 months which will be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee in the first instance. The report will cover all aspects of the system including progress with ward spending. This will include the impact of spend and the outcomes and benefits that it has achieved within each ward.

## **Publicity**

26. The Communications Team are currently drawing up proposals regarding the best way to keep residents informed about ward activity, including through council newsletters in addition to the recently upgraded Council website.

## **Implications**

27. **Finance:** The budgets in 2015/16 will be allocated as follows:
- Base Ward Committee funding £75k - will be devolved taking into account in-year spends and commitments
  - Additional Ward Committee funding - fully devolved
  - Pride In York Fund (one off) - fully devolved
  - Pride in York (Recurring) - 50% of funding to be devolved in 2015/16
  - Community Care Fund - fully devolved
  - Highways Programme - fully devolved
28. **Equalities:** The equality impact assessment 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 channels of communication.
29. **Legal:** As Members are aware in making decisions of this nature the Council must have regard to its obligations under the Equalities Act 2010 and particularly the need eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not.
30. If the Executive wish to establish formal, decision making Ward Committees then Full Council will need to appoint those committees



and the Executive will then need to allocate decision making responsibilities in respect of relevant executive functions.

31. There are no additional Property, Human Resources, Crime and Disorder, or Information Technology implications arising from this report.

### **Corporate Objectives**

32. The proposals in this report contribute to the Council Plan objective that “All York’s residents live and thrive in a city which allows them to contribute.”

### **Risk Management**

33. In compliance with the Council’s risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and to deliver services, leading to damage to the Council’s reputation and failure to meet stakeholders’ expectations. The level of risk is assessed as “Low”. This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

### **Annexes:**

- 1 - Devolved budget amounts
- 2 - Initial list of local services options
- 3 - Fact Sheets

### **Contact Details**

<b>Authors:</b>	<b>Chief Officer responsible for the report:</b>
Mary Bailey Head of Communities and Equalities  Charlie Croft Assistant Director (Communities, Culture and Public Realm)	Sally Burns Director of Communities & Neighbourhoods
<b>Report Approved</b> ✓	<b>Date:</b> 16 July, 2015

**Specialist Implications Officers:**

Patrick Looker, Finance Manager

Andy Docherty, Assistant Director of Governance and IT

**Wards Affected:****All**

✓

**For further information please contact the author of the report****Background Papers:** Equality Impact Assessment