

Ward Funding Scrutiny Review Draft Final Report

Summary

1. This draft final report details the work undertaken by the Ward Funding Scrutiny Review Task Group, and presents their draft review recommendations for this Committee's consideration.

Introduction

2. On 30 July 2015 Executive approved the council's new approach to community engagement. This new approach involved the re-establishment of ward committees to enable the council to work in closer partnership with residents, in order to tackle local issues and increase community capacity. Amongst other responsibilities, ward committees are charged with drawing up ward priorities based on engagement with residents, agreeing expenditure and services and stimulating community schemes that meet local needs.

Background to Review

3. In June 2016 the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee received a detailed report on the Council's new approach to community engagement through the establishment of revised ward committees, and the progress to date in embedding them in working practices. This highlighted some areas of operation where there were issues, so it was suggested it would be helpful if the Scrutiny Committee were to undertake a review to assess achievements to date and ambitions for the future for a number of areas which still needed refining e.g.:
 - Process for spending ward funding;
 - Project generation by community groups;
 - Matching spend to residents' priorities;
 - Assessing 'value for money' in terms of outcomes;
 - Commissioning of local schemes.

4. With the aim of increasing the allocation of ward budgets and identifying improvements to the process, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to proceed with a review, and formed this Task Group to carry out the review on its behalf, with support from the Head of Communities & Equalities.

Information Gathered to Date

5. In July 2016 this Task Group met for the first time to receive introductory information in support of this review. This included a progress update on the implementation of the new approach to ward funding – see Annex A, and examples of national and regional good practice.
6. To add to this, the Task Group also received a detailed presentation on the Neighbourhood Working Model, which examined each stage of the process and the differing responsibilities of both officers and ward councillor at each stage – see Annex B. The Head of Communities & Equalities confirmed that in an effort to embed the new arrangements, a number of Member briefings had been held, factsheets outlining the different stages had been shared, and articles had been included in the Members' Newsletter.
7. At the meeting, the Task Group took part in an exercise to identify and examine barriers and issues within the process. This included considering some initial feedback from the Communities & Equalities team (CET) on their experiences to date of implementing each stage, examples of progress in local wards and the barriers that some wards have experienced to date, to which the individual Task Group members added their own feedback on experiences in their wards. Finally, consideration was given to three case study factsheets prepared by CET to illustrate good practice across the different stages of the process.
8. Having considered all the information provided the Task Group agreed that the remit for this review should be based on an assessment of the achievements to date and ambitions for the future in the following areas:
 - Process for allocating ward funding;
 - Project generation by community groups;
 - Matching spend to residents' priorities;
 - Assessing 'value for money' in terms of outcomes;
9. In an effort to achieve the above remit, the Task Group agreed it would be worthwhile consulting with all Councillors (Cllrs) on their experiences to date, and agreed to share with them the Task Group's initial feedback

and seek their views on the different stages of the process via a consultation document issued to all Cllrs.

10. In October 2016 the Task Group met to consider Cllrs feedback (shown at Annex C). They considered a written response from CET to the Cllr feedback – see Annex D, together with a number of local good practice case studies which CET had produced in response to the feedback from Cllrs.
11. At the same meeting, the Task Group learnt that Veritau had recently completed an internal audit to provide assurance to Council management that procedures and controls within the system were appropriate to ensure that:
 - Expenditure addresses ward priorities and/or is supported by full and effective engagement with ward residents
 - The quality of information available to ward committees (and the extent to which this information is being used) is sufficient to enable effective decision making
 - The effectiveness of spending decisions is measured
12. The Task Group noted that a sample of ward councillors had been consulted as part of the audit, to examine the basis on which their spending decisions had been made and how residents had been engaged in those decisions. The Task Group considered the Audit report (see Annex E) and noted that their scrutiny review findings were to be used by CET to inform the actions necessary to address the issues identified by the audit.
13. Finally, the Task Group learnt that the Corporate Management Team were due to receive an update report on the Neighbourhood Working Model, looking at implementation progress and barriers, and a Cross Party Working Group was in place as a conduit for ensuring all Groups/Cllrs participate in embedding the model across the city.
14. Having noted all of the information provided at their October meeting, the Task Group agreed it would be beneficial to meet with some of the local community groups etc who had been through the process of applying for ward funding during the last year to gather their feedback.
15. A consultation session was held in November 2016, attended by a range of previously successful applicants, a number of current applicants and a

number of applicants seeking funding for the provision of a service across a number of wards – see list of invitees at Annex F. The following issues were raised by the consultees:

16. In regard to communications:

- Loss of individual ward newsletters makes it more difficult to communicate the availability of ward funding
- Communication in wards needs improving – not evident that all community groups are aware that ward funding is available, particularly new groups and small groups who are not already in the loop
- Parish Councils and Residents Associations could be encouraged to spread the word
- There needs to be consistency in communication across all wards
- Available funding should be advertised regularly
- Better awareness raising of ward priorities with Residents/Community Groups

17. In regard to the application process:

- General consensus amongst consultees that process fairly straight forward – a majority of those present had applied for funding previously and were therefore not new to it
- Some issues around pagination and numbering of sections
- The council website does not allow the application form to be completed online - applicants would welcome an improved online form
- Some information requested in the form is a little repetitive in places
- Community Involvement Officers proved very helpful at this stage and applicants received guidance on how to complete the form and how much to apply for
- Provision of hard copies of applicants constitution not always feasible due the size of the document
- Examples of previous difficulties for organisations working across the city who wished to supply a service in more than one ward where they had identified a local need – clarification was given at the consultation session about how the process had been recently revised to enable citywide organisations to submit one application covering a number of wards where they were able to demonstrate that they met a priority of those wards.

18. In regard to Ward Committee Meetings & Ward Team Meetings:

- Meetings could be advertised in Parish Council newsletters and other local communication could be tapped into

- Need to identify a clear route by which to cascade information throughout each ward e.g. From Council to Ward to Parish Council/Residents Associations, to Community Groups

19. In regard to Ward Funding Decisions:

- It would be helpful to provide a list of current applications showing their status so that applicants can track them
- Each ward needs to provide clear guidance on the frequency of when decisions are due to be made.
- A record of the decisions per ward should be made available online, preferably on each ward's page, together with an record of the remaining funding available for the ward
- The ward letters issued confirming successful applications include a date by which an implementation update is required.

20. Other Issues:

- Examples were given of where local organisations may have identified needs that did not match the aims of the funding (the ward priorities).
- Clarification was given on what would happen if this year's funding was not spent.
- There was no feedback suggesting that applicants had needed to draw excessively on CET officers time to assist them in completing their applications, although in the early days before the decision to allow applications for multiple wards, more support was required for those types of applications e.g. Musical Connections & St Nicholas Fields.

21. Finally, the Task Group queried what role York Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS) may be playing in supporting local charities, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and community groups etc to apply for ward funding. CVS confirmed it can:

- Review a group or organisation's needs and suggest appropriate funding application options, which may result in directing them to ward funding, right the way through to Big Lottery applications.
- Provide free funding advice - they have sign posted 351 service users to online funding but were unable to confirm how many were referred to ward funding or how many went on to apply for ward funding.
- Provide a free online tool for sourcing funding and hold an annual funding fayre
- Provide free advice sessions on governance, which has so far sign posted one organisation to successfully apply for ward funding.

22. A representative of CVS met with the Task Group in January 2017 to further discuss the broad package of support CVS provides and to give feedback on the ward funding application process and how they might best support it through their new advocacy role. A detailed example of how CVS had supported a small local group to successfully apply for ward funding was also provided.
23. Finally the Task Group considered how the changes across a number of council departments within the authority might improve ward Cllrs access to information to help them make informed decisions for ward funding. They noted the cultural shift towards creating additional capacity building resources and stimulating improved community engagement thereby helping to identify future ward priorities and bring forward more community based schemes. For example, Children's Services have recently introduced Local Area Teams to work across the city to bring together a range of existing services to form a new set of preventative arrangements for families from pregnancy through to adult hood (see Executive update report dated 14 July 2016). Adult Social Services are introducing Local Area Co-ordinators who will support people with disabilities, mental health needs, older people and their families or carers to create a network which provides efficient routes to the best outcomes along with an environment which allows access and support when needed (see Executive report dated 25 August 2016). Finally the introduction of the Yor-Wellbeing Services which aligns with the review of the 0-19 early intervention and prevention work concerning early help arrangements and supports the council's move towards the new vision of a place-based operating model (see Decision Session - Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism July 2016).

Analysis

24. In regard to identifying ward priorities, the Task Group noted that the feedback from Cllrs (shown in Annex C) suggested there were issues for some around defining ward priorities, understanding and getting beneath the surface of the ward profile information, concerns around the accuracy of ward profile information and queries about how often it was updated etc. The Task Group therefore suggested that a member training session be arranged to support ward Cllrs in their use of the profile information. Two training sessions were arranged in December 2016 but the take up was extremely poor with only four members attending each session.

25. The Task Group acknowledged the considerable effort invested by CET in producing fact sheets, information bulletins, and organising those Cllr training sessions. However, it was clear from the responses that some Cllrs were not up to date with the changes that had been made since the scheme was first introduced e.g. that it is now possible to apply for funding across a number of wards. To further illustrate this, Member training records showed that attendance at other scheme related training and information sessions had also been low which meant some councillors remained unaware of the support and information that was available to support them in undertaking work associated with the scheme.
26. This helped to evidence an underlying problem with the introduction of any new process/working model affecting Cllrs i.e. that they do not always attend essential Member training sessions, unless they are statutorily required to do so e.g. licensing training. This suggested there may be a need for the Council to make some training mandatory.
27. The Task Group identified a number of other issues e.g.:
- A number of members had referred to the ward funding being in silos, which the Task Group knew to be incorrect. The Task Group agreed that their review final report should provide absolute clarity on this point i.e. *that all wards have their own ward funding pot that they can choose to spend to address their ward priorities. In addition there is a designated highways funding pot held by highways, containing an agreed figure for each ward to allocate to highways schemes in their ward.*
 - The ongoing difficulties Cllrs were experiencing getting information from specific council teams e.g. Highways, CETs inability to access that information on their behalf, and the knock-on effect it had on spending the available ward funding on much needed ward improvements. The Task Group recognised this issue was heightened when a proposed scheme was of a complex nature, requiring input from a number of technical officers. They agreed the management of this information flow needed improving to ensure it did not hinder progress and proposed the introduction of a set of agreed standards.
 - Ward Cllrs would benefit from being able to access information on successful applications in other wards, as it would help to speed up the process of submitting and considering new applications. They

questioned whether it may be possible for CET to build up a database of information that all Cllrs could access. However, they accepted this might prove to be labour intensive. The Task Group queried whether a Cllr Forum could be introduced that they themselves could populate, however they recognised this would again increase their workload.

- Improving communication between CET officers and ward Cllrs, and between Cllrs within an individual ward, would benefit everyone involved, which in turn could lead to improved engagement from others. They agreed it would be particularly helpful in split wards where there was evidence to suggest that some Cllrs were struggling to work cooperatively.
- The feedback suggested that the officer role and Cllr role was often not as clearly defined as the consultation document suggested. The Task Group recognised that as all Cllrs were able to choose their own approach and not all employed the same styles of leadership, it was crucial that they formed a good working relationship with their support officers, so that they could work together as a team. To do this successfully, Cllrs needed to give clarity on their expectations and agree their support requirements, to enable officers to effectively support the process. Cllrs could also be more pro-active and perhaps participate in the induction of new officers to the support team as they are the most knowledgeable on their wards etc.

28. The Task Group acknowledged the contribution of the consultees in identifying a number of issues around the application process, and agreed the following improvements were required:

- An online application form and guidance on the frequency that individual wards make their funding decisions:
- Clarity on how long it will take to receive the funding once an application has been approved etc.
- A live document per ward page detailing current applications, successful applications, and balance of available funding

29. The Task Group also acknowledged:

- The feedback from CET shown at Annex D, proposing solutions and minor changes to working practices to address some of the issues identified in the Cllr feedback at Annex C.

- The findings from the Veritau audit identifying a number of issues with the internal processes and the steps to be taken by CET to address them – see Annex E.

30. Having considered all of their findings the Task Group agreed that overall, many Cllrs remain unclear about their ward role and responsibilities. Furthermore, that some do not feel it should be part of their role and responsibilities as ward councillors, e.g. making assessments about how social care funding should be allocated, and some do not feel they have the time and/or the necessary expertise to undertake the role. The Task Group agreed if this was not addressed it could prove fundamental to the scheme's long term success. They therefore welcomed the forthcoming changes to service delivery in a number of key areas (see paragraph 23) as they agreed it was likely to lead to better and increased support for ward Cllrs and ward teams.

Council Plan 2015-19

31. This scrutiny review will support Ward Councillors in applying the agreed changes to their ward committees, and the Council's new approach to community engagement through working with local neighbourhoods. This supports the council's priority to listen to residents, protect community facilities and focus on cost and efficiency to make the right decisions at a ward level in a challenging financial environment.

Draft Review Recommendations

32. Taking account of their findings, the Task Group have drafted the following review recommendations for the Committee's consideration.

That:

- i) Council be asked to consider introducing mandatory Member Training associated with the future introduction and delivery of any major changes to working practices such as the new neighbourhood working model, through a refresh of its Member Development Protocol
- ii) A set of standards be agreed to formalise the working arrangements between CET and other CYC teams e.g. Highways, in order to better manage the flow of information and manage Cllr expectations, and speed up the progression of ward funded schemes.
- iii) Appropriate changes are made to the internal processes to address the Veritau findings and scrutiny review findings, including

- Improving communication and publicity of ward committee meetings;
- Replacing the downloadable application form with an online application form, and providing guidance on the frequency that individual wards make their funding decisions, and how long it will take to receive the funding once an application has been approved etc.
- Introducing a form to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of ward funded projects;
- A 'live' system be introduced with the capability to detail successful applications, pending applications, and the balance of available funding

iv) All case studies, fact sheets and other training materials be stored in a central depository made accessible to all Cllrs

33. Finally, in recognising that some Members are struggling with their ward role and responsibilities, the Task Group recommends that:

- v) An additional staff resource be provided in CET, , in order to increase support to ward Cllrs, improve communication between ward Cllrs and council departments, and support the flow of information from the new working models being introduced across council services to Cllrs (see paragraph 23). Options for funding this should include funding this from the budget allocated to wards.
- vi) CET continues to provide a range of support in a range of ways to suit individual Cllrs preferences and identify future improvements where feasible.
- vii) Political Groups provide peer support to their ward members to enable them to progress schemes in their wards
- viii) This committee receive a future update on implementation progress of the model in order to assess any outstanding issues.

Implications Associated with Draft Review Recommendations

34. **Financial & HR** – In regard to Recommendation (v), the cost to the council of an additional staffing resource in CET would be £36,888 per annum per additional CET officer. If a decision were taken to fund this from the ward funding budget, the current year's funding budget would

not be impacted as it is unlikely that any additional resource could be employed this financial year. How the additional resource would impact the ward funding budget of each ward will be dependent on whether the cost was shared equally across all 21 wards at a cost of £1757 per ward, or allocated across the wards in proportion to their budget. This would result in a range of contributions, from £730 (Bishopthorpe) to £2,560 (Guildhall). The implementation update information contained within Annex A shows that a number of wards are likely to spend their full ward funding budget for this financial year. If an additional resource was funded from the ward funding budget, wards will have less money in future years thereby reducing their ability to achieve all of their ward priorities.

35. In regard to Recommendation (ii), this would require a significant piece of work to be undertaken, involving officers from across a number of CYC departments. This would take time and would only be successful if there was appropriate buy-in across those teams. Future changes to structures which affect the operating model of those teams would also affect each team's ability to maintain the agreed standard.
36. **IT** – CET are already in the process of drawing up a specification for the 'live system' proposed in Recommendation (iii). They would need to commission the work from CYC's IT team and the workstream would need to be priorities against other ongoing work and department requests. The costs associated with this piece of work would be identified as part of the specification design stage.
37. There are no legal or other implications associated with the draft review recommendations listed above.

Risks Associated with Draft Review Recommendations

38. There is a risk that if funds are diverted from the ward funding pot to fund an additional staffing resource in CET (see recommendation v) it still may not guarantee an improvement in the flow of information and support from other CYC teams that Cllrs feel they need to effectively fulfil their ward role. The alternative to this approach would be to agree and maintain a set of working standards across CYC teams (as per recommendation ii) which Cllrs can use to hold to account the support they receive.
39. It is also too early to quantify the benefits to ward Cllrs of the new working models being introduced across other key council service areas,

designed to empower communities to make informed choices (see paragraph 23). However, it is clear the introduction of local area teams will enhance the membership of ward teams, which in turn will inform the setting of ward priorities and direct ward spending to those most in need.

Report Recommendation

40. Having considered the review findings and the draft review recommendations listed at paragraphs 32 & 33 above (together with their associated implications etc), the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:

- Agree any amendments required to the report and the review recommendations
- Identify any additional review recommendations required

Reason: To conclude this review in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols, and enable the review final report to be presented to a future meeting of the Executive (in March 2017).

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Specialist Implications Officer(s) N/A

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: N/A

Annexes:

Annex A – Progress Update on the Implementation of the New Ward Funding Model

Annex B – Copy of Neighbourhood Working Model Presentation July 2016

Annex C – Cllr Feedback (anonimised)

Annex D – CET Response to Cllr Feedback

Annex E – Veritau Internal Audit Report

Annex F – List of Consultation Invitees

Abbreviations:

Cllr – Councillor

CET – Communities & Equalities Team

CVS – Centre for Voluntary Service