

**Decision Session - Executive Member
for Economic Development & Community
Engagement**

8 March, 2016

Report of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

Review of Neighbourhood Working Arrangements

Summary

1. This report provides an update on implementation of the Council's new approach to community engagement through working with local neighbourhoods and the establishment of revised ward committees.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - Note progress to date.
 - Agree criteria by which impact may be evaluated.
 - Identify input that scrutiny could make into future development of this approach.
 - Agree to receive a further report in due course.

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

Background

3. In July, 2015 the Executive agreed a new approach to community engagement, supporting ward members to:
 - Work with local communities to develop local priorities and help deliver on these.
 - Help empower local communities and devolve more budgets to residents.
4. The Executive agreed that the approach be kept under review and that a report be brought back, after 6 months, in the first instance to the relevant scrutiny committee, this report to cover all aspects of the

system including progress with ward spending, the impact of the spend and the outcomes and benefits that it has achieved. Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee considered a report at its meeting on 20 January, 2016. Feedback from the committee was as follows:

- It was suggested that to encourage better engagement, a better explanation about the purpose and format of the meetings could be provided or they could be given a different title as a member felt the words “Ward Committee” didn’t provide a full enough picture.
 - Any support to work carried out more locally was welcomed as each Ward has unique issues.
 - Members raised concerns about the work loads of the community officers. The Head of Communities advised that if members found their ward officer unavailable then any queries could be referred to another officer on the team.
 - It was felt that some wards needed more information and knowledge in order to make decisions about their ward budgets.
5. It was noted that the new approach is still in its infancy with members just embarking on their second round of meetings and still learning how to get the best from the arrangements. For this reason it was felt to be too early to review the approach.

Key Elements of the Approach and Progress to Date

6. This section of the report identifies the key elements of the Council’s neighbourhood working approach and outlines: i) progress to date, and ii) potential measures by which the success of the approach might be judged.
7. **Ward Committees:** Central to the new approach was the re-establishment of Ward Committees, chaired by the ward councillors, and with increased budgets, in order to:
- 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. Progress to date:

- **Ward Committees:** 30 Ward Committee meetings have taken place to date with the majority of wards having had at least 2 of their 4 ward committee meetings.
- Meetings which have had the best turnout have been those with a specific focus or a topic. Meetings which have elicited the best involvement are those facilitated in a style which is interactive e.g. café style with table top discussions and local groups taking part in / presenting in the meetings. Examples include:
 - Micklegate ward has held an interactive meeting themed on flooding, Neighbourhood Planning and ground maintenance.
 - Guildhall ward has regular ward surgeries in between ward committee meetings. These are supported with some officer publicity but otherwise councillors do all the organisation.
 - Copmanthorpe Ward is planning to hold the next Ward Committee meeting alongside the Annual Parish Meeting; this should increase co-operation and reduce duplication for residents and partner alike.
 - Hull Road has held an interactive café style session with residents to discuss ideas for ward budget spending.
- The use of clear language on posters etc. to describe what a ward committee meeting involves is being implemented e.g. community debate, community café, public meeting, and so on.
- **Engagement:** In the main, wards are committed to engaging with residents through ward committee meetings as the main vehicle for engagement. Potential areas for future consideration include:
 - The flexibility to hold up to 4 meetings per year means that there is no 'cycle' of meetings at predicted times so wards need to be proactive in developing an engagement approach / plan and letting residents know how they can access this information and engage in the process.
 - If a range of engagement methods is used then wards will not run the danger of only engaging with the same people.
- **Ward Priorities:** Ward Committees have established ward priorities in the most part using member and ward partner knowledge and ward statistics. These have been communicated to residents via ward web pages and announced at ward committee meetings. Examples of good practice in setting ward priorities include the use

of a residents' survey, discussions at ward committee meetings and in ward teams:

- In Acomb ward councillors have set their ward priorities based on the outcomes of an online survey, conversations with local residents and in the ward team meeting. Those priorities are set for 4 years.
 - In Haxby & Wigginton the elected members are working with the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group which has helped to identify shared priorities.
 - Westfield has put together a spending plan for the year to address its priorities.
 - Clifton and Rawcliffe & Clifton Without councillors have worked collectively to review the feedback of 236 students from Cannon Lee School. The consultation asked pupils about, how and where, their ward budgets could be spent, with social isolation and loneliness highlighted amongst young people's concerns.
- Ward committees have long been used as a mechanism for consultation on city wide issues but getting the breadth of views and opinions from across a ward is the main challenge so wards are using a range of communication methods:
 - Through the new flexible arrangements, members can decide to host a ward committee meeting at any time which means they can respond in a more effective and timely manner.
 - Following the recent floods, ward member in areas affected were invited to host special flood meetings in their wards.
 - In response to the discussions with the voluntary sector about the grounds maintenance budget in ward team meetings a citywide meeting was held for ward-based environment groups and council officers.
 - A joint ward committee was held in March for Holgate and Micklegate residents on the York Central development.
- **Holding the Council to account:** Ward members are involving residents in their decision making by taking their recommendations to their ward committee meeting for further discussion and feedback. This allows residents to give feedback and challenge.
 - In Dringhouses and Woodthorpe ward councillors write monthly reports summarising work of the ward team. Those reports are then published on their ward web page.

- In some wards resident representatives sit on the Ward Team which allows for direct accountability.
- Ward Committees have hosted consultation events, e.g. Holgate and Micklegate hosted a joint consultation on York Central and a number of wards held meetings to gain resident feedback on the floods.
- All decisions on the allocation of ward funding are uploaded onto the council website on a monthly basis which is then linked to the ward web pages.

9. Potential areas for future consideration by scrutiny:

- How is decision making recorded and fed back to residents effectively outside of the annual meetings process? Current practice differs from ward to ward which may be confusing to residents. Action plans may offer a solution to this if they are made publicly available.

10. Potential success measures might be:

- Numbers of residents engaging in the ward committee process / other events.
- Ward priorities and a spending plan in place.

11. **Ward Teams:** Designed to complement Ward Committees, Ward Teams are there help 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) and guide use of the ward budgets.

12. Progress to date:

- Ward teams are established in the majority of wards. Meetings take place approx every 6-8 weeks, usually in the ward.
- Ward councillors have brought to the table residents representatives, residents' associations, businesses, voluntary sector groups, parish councils, police, faith groups, students, schools, nurseries, specialist

officers e.g. from health, youth and community workers, estate managers, and enforcement officers. Ward teams are constantly evolving and it is recommended that a annual review of membership takes place in wards. An example:

- Acomb Ward has invited local resident representatives to join the ward team promoting this via email to the resident distribution list, twitter and posters on ward notice boards. Councillors invited 4 residents from different geographical areas of the ward and so far 2 residents have joined.
- **The voluntary / community sector:** In ward teams this sector has been included through a combination of members asking directly groups in their wards to attend and formal invitation via officers. Voluntary groups have been involved in the discussions around the grounds maintenance allocations.
- **Information gathering:** Reliable information gathering depends on who is round the table and participants having a clear understanding of their role on the ward team. Ward teams are most effective where partners bring issues to the group and solutions are explored collectively. Example:
 - A health and wellbeing approach has been piloted in 3 wards which had resulted in a report with recommendations for developing bespoke projects. This approach has generated information and resident involvement in liaison with the ward team which will identify future projects and use for ward funding.
- **An Example of Effective Action Planning:** In Guildhall Ward the January Ward Committee meeting included an interactive session for residents to consider three over-arching ward aims and the elected members then worked together to prioritise specific objectives under each aim.
- There is future potential for Neighbourhood Plans to be used to support ward planning and vice versa. For example, Rawcliffe Parish Council has approached the Ward Committee for advice and guidance in developing a Community Plan in the village.

13. Potential success measures might be:

- Members getting information out in their wards, holding surgeries, etc.
- Number of different partners attending ward team meetings.
- Feedback from ward team partners.

14. **Devolved Budgets:** Additional budgets were devolved to wards to create a single pot that wards can use flexibly to help address their priorities and to develop community initiatives which benefit local residents and reduce reliance on Council services. A total of £925k was devolved. The ward pots are made up of:

- The general “Ward Budget”.
- The “Pride in York Fund”, made of both one-off and recurring elements, for the purpose of supporting environmental initiatives.
- The “Community Care Fund” aiming to support the prevention or delay of people needing to access formal care packages and statutory support.

15. The ward pot can be spent as wards see fit within Council policies and procedures. The budgets may be used to give grants or to buy services.

16. In addition:

- A Ward Highways Programme was instituted partly localising the process for allocating highway improvements through the ward committees.
- The grounds maintenance spend in each ward was devolved to the ward.

17. Progress to date:

- Publicising budgets:** members have got word out to their wards about the budgets available and how people can get involved in discussions using social media, residents’ email distribution lists, parish council websites, posters in the community, presentations at parish council meetings, and ward web pages.
- An ‘Our City’ insert has been used to provide information to residents.
- The commitments are shown on the Council’s website: <https://www.york.gov.uk/wardfundingdecisions>. Given the slow rate of spending in some wards to date more clearly needs to be done to stimulate the interest and creativity of community groups to generate projects.
- Using ward budgets effectively to tackle local residents’ priorities:** Targeted preventative projects have been undertaken for older and vulnerable residents e.g. luncheon clubs, trips, craft activities, by giving grants to locally based community groups to purchase tools and equipment, make improvements to community

facilities, help with improvements to the local environment, supporting local events and activities for children and young people. Example: Heworth Without has part funded a defibrillator at the Applecroft Road Community Centre which will be accessible to the public in case of emergency and accessible toilet facilities at Heworth Cricket Club which will also benefit those attending educational and recreational classes. As well as benefitting the wider community both grants lever in other funding.

- **Evidence of impacts, outcomes and benefits from ward spending:** This is an area of development to enable detailed analysis of outcomes and benefits. Grant monitoring reports will be requested from grant recipients and this information will tell us about impact and outcomes. An annual review sheet has been developed which can be offered to wards.
- **Devolved grounds maintenance budget:** Wards have submitted their recommendations for their Grounds maintenance budget for 2016-17. This has involved discussions with residents, partners and officers. Each ward has taken a variety of approaches to meeting the savings targets including community groups taking on planting schemes, looking at alternative solutions in the local neighbourhood.
- **Cleansing:** At forthcoming ward meetings maps will be provided showing current cleansing arrangements for each ward. Ward members will be able to re-prioritise activity based on their local knowledge or priorities, or supplement cleansing activity from their ward budgets where they wish to (subject to deliverability).
- **Ward Highways Programme:** Each ward has received the highways priority list for footways and carriageway works. Wards are identifying locations for potential schemes subject to feasibility, legality and budget availability.

18. Areas for future consideration include:

- It is proposed that in the future the ward budget is simply expressed as a single pot (with capital and revenue elements) rather than as a number of discrete budget heads in order to improve clarity.
- Some members felt that the grounds maintenance spreadsheets were too complex to be an effective means of devolving control to wards. It is proposed that once wards have completed identification of their priorities for 16/17, to improve clarity, the spreadsheets are no longer used.
- It is proposed instead that the £150k additional Pride in York funds agreed in the budget process is used partly to assist wards in

mitigating the effect of previous reductions in the grounds maintenance budget. It is proposed that this is divided into two elements as follows:

- One part to be divided amongst all wards. This will be £100k in 16/17
 - One part to fund community and voluntary sector organisations who can support wards with community led environmental and gardening type projects (to prioritise those wards where the affects of previous reductions have been greatest, principally city centre and those with parks.) This will be £50k in 16/17
- With regard to the Ward Highways programme, improved information will be provided to wards with regard to the schemes proposed in their areas from the main highways programme. The list of schemes for 17/18 will be available in late summer 2016. Further information will also be developed to assist wards in having an idea about the likely scale of cost for various types of maintenance initiatives and a further member briefing will be arranged. It should be noted that where a potential scheme involves more than merely maintenance and includes the need for design work a feasibility study will be needed. Wards will be required to fund any feasibility study. Also, a particular challenge has been encountered with wards seeking repeated re-costing of schemes as they develop their ideas. This is not sustainable within available highways staffing resources. It is therefore proposed to provide an initial price free but make a charge at cost for any follow-up re-costing or feasibility work.
 - Building on the experience of devolving part of the highways budget to wards there is now potential to consider how further council budgets could be localised.

19. Potential success measures in this area might include:

- Number of schemes commissioned
- Feedback from residents at ward committee meetings

20. **Publicity:** The current arrangements are that we use *Our City* where to can to publicise meeting dates, as well as social media, flyers where appropriate, residents' email distribution, residents' associations, councillors' own publications, notice boards, and the Council's website.

21. Progress to date:

- Local residents have been made aware of the opportunities to get involved in the new arrangements through articles in local newsletters which are delivered locally at no cost e.g. parish / church and village newsletters, the ward insert in Your City, social media, direct email, through ward team members actively promoting the opportunity to their networks face to face. Examples:
 - In Micklegate ward a local active citizen proactively organised the delivery of the flyer for the York Central Ward committee meeting to an area of the ward with other local residents incurring no delivery cost.
 - Westfield Ward has committed some of its ward funds to produce and deliver a scheme suggestions form to ask for ideas and a subsequent form to get an indication of residents' preferences.
 - In Dringhouses/ Woodthorpe Ward, elected members write monthly reports summarising work of the ward team. Those reports are then published on ward web page under the news section.
- Officers are working with members to increase attendance at Ward Committees by trying new formats to reach new audiences e.g. taking a ward committee to a local event or well attended drop in. These will be reviewed and assessed once they have taken place. For example, Copmanthorpe Ward is linking with Copmanthorpe Parish Council to hold a ward committee meeting followed immediately by the Parish Council AGM. The aim is to attract residents, encourage better working together, and minimise the number of meetings which officers and parish councillors need to attend.

22. Potential success measures might be:

- Ward committee attendance figures
- Surveys

23. **Other Issues:** The Neighbourhood approach will now be enhanced with two specific additional developments that will be led from within the Communities and Equalities Team:

24. **Community Led Local Delivery (CLLD):** The Council has been successful with its Stage 1 CLLD application to the European Social Fund for a "Community Growth York" project. The purpose of this

funding is to promote community enterprise and business development and to remove barriers to work.

25. The first milestone is that by 31 August, 2016 the Council must:
 - Submit a robust CLLD Strategy that takes full account of the CLLD requirements and guidance and is of a sufficient quality to be assessed and complete enough to be considered for Phase 2 Investment
 - Submit a Stage 2 Full Application
 - Identify an appropriate Accountable Body, which will be responsible for the administration of Phase 2
 - Form a functioning Local Action Group, with appropriate representation and the capacity and capability to oversee the delivery of Phase 2
26. If the bid is successful at Stage 2 up to £1.29m of European funding will be available to spend across those super output areas in York with the highest levels of deprivation. This will bring together residents, agencies and communities to develop activities to encourage local enterprise and business development and support to connect people to jobs. A bespoke programme of activity will be developed and driven by a Local Action Group made up community and agency representatives.
27. A fixed-term post of Neighbourhood Manager has been created to take this forward.
28. **Ageing Well project:** The Health and Wellbeing Board is supporting the development of a new public health strategy for the City called “Well York”. The strategy is being based on a model of wellness and the Public Health team will be developing the Ageing Well work programme in partnership with local communities in support of it. Deliverables by 31 March, 2017 will be:
 - An evidence based Ageing Well delivery plan as part of the overall “Well York” strategy
 - Increased capacity for tackling social isolation and loneliness in adults and older people, working in partnership with local communities and groups
 - Increased capacity for falls prevention work in targeted neighbourhoods identified in the recent Health Impact Assessment of housing conditions, working closely with public health and the housing team in the Council

- Further work to develop York as a Dementia Friendly City
29. These initiatives will support the Council's move towards creating sustainable services into the future through a community operating model which is:
- Place based – services being delivered within localities that recognizes the communities we live in, and the needs of those residents
 - Intelligence led – using what we know both through data and local, on the ground knowledge to deploy resources to places of most need, and strengthen capability other areas of the City
 - Multi-Agency – recognizes the need to work in close partnership to improve shared outcomes for the City
 - Efficient and Effective – reduce duplication, be more informed in deployment of resources and reduce demand on higher cost specialist services

Options

30. The principal options open to the Executive Member are to:
- Accept the analysis set out in the paper
 - Add to or amend the analysis

Analysis

31. Given that implementation of the new arrangements is at an early stage it is proposed to continue to review the arrangements against the evaluation measures proposed. Scrutiny will be asked to review the proposed impact measures prior to the next review report being brought to the Executive Member.
32. As part of the next phase of review examples of best practice will be sought from other council across the country.
33. The Executive will be asked to agree to carry forward of unspent ward budgets as part of the year end budget process.

Corporate Objectives

34. 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

35. 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.

Contact Details

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Report Approved ✓	Date: 29 February 2016	
Specialist Implications Officer:		
Wards Affected:	All	✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None