

Review of Neighbourhood Working Arrangements

Summary

1. This report seeks input from the Communities and Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee into a review of the Council's neighbourhood working arrangements. The committee's experience will be fed into the review that is to be considered by the Executive Member for Economic Development and Community Engagement at his 8 March meeting.

Background

2. 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
3. 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.

Key Elements of the Approach and Questions for the Review

4. This section of the report identifies the key elements of the Council's neighbourhood working approach and suggests key questions for the review. Officers will bring examples of good practice to the meeting for discussion and committee members are also invited to identify examples of good practice under each heading in order that learning can be shared.
5. **Ward Committees:** Central to the new approach was the re-establishment of Ward Committees, chaired by the ward councillors, 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

6. Questions / Examples of good practice:

- How effectively have members been able to engage with their communities through the new arrangements?
- What examples of good practice are there in establishing ward priorities?
- How effectively have we been able to communicate with local residents through these arrangements about the issues facing the city / the Council?
- To what extent are residents able to hold the Council to account through the new arrangements
- What styles of meetings have worked best?

7. **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

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

9. Questions / Examples of good practice:

- Which partners have ward members brought to the table?
- What have members done to get voluntary / community groups involved?
- How effective has the ward team been in gathering information?
- What good examples exist of effective action planning?

10. **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
11. 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.
12. 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
13. Questions / Examples of good practice:
 - How have members got word out to their wards about the budgets available and how people can get involved in discussions?
 - How have members been able to use ward budgets effectively to tackle local residents’ priorities?
 - What evidence can be shown of impacts, outcomes and benefits from ward spending?
 - To what extent have the “local services options” developed by officers proved useful?
14. **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.
15. Questions / Examples of good practice:
 - What have been the best ways of making local residents aware of the opportunities to get involved in the new arrangements?

- What ways have members found to increase attendance at Ward Committees?

16. **Other Questions:**

- What further support would members like to receive in operating the new arrangements?

Next Steps

17. Feedback from the committee will be fed into the report to the Executive Member and will inform plans for 2016/17.

Recommendations

18. That the scrutiny committee comment on their experience of:
- Engaging their communities and holding effective ward committee meetings
 - Establishing ward priorities
 - Leading ward teams to deliver action against priorities
 - Using ward budgets effectively

The scrutiny committee is asked to identify examples of best practice that can be shared with other members.

The scrutiny committee is asked to identify any additional support that they would find useful in working within these arrangements.

Reason: To provide feedback for the Executive Member and inform plans for 2016/17.

Contact Details

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Report Approved ✓	Date: 7 January, 2016
Specialist Implications Officer: N/A	
Wards Affected:	All ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None