Health Scrutiny Committee **5th January 2009**

Feasibility Report – Access to Outreach Workers

Summary

1. This report asks Members to consider a scrutiny topic registered by Councillor Alexander to scrutinise the availability, funding and uniform distribution of access to outreach workers (a different entity to a befriending service). A copy of the topic registration form is attached at Annex A to this report.

Criteria

2. Councillor Alexander believes that this topic fits with the following eligibility criteria as set out in the topic registration form:

    - Public Interest (i.e. in terms of both proposals being in the public interest and resident perceptions)
    - In keeping with Corporate Priorities [We want services to be provided by whoever can best meet the needs of our customers]
    - National/local regional significance e.g. a central Government priority area, concerns joint working arrangements at a local 'York' or wider regional context.

Background Information

3. In his topic registration form, Councillor Alexander stated that many people in Holgate Ward rely on an outreach worker service from providers such as Age Concern. During the recent Dementia Review looked at by the Health Scrutiny Committee it became clear that this service was different from a befriending service. Outreach workers usually provided practical assistance and were paid; whereas the befriending service tended to concentrate on social visits and staff were normally volunteers. It also came to light that the outreach worker service was unequally available across the city (due to the way that Ward Committees allocated their individual budgets). In previous years Age Concern had bid for funding for the scheme but they had made the decision not to apply for funding for 2009/10.

4. Members of the Health Scrutiny Committee had not felt that discussions on the future of the outreach service fitted with the agreed remit of the Dementia Review, as the service was much wider reaching and did not just affect those suffering from dementia. It was therefore decided not to include a

recommendation on this subject; but it was suggested that it could be a topic in its own right should anyone wish to submit it.

Consultation

5. Councillor Sue Galloway, the portfolio holder for Housing and Adult Social Services (HASS) made the following comments:

   'Outreach workers are also employed in the NHS so I think we need to be clear exactly what is being proposed. My understanding is that it is the narrow remit of ward funded support workers that is being put forward as a topic.'

   'On the assumption that Councillor Alexander is referring to the former Ward Committee scheme due to end in 2009, this was not a scheme aimed specifically for dementia sufferers but was aimed at promoting independence amongst elderly people to counter social isolation and was first started in Westfield Ward as a result of a Health Needs Assessment in 2001. It was a Ward Committee funded scheme, which could be cut if residents did not vote for the service. The scheme was provided by Age Concern who, earlier this year, decided not to bid for the scheme for the forthcoming year 2009/10. In so far as Westfield Ward was concerned, Councillors had already expressed their concerns about people moving through the scheme and it was difficult to know the outcomes for this service.'

   'In HASS there is a home support team and a promoting independence team which, subject to eligibility criteria, would meet the needs of people who used to access the previous Ward funded schemes. The option would be open for Councillor Alexander to either fund a Ward Committee scheme through Ward budgets or to make a growth bid in the forthcoming budget.'

6. Councillor Ann Reid, the portfolio holder for Neighbourhood Services made the following comment:

   'As far as Neighborhood Services are concerned if these kinds of schemes are funded by Ward Committees then it is purely based on residents' votes. If people feel that a good scheme has been proposed then they will vote for it. We certainly can't divert Ward Committee funds to a citywide scheme as this would fly in the face of the long established principles of Ward Committee budgets.'

7. The Head of Neighbourhood Management and Business Support has made the following comments:

   ' Ward Committees have funded Community Support Outreach Workers for a number of years. This has been done through one provider (Age Concern), who has applied for grant provision from a number of wards. The level of support has expanded considerably since the first Ward was approached (Westfield). In 2008/09 ten out of eighteen Ward Committees are providing funding. On an annual basis the level of funding provided via the Ward Committee had altered as have the actual Ward Committees making the

provision. This is logical, as the areas needing provision will have changed over time, as will the priorities of members of the public.

The Ward Committee process for applying for grants has been approved via the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services and Advisory Panel (EMAP), following a recent review of policy and practice (EMAP 19th March 2008). The process was also called in via Scrutiny and reported back to Neighbourhood Services EMAP in April 2008.

The review of the application process looked at the national practice as well as consultations with the voluntary and community sectors on the proposals, in line with the York Compact. Part of the review was to strengthen the measures in place to ensure that the applicants are demonstrating local need and local (Ward based) delivery, thus meaning that blanket bids for funding across all Wards would not be accepted. This has now ensured that the Ward Committee process is more robust under the requirements of the Constitution and the financial regulations.

Since the introduction of the new application process Age Concern has not applied for funding. They have written to all Ward Members to inform them of their decision. In their letter they have stated that:

" The level of funding has been unpredictable making it difficult to effectively resource the service...."

The Ward Committee budget is present to deliver local services and improvements based on local need and priorities, voted for by the public. Providing a blanket service across the city is not something that would be provided via the Ward Committee setting.

We have a transparent and open process that enables a level playing field for all applicants. As a service we cannot force agencies and the third sector to apply for money.'

8. The Director of Housing and Adult Social Services has made the following comments:

- Effective community support and supportive neighborhoods are key issues for the quality of life in the city and the ability of vulnerable people to live independent and fulfilling lives.
- There is a major role for health, housing and social care to play in this but it is clearly about people's whole lives and therefore goes beyond HASS and into most other areas of council responsibility.
- I think it is important to focus on the outcome of sustainable and supportive communities in which vulnerable people can live safely and independently rather than focusing on a specific service - in this case outreach workers from Age Concern. I'm not sure how a scrutiny process could deal with the specific issue and link in with the budget setting and the associated commissioning/procurement processes.
- HASS are involved in discussions with a range of stakeholders, representative agencies & providers about commissioned services that would

support the broad outcome. This is largely within the context of the changing demographic profile of York and the implementation of the government's initiative "Putting People First". Other departments will be involved in complementary activities in terms of commissioning and partnership working but this is not co-coordinated in the council.

- There is a delicate balance to be struck between local initiatives and having a consistent level of support in all parts of the city
- Other agencies and partners are critical to this and so there is a role for the Local Strategic Partnership in shaping community support networks.
- The initiative in Westfield ward could be useful in informing future options at a neighborhood level.

My view would therefore be:

- If this were to be put forward as a scrutiny topic it ought to be more broadly focused on the outcome (sustainable neighbourhoods for vulnerable people) rather than starting with the input (how are outreach workers funded).
- This could be a potentially big piece of work involving staff from more than one department and would generate considerable interest from agencies outside the council who would want to provide evidence. I therefore doubt whether the topic could be concluded in 1-3 months.

9. Councillor Alexander has suggested that the following persons and organisations be consulted during the course of the review:

   - Older Persons
   - People with disabilities that may wish to access this service or who have previously used this service
   - Carers
   - Adult Social Services (CYC)
   - Neighbourhood Services (CYC)
   - Age Concern & other relevant voluntary organisations
   - The public

Analysis

10. It should be noted from the comments above that it is not within a Local Authority's remit to insist that third sector organisations apply for monies. There had also previously been difficulties in collating the outcomes for the outreach worker service. Further problems regarding re-allocating Ward Committee funds to a citywide scheme would also need to be resolved and it was more than likely that this would be directly against the long established principles of Ward Committee budgets.

11. It should also be noted that the processes for applying for grants had already been called in via the scrutiny function once before and had been reported back to Neighbourhood Services EMAP in April 2008. Members should therefore consider whether re-scrutinising the subject could provide further insight.

Conduct of Review

12. However, were this review to go ahead the Committee should look at how the service has worked in the past and look at the effect of such a service stopping. They should also investigate the possibility of replacing the service and indicate possible providers and funding sources.

13. Councillor Alexander has suggested that this review should look at:

- How the provision that has been provided in previous years could be maintained
- How the service could be more equally distributed across the city
- How the service can be funded
- What providers are available to offer the service
- What the Council obligations are regarding this service

14. It is estimated that this review would take approximately one to three months to complete.

Implications

15. **Financial** - There is a small amount of funding available within the scrutiny budget to carry out reviews. There are no other known financial implications associated with this report however; implications may arise should the review be progressed.

16. **Human Resources (HR)** - There are no known HR implications associated with this report.

17. **Legal** – There are no direct legal implications associated with this particular report however; legal implications associated with this topic may emerge if the topic progresses.

18. Other – There are no known equalities, property, crime and disorder or other implications associated with the recommendations within this report.

Risk Management

19. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, there are no known risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

Recommendation

20. Based on the evidence presented within this report Members are not advised to proceed with this review. However, if this were to be put forward as a scrutiny topic it ought to be more broadly focused on the outcome (sustainable neighborhoods for vulnerable people) rather than starting with the input (how are outreach workers funded) and a revised topic registration form would need to be submitted.

Reason: On the basis that the voluntary sector agencies are not obliged to apply for funding and that the Ward Committee process for applying for grants had been called in via the scrutiny function before in April 2008, there was therefore, little to be gained from scrutinising the same subject twice.

Contact Details

Author:

Tracy Wallis
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Services
Tel: 01904 551714

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Quentin Baker
Head of Civic, Legal & Democratic Services
Tel:
01904 551004

Feasibility Study Approved ✓ **Date** 18.12.2008

Specialist Implications Officer(s)
None

Wards Affected: **All** ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A Topic Registration Form