

## **Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee**

29 June 2016

Report of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

### **Commissioning Through Ward Budgets: Introductory Report**

#### **Summary**

1. This report sets out information intended to help the scrutiny committee to decide whether to conduct a scrutiny review of commissioning at ward level. Should the committee decide to conduct a review a scoping document will be drawn up.

#### **Recommendations**

2. Members are asked to consider whether they wish to undertake a review on this topic, in light of the information given in this report, and, if so, to indicate in relation to which specific aspects, in order to inform a scoping report for submission to the next meeting.

Reason: To ensure compliance with scrutiny procedures and protocols.

#### **Background**

3. In January this year the scrutiny committee considered a report which provided 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. The report went on to the Executive Member for Economic Development and Community Engagement (Deputy Leader) who:
  - Agreed criteria by which impact may be evaluated.
  - Proposed further input from scrutiny into future development of the Council's approach.
  - Asked for a further report in due course.
4. Under the Council's new approach to ward committees additional budgets were devolved to wards in 2015/16 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.

For 2016/17 a further £100k was added specifically to assist wards with local environmental schemes. The ward pots are made up of:

- The general “Ward Budget”.
  - The “Pride in York Fund”, made up 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.
5. 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. Key fact sheets have been developed (see Annex).
6. In addition:
- A Ward Highways Programme was instituted partly localising the process for allocating highway improvements through the ward committees.
  - The grounds maintenance and cleansing activities in each ward were devolved to the ward.

### **Key issues with regard to commissioning from ward budgets**

7. **Overall Spend:**

- In 2015/16 only £90k was spent from a budget of £475k, i.e. 19%. £385k was carried forward
- In 2016/17 (as at 10 June) only £61k has been committed from a budget, including the carry forward, of £910k, i.e. 6.7%
- Ward councillors indicate that aspects of spending ward funding can be challenging despite early changes to make it easier, e.g. dropping the grounds maintenance spreadsheet
- Could the process be made easier?

8. **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 budget commitments are shown on the Council's website: <https://www.york.gov.uk/wardfundingdecisions>; however,
- Given the slow rate of spending in some wards more clearly needs to be done to stimulate the interest and creativity of community groups to generate projects.

**9. Using ward budgets effectively to tackle local residents' priorities:**

- Targeted preventative projects have been undertaken for older and vulnerable residents, events and activities for children and young people, and grants to locally based community groups to make improvements to community facilities and the local environment; however,
- Schemes to date have focused in the main on capital purchases, things where the expenditure is clearly visible. Commissioning projects e.g. a service for a particular group has been much less common
- It is not clear to what extent information collected from ward teams and ward committees is helping to inform decisions about ward spending

**10. Evidence of impacts in terms of outcomes and benefits:**

- This is an area for development. We do not currently know whether we are getting value for money through ward spending or whether it is making a difference and addressing ward priorities
- 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. Will these help?

**11. Devolved grounds maintenance and cleansing activities:**

- Wards have now submitted their recommendations for their Grounds maintenance budget for 2016/17. 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. Will wards be able to commission sufficient local schemes to meet their needs?
- 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).

## 12. **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. Improved information will now 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. 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.

### **Summary**

13. The new arrangements are embedding and, as with all new working practices, there are some areas of operation which throw up issues for consideration. The Executive Member has already indicated that he wishes to maintain some involvement in the evolution and development of our commissioning arrangements. We are now in the second municipal year of the revised Ward Committee arrangements and Members may wish to consider whether it would now be appropriate for the Scrutiny Committee to review achievements to date and ambitions for the future in relation to any of the following areas which still need refining:
- 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.
14. If Members consider some further scrutiny would be appropriate at this stage in relation to any of the above or other areas of the new arrangements, a scoping report and timetable can be brought back to the next meeting, when the Committee could also consider whether it wishes to form a Task Group to undertake any further review work.

## **Annex**

Annex 1-Ward fact sheets

## Contact Details

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Charlie Croft Assistant Director (Communities, Culture and Public Realm)	<b>Report Approved:</b> ✓	
	<b>Date:</b> 17 June 2016	
<b>Specialist Implications Officers:</b> None		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>	✓

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:** None