

Meeting	Commissioning Through Ward Budgets Scrutiny Review Task Group
Date	27 July 2016
Present	Councillors Funnell, Hunter and Richardson

1. Appointment of Chair

Resolved: To appoint Councillor Funnell as Chair of the Scrutiny Review Task Group.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests, not included on the Register of Interests, or any prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in respect of business on the agenda. No additional interests were declared.

3. Public Participation

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

4. Commissioning through Ward Budgets Scrutiny Review Scoping Report

Consideration was given to a scoping report which provided introductory information in relation to the Council's new approach to community engagement through working with local neighbourhoods and revised ward committees and commissioning through Ward Budgets. The report followed a request by the Communities and Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee for a Task Group to undertake a review to assess achievements to date in this area and ambitions for the future.

In order to support Members' consideration of a suitable remit for the review and to enable the Task Group to focus on a way forward, the Head of Communities and Equalities with the assistance of a Student Intern presented details of the present Neighbourhood Working Model and the differing responsibilities of both Officers and Members in the following areas:

- Ward Priorities
- Ward Committees
- Ward Funding
- Ward Action Plans (optional)
- Ward Team Meetings
- Feedback to Residents
- Different Roles

In answer to Members questions, it was confirmed that, in an effort to embed the new Ward Committee process, following a number of Executive reports, the Communities and Equalities team had met with all Members to explain the new arrangements, held a number of Member briefings, and produced fact sheets outlining the process in more detail. Articles had also been included in the Members' Newsletter.

An exercise with the Task Group was then carried out to identify barriers and issues within the process. The Head of Communities and Equalities provided feedback from Officers supporting the process:

- New Members and staff changes in the Communities and Equalities team
- Increase in ward budgets from £75k to £1m
- Introduction of new system
- The options of allocating ward budgets through local grants or the commissioning of services
- Individual Members responsibility to understand the process
- Generally poor feedback/responses from Members/Officers
- No collective agreement on how Ward monies were spent
- Confusion of roles
- Accountability – monitoring the spend of ward budgets
- Ward meetings were not always representative of the community
- Need for resident meetings or activities designed to be more responsive to local needs

- The same style of engagement did not always work
- Members often missed ward team meetings
- Difficulties in agreeing meeting dates
- Members unsupportive of process

Members highlighted their issues and concerns:

- There had been no requirement for Members to attend any of the meetings/briefings
- Mixed ward issues
- Each ward had different issues
- Need for all Members to understand each stage of the process
- Level of staff support (each Officer now covered four wards)
- Loss of local knowledge when supporting Officers change
- Need to build on learning e.g. organisational memory, good practice
- Need for audit trail
- How the process has worked and is working for local groups
- Assistance when applications do not suit ward grant process
- Structures to deal with joint commissioning
- Useful to obtain the views and experiences of bodies seeking funding, those already in receipt of funding and those who have been refused funding

Members requested further information in relation to the Highway Wards Programme and the highway improvements processes to include Ward examples.

Officers questioned the barriers that prevented success and the parts of the process which Members found more challenging. They also circulated three case study fact sheets prepared by the Communities and Equalities Team to illustrate good practice in the different stages of the process undertaken across various Wards. Officers suggested the use of these fact sheets or similar to share information and learning between Members and Ward Committees.

Following further discussion it was

- Resolved:
- (i) That the Scrutiny Review's remit 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.

 - (ii) That, in order to inform the review, Officers prepare a hard copy questionnaire, for agreement by the Task Group, for circulation to all Members, based on the presentation made at the meeting, to include a description of the commissioning process and requesting Members experiences in each of the areas. Questionnaires to be returned by mid September 2016.

 - (iii) That the next Task Group meeting be arranged following receipt and analysis of the Ward questionnaire returns.

Reason: To progress this scrutiny review in line with scrutiny procedures, protocols and work plans.

Cllr T Funnell, Chair

[The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 12.30 pm].