

Commissioning through Ward Budgets Scrutiny Review Scoping Report

Purpose of Report

1. In support of this new scrutiny review, this report presents introductory information, and Members are asked to identify and agree a suitable review remit with a number of objectives, and the timeframe for the review's completion.

Consultation

2. The Head of Communities & Equalities will be present at this meeting to provide support to members' work on this scrutiny review.

Background to Review

3. In January 2016 the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee considered an update on the implementation of the Council's new approach to community engagement through working with local neighbourhoods and the establishment of revised ward committees. That report was subsequently considered by the Executive Member for Economic Development and Community Engagement (Deputy Leader) who agreed criteria by which impact may be evaluated, and proposed it would be helpful if scrutiny considered how best to further develop the council's approach.
4. In June 2016 the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee received a detailed report on the new arrangements and the progress to date in embedding them in working practices. This highlighted some areas of operation where there were issues. It was suggested that it would be helpful if the Scrutiny Committee were to undertake a review to assess achievements to date and ambitions for the future for a number of areas which still need refining e.g.:
 - 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.
5. The Scrutiny Committee agreed to proceed with the review and this Task Group was formed to carry out the review on its behalf.

Progress Update on Ward Commissioning

6. 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'- aimed at supporting the prevention or delay of people needing to access formal care packages and statutory support.
7. 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.
8. In addition, a Ward Highways Programme was instituted partly localising the process for allocating highway improvements through the ward committees, and grounds maintenance and cleansing activities in each ward were devolved to the ward.
9. Spend to Date
In 2015/16 only £90k was spent from a budget of £475k, i.e. 19%. £385k was carried forward. As of 10 June 2016, only £61k has been committed from the 2016/17 budget, including the carry forward of £910k, i.e. 6.7%.
10. Feedback from ward councillors has suggested that they are finding aspects of spending ward funding challenging despite early changes to make it easier, e.g. dropping the grounds maintenance spreadsheet.
11. Publicising Available Budgets
Wards have been made aware of the budgets available and how people can get involved in discussions via a number of routes i.e. social media,

residents' email distribution lists, parish council websites, posters in the community, presentations at parish council meetings, and ward web pages. In addition, information was provided to residents via an insert in 'Our City' and the budget commitments to date have been listed on the council website at: <https://www.york.gov.uk/wardfundingdecisions>;

12. Effective Use of Ward Budgets

To date 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, the majority of these have focussed 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.

13. Evidence of Impact (Outcomes & Benefits)

As yet there is insufficient evidence to suggest whether or not value for money through ward spending is being achieved or whether it is making a difference and addressing ward priorities. However in the future, grant recipients will be expected to provide grant monitoring reports to help ward councillors to assess the impact and outcomes, and an annual review sheet has been developed which can be offered to wards.

14. Devolved Grounds Maintenance & Cleansing Activities

Wards have now submitted their recommendations for Grounds maintenance budget for 2016/17, which show that a variety of approaches have been taken to meeting the savings targets. For example, community groups have taken on planting schemes. However there is still a question over whether wards are able to commission sufficient local schemes to meet their maintenance needs.

15. It is planned that maps will be provided at forthcoming ward meetings to show current cleansing arrangements in the ward. Using these, 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).

16. Ward Highways Programme

Originally, each ward received the highways priority list for footways and carriageway works in 2016/17, in order to assist them in identifying locations for potential schemes subject to feasibility, legality and budget availability. To further assist them, improved information is now to be provided to wards to show the schemes in the main highways

programme proposed for their wards. 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. The list of schemes for 17/18 will be available in late summer.

17. Questions arising from the progress to date:

- How could the process of spending ward funding be made easier?
- Given the slow rate of spending in some wards, what could be done to stimulate the interest and creativity of community groups to generate projects?
- Is the information collected from ward teams and ward committees helping to inform decisions about ward spending?
- Are there other ways of evidencing impact and measuring outcomes - will the planned annual review sheet help?

Proposed Methodology & Timetable for Scrutiny Review

18. To support Members' consideration of a suitable remit for the review and a way forward, officers will present additional introductory information at this meeting. This will include examples of national and regional good practice, examples of progress in local wards, and examples of barriers that some wards have experienced to date. The Task Group will also be asked to feedback on their experiences in their wards.
19. Members will also be asked to identify the tasks required in support of the review, potential consultees and associated consultation activities and events, and the number of further meetings required etc.

Options

20. Members are asked to consider whether they have the appropriate information to identify and agree the review aim and objectives, and the timetable for the review. Members may choose to defer agreeing the review remit until further information is provided.

Council Plan 2015-19

21. The intention of this scrutiny review is to support Ward Councillors in applying the agreed changes to their ward committees, and the Council's

new approach to community engagement through working with local neighbourhoods. This supports the council's priority to listen to residents, protect community facilities and focus on cost and efficiency to make the right decisions at a ward level in a challenging financial environment.

Implications & Risks

22. Any identified implications and risks associated with the findings from this review will be included in the draft final report arising from this review.

Recommendations

23. Members are asked to agree:

- i) A appropriate review remit with a number of review objectives
- ii) A review methodology with a timetable of future meetings

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

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Specialist Implications Officer(s) N/A

Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

All

Background Papers: N/A

Annexes: N/A