

## **Ward Funding Scrutiny Review Update**

### **Summary**

1. This interim report provides an update on the Ward Funding Scrutiny Review for the Task Group's consideration ahead of its presentation to the full Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2017.

### **Introduction**

2. On 30 July 2015 Executive approved the Council's new approach to community engagement. This new approach involved the re-establishment of ward committees to enable the Council to work in closer partnership with residents, in order to tackle local issues and increase community capacity. Amongst other responsibilities, ward committees are charged with drawing up ward priorities based on engagement with residents, agreeing expenditure and services and stimulating community schemes that meet local needs.

### **Background to Review**

3. In June 2016 the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee received a detailed report on the Council's new approach to community engagement through the establishment of revised ward committees, and the progress to date in embedding them in working practices. This highlighted some areas of operation where there were issues, so it was suggested 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 needed 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.

4. With the aim of increasing the allocation of ward budgets and identifying improvements to the process, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to proceed with a review, and formed this Task Group to carry out the review on its behalf, with support from the Head of Communities & Equalities.

### **Information Gathered to Date**

5. In July 2016 this Task Group met for the first time to receive introductory information in support of this review. This included a progress update on the implementation of the new approach to ward funding – see Annex A, and examples of national and regional good practice.
6. To add to this, the Task Group also received a detailed presentation on the Neighbourhood Working Model, which examined each stage of the process and the differing responsibilities of both officers and ward councillors at each stage – see Annex B. The Head of Communities & Equalities confirmed that in an effort to embed the new arrangements, a number of Member briefings had been held, factsheets outlining the different stages had been shared, and articles had been included in the Members' Newsletter.
7. At the meeting, the Task Group took part in an exercise to identify and examine barriers and issues within the process. This included considering some initial feedback from the Communities & Equalities team (CET) on their experiences to date of implementing each stage, examples of progress in local wards and the barriers that some wards have experienced to date, to which the individual Task Group members added the own feedback on their experiences in their wards. Finally, consideration was given to three case study factsheets prepared by CET to illustrate good practice across the different stages of the process.
8. Having considered all the information provided the Task Group agreed that the remit for this review should 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;
9. In an effort to achieve the above remit, the Task Group agreed it would be worthwhile consulting with all Councillors (Cllrs) on their experiences to date, and agreed to share with them the Task Group's initial feedback

and seek their views on the different stages of the process via a consultation document issued to all Cllrs.

10. In October 2016 the Task Group met to consider Cllrs feedback (shown at Annex C). They gave considered a written response from CET to the Cllr feedback – see Annex D, together with a number of local good practice case studies which CET had produced in response to the feedback from Cllrs.
11. At the same meeting, the Task Group learnt that Veritau had recently completed an internal audit to provide assurance to Council management that procedures and controls within the system were appropriate to ensure that:
  - Expenditure addresses ward priorities and/or is supported by full and effective engagement with ward residents
  - The quality of information available to ward committees (and the extent to which this information is being used) is sufficient to enable effective decision making
  - The effectiveness of spending decisions is measured
12. The Task Group noted that a sample of ward councillors had been consulted as part of the audit, to examine the basis on which their spending decisions had been made and how residents had been engaged in those decisions. The Task Group considered the Audit report (see Annex E) and noted that their scrutiny review findings were to be used by CET to inform the actions necessary to address the issues identified by the audit.
13. Finally, the Task Group learnt that the Corporate Management Team were due to receive an update report on the Neighbourhood Working Model, looking at implementation progress and barriers, and a Cross Party Working Group was in place as a conduit for ensuring all Groups/Cllrs participate in embedding the model across the city.
14. Having noted all of the information provided at their October meeting, the Task Group agreed it would be beneficial to meet with some of the local community groups etc who had been through the process of applying for ward funding during the last year to gather their feedback.
15. A consultation session was held in November 2016, attended by a range of previously successful applicants, a number of current applicants and a

number of applicants seeking funding for the provision of a service across a number of wards – see list of invitees at Annex F. The following issues were raised by the consultees:

16. In regard to communications:

- Loss of individual ward newsletters makes it more difficult to communicate the availability of ward funding
- Communication in wards needs improving – not evident that all community groups are aware that ward funding is available, particularly new groups and small groups who are not already in the loop
- Parish Councils and Residents Associations could be encouraged to spread the word
- There needs to be consistency in communication across all wards
- Available funding should be advertised regularly
- Better awareness raising of ward priorities with Residents/Community Groups

17. In regard to the application process:

- General consensus amongst consultees that process fairly straight forward – a majority of those present had applied for funding previously and were therefore not new to it
- Some issues around pagination and numbering of sections
- The council website does not allow the application form to be completed online - applicants would welcome an improved online form
- Some information requested in the form is a little repetitive in places
- Community Involvement Officers proved very helpful at this stage and applicants received guidance on how to complete the form and how much to apply for
- Provision of hard copies of applicants constitution not always feasible due the size of the document
- Examples of previous difficulties for organisations working across the city who wished to supply a service in more than one ward where they had identified a local need – clarification was given at the consultation session about how the process had been recently revised to enable citywide organisations to submit one application covering a number of wards where they were able to demonstrate that they met a priority of those wards.

18. In regard to Ward Committee meetings & Ward Team meetings:

- Meetings could be advertised in Parish Council newsletters and other local communication could be tapped into

- Need to identify a clear route by which to cascade information throughout each ward e.g. From Council to Ward to Parish Council/Residents Associations, to Community Groups

19. In regard to Ward Funding Decisions:

- The ward letters issued confirming successful applications include a date by which an implementation update is required.
- Each ward needs to provide clear guidance on the frequency of when decisions are due to be made.

20. Other Issues:

- Examples were given of where local organisations may have identified needs that did not match the aims of the funding (the ward priorities).
- Clarification was given on what would happen if this year's funding was not spent.
- There was no evidence to suggest that officers were spending excessive time supporting applicants with their applications

21. Finally, the Task Group queried what role York Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS) may be playing in supporting local charities, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and community groups etc to apply for ward funding. CVS have confirmed they:

- Review a group or organisation's needs and suggest appropriate funding application options, this may direct them to ward funding, right the way through to Big Lottery applications.
- Offer a free funding advice service - they have sign posted 351 service users to online funding but are unable to confirm how many were referred to ward funding or how many went on to apply for ward funding.
- Provide a free advice service on governance, which has so far signposted one organisation to successfully apply for ward funding.

22. A representative of CVS will be attending this meeting to further discuss the broader package of support they provide and to give their feedback on the ward funding application process and how they might best support it.

### **Analysis**

23. Having considered the consultation feedback from Cllrs, the Task Group noted two emerging themes e.g.:

#### i) Communication & Relationships

The Task Group agreed that improving communication between CET officers and Ward Cllrs, and between Cllrs within an individual ward, would benefit everyone involved, which in turn could lead to improved engagement from others. They agreed it would be particularly helpful in split wards where there was evidence to suggest that some Cllrs were struggling to work cooperatively.

#### ii) Managing Expectations

It was clear from the feedback that the officer role and Cllr role was often not as clearly defined as the consultation document suggested. The Task Group therefore agreed it would be helpful to explore it in more detail. In doing so, they acknowledged that as all Cllrs were able to choose their own approach and not all employed the same styles of leadership, it was crucial that they formed a good working relationship with their support officers, so that they could work together as a team. To do this successfully, Cllrs needed to give clarity on their expectations and agree their support requirements, to enable officers to effectively support the process. Cllrs could also be more pro-active and perhaps participate in the induction of new officers to the support team as they are the most knowledgeable on their wards etc.

### **Council Plan 2015-19**

24. This scrutiny review will 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**

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

### **Interim Report Recommendations**

26. The Task Group is recommended to:
  - i) Confirm their views on the information received from all Consultees and the findings from the internal Audit, so that they may inform the review recommendations

- ii) Agree any further amendments required to this interim report prior to its presentation to the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2017

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

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 20 Dec 2016

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** N/A

**Wards Affected:**

All



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

**Background Papers:** N/A

### Annexes:

**Annex A** – Progress Update on the Implementation of the New Ward Funding Model

**Annex B** – Copy of Neighbourhood Working Model Presentation July 2016

**Annex C** – Cllr Feedback (anonimised)

**Annex D** – CET Response to Cllr Feedback

**Annex E** – Veritau Internal Audit Report

**Annex F** – List of Consultation Invitees

### Abbreviations:

Cllr – Councillor

CET – Communities & Equalities Team

CVS – Centre for Voluntary Service