Present: Councillor Ric Metcalfe (in the Chair), Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor Rosanne Kirk, Councillor Neil Murray, Councillor Fay Smith and Councillor Peter West

Apologies for Absence: None.

51. **Confirmation of Minutes - 30 August 2017**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2017 be confirmed.

52. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

53. **Review of the Neighbourhood Working Service**

**Purpose of Report**

To present a final business case for approval, which was a culmination of an in-depth review of the Neighbourhood Working Service undertaken over the last six months and which involved two periods of public consultation.

**Decision**

That the final business case be approved and officers be instructed to implement the proposed changes.

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

The business case summarised the current strategy, work programme and resulting structure of the Neighbourhood Working Service deployed in specific areas across Lincoln, and presented a number of options for taking the service forward. The business case, as set out in the report, evaluated each of these options and proposed a preferred option for the future of the Service.

**Reason for Decision**

The Neighbourhood Working Team had been successful in a variety of ways over the years they had operated in Lincoln, with a great deal of positive work delivered in the city’s communities. However, in view of the unprecedented pressures on local government funding it was necessary to review the scope, purpose and cost of delivering what was a non-statutory service to ensure it continued to have maximum impact but within a much smaller cost envelope.

The review had been focussed on orientating the service to focus on the Council’s 2020 Vision objectives, whilst also delivering a significant saving to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
There were a number of drivers associated with the review of the Neighbourhood Working Service which were internal, external, local and national, consisting of the following but set out in more detail at paragraph 4.3 of the report:

- re-focus of the Council’s strategic priorities;
- a changing service delivery landscape;
- the Council’s financial position;
- best use of available resources;
- the emergence of the Sincil Bank regeneration scheme;
- staffing levels;
- collaboration with other City of Lincoln Council teams;
- increasing the resilience and independence of Neighbourhood Boards and communities.

The report also set out the current team structure at paragraph 5.2, and explained the role in more detail of the Neighbourhood Manager, Neighbourhood Administrator and Community Caretaker posts.

The report outlined the initial options considered and the initial proposal, which was a hybrid of these options. The first round of consultation saw respondents provide a number of wide-ranging comments which could be summarised as follows:

- general opposition to withdrawing the Neighbourhood Working Service from areas and the implications this would have for those areas. This covered a wide variety of reasons from potential for estates to decline and a concern about the lack of support for areas in need;
- the impact of losing local offices which were staffed predominantly by Neighbourhood Working staff. This impacted both as an access point for local services and the closure of another public building within local estates;
- speed of withdrawal, giving areas little time to adjust;
- withdrawal of administrative support for local Neighbourhood Boards and the potential collapse of the Neighbourhood Boards if left unsupported;
- reduced level of engagement moving forward between communities and the services the City Council provided;
- several respondents agreed that if there was a reduced resource it should focus on one area of the city in particular, although many did not think the case had been made for focussing on Park Ward but instead felt that another area was more or at least equally deserving.

A full breakdown of the responses received was included in the appendices to the report.

In order to mitigate some of the issues identified in the first phase of public consultation, to ensure a smoother transition and encourage greater sustainability of the Boards, the business case was amended to include:

- a longer transition period supported by a clear plan;
- additional support for Neighbourhood Boards in the first year following the changes;
- small ongoing financial support to each Board to cover some operating costs;
- mitigation measures for the closure initially of one local office.
Regarding comments received in respect of the resilience of Neighbourhood Boards, the business case had been amended to include support which would be focussed on:

- improving the governance and administrative resilience of the Boards;
- upskilling of the community representatives on the Boards;
- attracting and developing volunteers within the area to support the work of the local Board;
- providing each Board with the ability and confidence to help them identify the needs and desires of the local communities;
- identifying long-term funding opportunities for each Board.

A summary of the revised proposal was set out in paragraph 9 of the report.

A second round of public consultation on the revised proposal was undertaken, the details of which were outlined in paragraph 10 of the report. The responses were considered to fit within the following themes:

- broadly or wholly unsupportive of the overall proposal;
- broadly supportive of the offer of third sector support saying that it would provide opportunities;
- outlining that there would be a reduction or gap in provision when the service was reconfigured;
- supportive of attendance at the Neighbourhood Boards by key staff at a sufficiently senior level from the City Council.

A full breakdown of responses was set out in the appendices to the report.

It was noted that the Policy Scrutiny Committee had considered this report at its meeting on 22 August 2017. Members of the Committee recognised the financial savings and understood the position of the Council and, whilst having some concerns, were in agreement with the revised proposal which had been shaped by the two rounds of consultations. The Scrutiny Committee was also keen to see a dedicated free telephone line made available at St Giles Community Centre to replace the provision currently in the St Giles Matters building and so assist residents with accessing services. The Executive supported this.

Considering the drivers for the review and the many comments that had been received across the two rounds of consultation, the following proposal was made for the Neighbourhood Working Service:

- to reduce the number of Neighbourhood Working Teams from three to one and so withdraw the Neighbourhood Working Teams from seven of the eight areas they current work in, which were Abbey (including Tower), Birchwood, Bracebridge, Ermine East, Ermine West, Moorland and St Giles;
- to focus intensively in a single area, which was likely to be the Sincil area as part of the Sincil Bank Revitalisation project. In future the Neighbourhood Working Team would move every few years to a new area, dictated by the extent of achievement in the present area and the needs of other areas in the city;
- to re-focus the remaining team to be project focussed, including a review of the roles and responsibilities of the team which would consist of:
- deleting the Community Caretaker post and creating a new Community Connector post;
- undertaking a light touch review of the job descriptions and person specifications of the remaining Neighbourhood Manager and Neighbourhood Administrator posts and renaming the Neighbourhood Administrator as Neighbourhood Working Project Assistant.

• to procure the third sector to deliver support to the Neighbourhood Boards for a period of one year aimed at delivering resilient Neighbourhood Boards that represented the community and were efficient and effective at taking a strategic approach to neighbourhood development, so as to work constructively with other agencies to achieve positive results for the community. This work would be based around the following five key objectives:

i) improving the governance and administrative resilience of the Boards;
ii) upskilling of the community representatives on the Boards;
iii) attracting and developing volunteers within the area to support the work of the local Board;
iv) providing each Board with the ability and confidence to help them identify the needs and desires of the local communities;
v) identifying long-term funding opportunities for each Board.

• the final specification of the contract and the appointment of the winning organisation(s) had been progressed with engagement with the Neighbourhood Boards. It was proposed that the maximum amount available for any third sector contract would be £40,000 based on £5,000 per area. This would be met from within the Neighbourhood Working supplies and services budget and the work would be monitored by the remaining Neighbourhood Manager, an Assistant Director and Strategic Director;

• to provide financial and non-financial support on an ongoing basis for Neighbourhood Boards, as follows:
  - £1,000 a year each for the eight Boards by way of a direct grant to support the workings of the Board, including things such as postage, printing and room hire for example. This would be granted directly to the Board annually at the start of the financial year, subject to a light touch annual review by the City Council and fulfilment of basic criteria. These were yet to be determined but might include minimum number of meetings each year, minimum attendance, an agreed Neighbourhood Plan between the Board and the community and a demonstration of moving forward with business;
  - attendance at the Board by representatives of the City Council by officers or elected members at a level of seniority and of a frequency to suitably engage with those Boards, while acknowledging that there were limited officer resources;
  - support by way of alternative accommodation for other groups currently using local neighbourhood offices at St Giles and Moorland, where they could not be accommodated in the community centre model, including:
    - a structured transition process for the closure of St Giles Matters;
    - supported groups using Moorland Community Centre to a key holding system.
• to implement the matrix set out in the report in respect of St Giles Matters and the Moorland Community Centre.
The Leader of the Council acknowledged that this was not a position the Council wanted to be in but indicated that the savings made as a result of the proposal would assist with the authority’s savings targets, especially in relation to a service which was not a statutory responsibility. He was content with the significant consultation that had occurred and felt that the proposal had taken the necessary measures to mitigate the changes.

In discussing the content of the report, the following comments from members of the Executive were noted:

- some good would come out of the proposal for the Sincil Bank area of the city, whereas other areas would suffer as a result of the Neighbourhood Working Team withdrawing;
- the Neighbourhood Working Team had been brilliant and had done a lot of hard work since the scheme began;
- the proposal should be seen as a positive from a negative situation;
- there were issues with sustainability of the Boards and this needed to be closely monitored with robust plans in place;
- the Park Ward of the city was the right area to target in respect of Neighbourhood Working due to it currently being one of the most deprived parts of the city;
- the proposal represented the best way in which the service could work in the current circumstances;
- it was not necessarily made clear enough at the commencement of the existing scheme that the service would only be in place for a certain period of time before moving areas and was never envisaged to be permanent in set locations. It should therefore be made clear in respect of the proposal’s commitment to Park Ward that the Neighbourhood Working Service for that area was not a permanent commitment and the team would move on to a new area at the appropriate time in future.

The Executive conveyed its thanks to all staff in the Neighbourhood Working Team for their past achievements in relation to the service and also for enduring a significant period of uncertainty.

Members also thanked Simon Walters, Director of Communities and Environment, and Simon Colburn, Assistant Director of Health and Environmental Services, for all the work they had undertaken in developing the proposals, acknowledging that this had been a challenging issue to deal with.

54. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of ‘exempt information’ as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

This item was considered in private as it was likely to disclose exempt information, as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. No representations had been received in relation to the proposal to consider this item in private.
55. **Review of the Neighbourhood Working Service**

**Purpose of the Report**

To detail the staffing issues associated with the report on the review of the Neighbourhood Working Service.

**Decision**

That the additional information in relation to the report on the review of the Neighbourhood Working Service be noted.

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

None.

**Reason for Decision**

This report was noted.