

Present: Councillor Jackie Kirk (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Jane Loffhagen, Councillor Liz Maxwell,
Councillor Ralph Toofany, Councillor Pat Vaughan,
Councillor Keith Weaver and Councillor Ronald Hills
(substituted for Councillor Andy Kerry)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Andy Kerry

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillors J Kirk, J Loffhagen, L Maxwell, P Vaughan and K Weaver declared a Personal Interest in the Review of the Neighbourhood Working Service as they each attended a Neighbourhood Working Board.

2. Review of Neighbourhood Working Service

Simon Colburn, Assistant Director Health and Environment

- a. presented the Neighbourhood Working Business Case to seek the views of Policy Scrutiny Committee prior to submission to Executive.
- b. summarised the business case outlining the current strategy, work programme and resulting structure of the Neighbourhood Working Service deployed in specific areas across the City.
- c. summarised the recommended option in the business case:
 - Reduction to one team focussing intensely in one area of the city only. If the council moved forward with a regeneration scheme in the Sincil area then that would be the targeted area. If not, the scheme would be based in an area of greatest need, but also where the greatest impact could be achieved.
 - Deliver a one year package of support through the third sector to ensure sustainable active neighbourhood boards.
 - Deliver a saving of £177,000 per year
- d. gave an overview of the key drivers associated with the review of the Neighbourhood Working Service including:
 - Refocus of our strategic priorities
 - A changing service delivery landscape
 - Our financial position
 - Best use of available resources
 - The emergence of Sincil Bank regeneration scheme
 - Staffing levels
 - Collaboration with other City of Lincoln Council teams
 - Increasing the resilience and independence of Neighbourhood boards and our communities
 - Providing community leadership at neighbourhood level.

- e. outlined the current team structure and location detailed at paragraph 5 of the report.
- f. referred to paragraph 6 of the report and gave an overview of the initial proposal and consultation
- g. advised that 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 above changes
 - Small ongoing financial support to each board to cover some operating costs
 - Mitigation measures for the closure initially of one local office (St Giles Matters)
- h. outlined the five objectives for delivering the additional support:
 - Improve 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 of the local communities
 - Identifying long term funding opportunities for each board.
- i. advised that it was proposed that the support be delivered for a period of one year to allow sufficient time for the support of the boards to be effective
- i. advised that the preferred option to deliver these objectives would be for the Council to procure and manage the third sector to deliver a package of support, working with each Board to tailor the package of support to them.
- j. advised that sections 10 and 11 of the report detailed the second round of consultation and the outcome.
- k. informed that considering the drivers and the many consultation comments across the two rounds of consultation a final proposal was drawn up, the key points of which were highlighted at section 12 of the report.
- l. highlighted that the savings associated with the proposed option were as shown at 13.1 of the report. The total savings under the final proposal were £383,528 in the general fund between 2017 and 2022 and £432,400 from the HRA between 2017 and 2022.
- m. referred to the staffing implications as detailed at section 14 of the report and advised that there was a risk of redundancy to three members of staff. The Council's Management of Change Policy had been applied and Consultation had taken place with staff and unions.
- n. invited members questions and comments

Comment

After the 2nd consultation it became clear that the review was about cost and saving money.

Response

There was a whole range of drivers for the review, one of the key drivers was contributing £177,000 to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The savings target needed to be met.

Question

It has been mentioned that Councillors would be instrumental on the Neighbourhood Boards, how do you envisage this working?

Response

Councillors were currently involved as community representatives on the Neighbourhood Boards. The aim was to encourage the boards to be self sufficient through training and support. It was not proposed that Neighbourhood Boards be led by Councillors. The boards should be led by residents with support from the third sector agencies.

Question

How would the £1000 given to each board be administered?

Response

With the support of the voluntary sector each board would be in a position to have terms of reference which would allow them to have a bank account. As long as the boards had met 3 times over the last year and could provide their priorities it would be sufficient for them to receive the money.

Question

How would you ensure that city council employees attend the Neighbourhood working board meetings?

Response

Council staff were already attending board meetings, it was important to ensure that in future staff that were attending were of a service manager level or above and were attending meetings when there was a specific issue and it could be discussed at a strategic level.

Comment

Could the St Giles Matters access centre be kept open?

Response

Officers considered options to try and keep the access centre open however, it was not feasible within the funding envelope, the building would go back to the Housing Revenue Account for further development. As many of the services as possible would be moving to the St Giles Community Centre.

Question

What would happen after the first year when the Neighbourhood Boards stopped receiving the £1000.

Response

The Neighbourhood Boards would receive the £1000 every year indefinitely. The community groups would be given free space for a period of a year and the Neighbourhood Boards would receive free space for their meetings.

Question

The closure of St Giles Matters access centre would affect the residents on the Ermine too. How would they access services if they could not afford the bus fare, they did not have a computer and there was no longer a phone line?

Response

The loss of the access centre would affect the wider area and we would support access to services wherever possible. The Methodist church and the Community Centre would have a public access computer. We would look into what could be done to provide a dedicated phone line.

Comment

On some boards there was little participation from residents and there was a risk that these boards would not be sustainable.

Response

The boards would be supported for a year by the 3rd sector which would build the skills of the Neighbourhood Boards. It was a risk but the contract would be monitored to address any issues.

Question

Why have the Council not used the voluntary sector before?

Response

The Council has worked with the voluntary sector for many years for example with the Anti-Poverty Strategy. In relation to Neighbourhood Working it became clear from the first consultation that support was needed to ensure that the boards were sustainable. The voluntary sector also have access to funding that the Council could not apply for.

Comment

The Park Ward Regeneration Scheme should be funded in its own right and not through the savings from the Neighbourhood Boards.

Response

The only additional funding for the area was a larger operating budget which would be ring fenced for Neighbourhood Working. The savings from Neighbourhood Working would go back into the MTFS and General Fund.

Question

What would happen when the work moves to another area?

Response

The £60,000 ongoing budget per year would move to the next area.

Question

Why did the General fund have a higher proportion of the savings split than the MTFS?

Response

The proportion of the split was agreed some years ago and was based on the indices of multiple deprivation which looked at the split of council housing and private housing. There was a higher percentage of private housing than council housing therefore it was split with a higher proportion in the general fund.

3. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it is 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.

4. Review of Neighbourhood Working

Simon Colburn, Assistant Director (Health and Environment) presented the staffing issues associated with the Neighbourhood Working Review.

The committee discussed the staffing implications and the management of change policies and procedures.

5. Inclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the Press and Public be re-admitted to the meeting.

6. Review of Neighbourhood Working Service - Summary

The Chair summarised the key points raised by the committee:

- It should be made clear that the primary driver for the review of the service was to save money.
- Members of the committee recognised the financial savings and understood the position of the council and, whilst had some concerns, were in agreement with the revised proposal which was shaped by the two rounds of consultations.
- Could the St Giles Matters Access Centre remain open?
- Members would like to see a dedicated phone line to be available in the area to assist residents accessing services.
- What would happen to the areas that were not covered by Neighbourhood Working.
- It was important that officers of Service Manager level or above attended the Neighbourhood Working Board meetings when required.
- There were concerns over how much involvement would be needed from Councillors to run the Neighbourhood Boards.
- There were concerns regarding setting up Neighbourhood Working in the Sincil Bank area.

RESOLVED that the comments be referred to Executive for consideration.