

Report to Scrutiny

Item Number: 6

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information

No

Subject of Report: Neighbourhood Governance Review

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
28th November 2013

Service Report Authors: Dennis Frost
frostd@ealing.gov.uk
Tel: 020 8825 5453
Evelyn Gloyn, Kofi Nyamah

Scrutiny Officer: Harjeet Bains, Scrutiny Review Officer
bainsh@ealing.gov.uk
Tel: 020 8825 7120

Director Responsibility: Keith Townsend, Executive Director, Customer Services
townsenk@ealing.gov.uk
Tel: 020 8825 6306

Brief: To consider an overview of Neighbourhood Governance in the borough

Recommendations: The Panel is asked to:

- consider and comment on the overview provided; and
- make recommendations for further improvement accordingly

1. Neighbourhood Governance Further Review – Information Paper

Background

In November 2007, Cabinet approved a new model of Neighbourhood Governance, to replace the boroughs then existing arrangements of seven Area Committees which had existed since the modernisation of local government in 2000.

The model comprised holding regular meetings or forums – at least three per year – in Ealing’s 23 wards. Each forum was provided with a £40k annual budget (reduced to £37.5k in 2012) to be spent on small local projects, at the recommendation of ward councillors and their residents.

One Year Pilot

The project began in 2008 as a one year pilot with the recruitment of four supporting officers seconded from other council departments. In its first year 3,180 residents attended ward forum meetings and 157 projects were suggested – of which almost half had been completed in the first twelve months.

The purpose of ward forums was to:

- Support the role of ward councillors as community advocates and community leaders, using their local knowledge and council resources to benefit their constituents
- Allow for more flexible approaches to neighbourhood governance and leadership at the ward level using methods that are engaging and relevant to constituents
- Strengthen officer regard for the local knowledge and skill possessed by ward councillors and their constituents and taking advantage of local intelligence to improve services in line with broader corporate and community strategies

Review of the Pilot

In September 2009, the council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a review of the ward forum pilot and made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- (i) That the Committee consider that overall the pilot Ward Forums have been a huge success, in particular the attendance and participation by members of the public. The Committee therefore recommend that Ward Forums continue in their present format, subject to proposals for a range of improvements to the process, listed below;

- (ii) That Ward Forum meetings be scheduled in the Members' Annual Meetings Programme;
- (iii) That to assist the neighbourhood governance process, the relevant officers be requested to draw up guidelines on what items can be spent on the annual £40,000 budget for local ward projects, and what items are for the Council's, central budgets;
- (iv) That to facilitate the implementation process, the Council's Highways officers be organised in such a way that individual Highways officers are allocated to a cluster of wards;
- (v) That the current formal clerking arrangements of Ward Forums be discontinued, and be replaced by a system whereby the Ward Councillors collectively make contact with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio holder, to advise of the decisions taken;
- (vi) That the remit of Ward Forums be clarified, and made available to the public in the form of a leaflet for general circulation;
- (vii) That an escalation process be drawn up and put in place to deal with those decisions that have not been implemented within a reasonable time frame.

Since Cabinet approval in 2009, recommendations, ii), iii), v) and vi) have been implemented.

Recommendation iv) was implemented by Highways and Neighbourhood Governance each nominating a particular officer, who has continued to liaise about the implementation of all ward forum projects. Recommendation vii) has been implemented in a similar manner, by each council department identifying a particular officer to deal with blocks to progress with particular projects. Regular reports to the council's Major Projects Board have been important in progressing ward projects.

Recent ward forum activity

Since 2009, Neighbourhood Governance at Ealing has continued to develop and refine its role.

The future challenge is to maintain ward forum's freshness as an imaginative part of the Council's engagement agenda¹ to ensure:

- Improved residents' awareness of council activity
- More customer focussed service delivery and higher levels of customer satisfaction
- Enhanced local democracy
- Better community cohesion

2. Legal Implications

In relation to discussions about pending planning and licensing applications; although the rules of procedure relating to Ward Forums do not specifically preclude discussions at Ward Forums there are a number of risks associated with it which would suggest that they should be avoided. The Constitution confirms that that Ward Forums may be part of the formal consultation process for some Council proposals such as CPZs and Controlled Drinking Zones, Planning and licensing applications are not on that list. Ward Forums are not part of the application consultation process for licensing and planning applications and, given the frequency of the meetings and the deadlines that have to be met it would be impractical for them to be included as a matter of course.

Although discussion about the fact that there is an application of particular local interest does not in itself cause any problems it can, in practice, be difficult to avoid discussion straying into a debate about the merits of the applications and this poses risks which can be summarised as follows:-

- i) For the reasons outlined above in commenting on an application at a Ward Forum the public may feel they have participated formally in the planning process and this is not the case. Unless residents respond to the formal planning consultation then there is a danger that their views will then not be taken into account before the planning decision is taken in the proper way.
- ii) There are particular risks for ward councillors who are also Planning Committee members and who may be making the decision. In particular they need to avoid appearing to have made up their minds about the application before the Planning Committee meeting itself. If feelings are running high about an application at Ward Forum meeting they may come under intense pressure at Ward Forum to voice an opinion.
- iii) There is a general risk that Ward Forums become a debating forum for the merits of planning and licensing applications generally which could fundamentally affect the nature of meetings.

3. Financial Implications

Each ward has an annual budget comprising £30k capital and £7.5k revenue funding (the revenue element funded from the Ealing Civic Improvement Fund (ECIF)). £30k Capital for each ward has been approved to 2016/17 with £690k (£30k for each of the 23 wards) for 2017/18 going to 26 November Cabinet for approval.

ECIF funding for the £7.5k revenue element was introduced in 2012/13 as a replacement to the Ward specific revenue budget of £10k per annum, which had been in place since 2009/10. The introduction of ECIF funding allowed the Ward Forums to reduce the permanent revenue budget while retaining the ability to deliver both revenue and capital projects. As a Reserve fund, the amount available is subject to the Council's ability to restore the ECIF Reserve balances each year. Specific allocations of ECIF funding need to be made to Ward Forums, with applications for continued funding being made through the annual budget process. At present £172k of revenue funding (£7.5k per Ward) has been allocated for the 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 financial years.

Further allocations of to fund revenue expenditure from 2015/16 onward will be applied for through future budget rounds.

The Tables below set out the overall budget and spend position.

Table 1 Annual Ward Form Budgets (per Ward)

	2008/09 – 2011/12		2012/13- 16/17	
	Per Ward	Total	Per Ward	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Capital	30	690	30	690
Revenue	10	230	7.5	172.5
Total	40	920	37.5	862.5

Table 2 Total Revenue Spend 2009/10 – 2013/14 (Year to Date)

Revenue	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14 (YTD)
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Balance b/f	-	123	258	292	253
Budget Allocation	230	230	172	172	172
Actual Spend	(107)	(95)	(138)	(211)	(74)
Balance c/f	123	258	292	253	351

Table 3 Total Capital Spend 2008/09 – 2013/14 (Year to Date)

Capital	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14 (YTD)
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Balance b/f	-	886	1,143	1,059	1,088	1,120
Budget Allocation	920	690	690	690	690	690
Actual Spend	(34)	(433)	(774)	(661)	(658)	(228)
Balance c/f	886	1,143	1,059	1,088	1,120	1,582

The detailed budgets are formulated and finalised at ward forum meetings through discussion between councillors and residents – and are submitted to the Leader of the Council for consideration as an Individual Cabinet Member’s Decision (ICMD).

The latest budget position for 19 of the 23 Wards is set out in the ICMD due to be considered by the Leader on 26th November. The remaining four wards (East Acton – 27 April, Hanger Hill – 27 April, Hobbayne – 23 July and Perivale – 23 July) had their budgets and projects approved by the Leader on the above dates.

Once the budgets for specific projects are approved, the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators take charge of implementing the projects, which can total as many as 300 schemes in a particular financial year, varying in cost from £0.5k for small improvement projects to £50k for a signalised pedestrian crossing across the Uxbridge Rd in Acton. A detailed Project Implementation record is maintained for each project for each Ward, using a red

/ amber / green scheme to monitor project progress and expenditure. Regular project reports are provided to the Council's Major Projects Board chaired by the Executive Director for Environment and Customer Services.

The schemes are administered by a team of 4 Neighbourhood co-ordinators, 4 apprentices and a team leader with an annual revenue budget of £304k.

Within the £304k budget each ward is allocated a £1k for administration, which funds publicity for ward forums, booking fees for the various meeting venues, and the cost of communicating with ward residents – both electronically and by post.

4. Other Implications

Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Planning is a new right for communities introduced amongst other things through the Localism Act 2011. Communities can now prepare neighbourhood plans to influence the future of their areas. These allow communities to set out their vision for their local area and general planning policies to guide development in their neighbourhood.

A Neighbourhood Development Plan will become part of the local statutory development plan and will form the basis for determining planning applications in that area. They have to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan. A Neighbourhood Development Order enables the community to grant planning permission for the development it wishes to see.

To date, Neighbourhood Development Plans have been established in Ealing Town Centre and West Ealing.

Work on developing these plans has not formed part of the work of ward forums, although a number of residents in the neighbourhoods covered by the two plans are also involved with their local ward forums.

5. Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Ward forum feedback survey (October 2013)

- which includes attendance at meetings, engagement and local involvement, residents' and councillors' attitudes

Appendix 2 - Review of projects

- including sample projects, maps showing ward projects, support from other council services, developing ward decision making

Appendix 3 – Communication and publicity

- including sample ward newsletters, posters and leaflets

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Department	Date Sent to Consultee	Date Response Received from Consultee	Comments Appear in Report Para:
Internal				
Director	Executive Director	25:10:2013		
Lawyer	Director of Legal Services	14:11:2013		
Finance Officer	Head of Finance	19:11:2013	19.11.2013	
Councillor	Cabinet Member for			
External				
A N Other				
Police, etc.				

Report History

Decision Type: For Information	Urgency item? No
--	--------------------------------

Authorised by Cabinet Member:	Date Report Drafted:	Report Deadline:	Date Report Sent:
XX.XX.06	31:10: 2013	19:11.2013	18.11.2013

Report No.:	Report Author and Contact for Queries:
	Dennis Frost, Neighbourhood Co-ordinator frostd@ealing.gov.uk Tel: 020 8825 5453