

This Report will be made public on 11 October 2016

Folkestone

Hythe & Romney Marsh
Shepway District Council



Report Number **C/16/56**

To: Cabinet
Date: 19 October 2016
Status: Non-Key Decision
Head of Service: Sarah Robson, Head of Communities
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jenny Hollingsbee, Cabinet Member for Communities

SUBJECT: Review of the Ward Profiles, Ward Plans, Ward Plan Budget Scheme and other community funding schemes

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: Cabinet is asked to consider the following reasons for recommendation:

The report sets out to review and improve the allocation, administration and effectiveness of Council expenditure to ensure better transparency, value for money, sustainability and more positive and targeted outcomes led by ward members in partnership with their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note Report C/16/56.
2. To consider the options being presented to:
 - Discontinue Ward Profiles and Ward Plans with immediate effect.
 - Increase individual ward member grants from £1,500 to £3,000 per member, per annum from 1 April 2017.
 - Develop, deliver and commission against a Shepway profile, action plan and online community asset resource, with an allocated budget of £35,000 per annum from 1 April 2017.
 - Continue the Community Chest funding programme.
 - Continue to provide existing Grant Agreements with the voluntary and community sector.
 - Provide an in year budget saving of £160,000 and next financial year saving of £80,000.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Council's Annual Governance Statement supports the priority to ***“Establish clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders and ensure accountability.”*** To support this priority, a Member Working Group was established in 2015 to consider the development of Ward Plans against 5 key principles:

- Clearly articulate members priorities for their respective wards
- Ensure that officers are working to deliver member and community priorities
- Use Ward Profiles to ensure a strong evidence base to identify community priorities
- Enable Members to collaborate with partners in an accountable and clear fashion
- Provide an opportunity for local people to influence local priorities and shape their community.

1.2 To support Ward Plans, it was agreed that Ward Profiles would be created to provide an overview of each of the district's ward assets, needs and priorities, including demographics, health and wellbeing, skills and employment, education, housing and community assets such as parks and open spaces, community halls and clubs.

1.3 In addition, Ward Plan Budget funding of £160,000 was approved and established in 2015/16, being reserved for projects that deliver local community priorities, as articulated in formally approved Ward Plans.

1.4 Member interest in Ward Plans has varied from area to area. Initial feedback received from both councillors and officers has suggested that the Ward Plan and funding process is both timely and protracted. Questions have been raised whether Ward Plans and Budgets have managed to significantly strengthen the way ward councillors and the Council in general engage with local communities and other stakeholders to bring about positive change in wards across the district. It is also unclear how Ward Plans and budgets can be evaluated in terms of community impact and outcomes.

2. INTRODUCTION

Ward Profiles

2.1 Ward Profiles were created for each of the district's wards, highlighting community assets and an overview of demographics, health and wellbeing, skills and employment, education, housing and community assets such as parks and open spaces, community halls and clubs.

2.2 Community Development Officers did not have the skill set required to compile Ward Profiles, therefore, the development of Ward Profiles demanded additional staffing and financial resource, with an officer seconded full-time from the Housing team to gather relevant data, write and finalise each profile over an 8 month period.

- 2.3 A recent survey of Heads of Service and Managers highlighted that no Council officer had utilised the profiles to inform their service area priorities or actions in the past 12 months. Outdated information and lack of county, district and ward comparisons were used as the main reasons. However, a consultant utilised by the Economic Development team had used the profiles “to broadly understand the area under review and access information and statistical data at a ward level, although it is clear that some information is not current and therefore unusable”.
- 2.4 In the survey, some officers commented that they would like an improved understanding of the expanding health and wellbeing agenda, its impact on district council services and support joined up strategic and operational thinking between health and wellbeing and services such as housing, planning, parks and open spaces.
- 2.5 A further survey (see Appendix 1) undertaken in June 2016 with the 30 Ward Members attracted 3 responses, of which 2 had utilised the ward profiles for information on health and wellbeing, local economy, planning and development and voluntary and community sector groups.
- 2.6 Overall, it is clear that the Ward Profiles are underused; data becomes quickly outdated and the staffing resource required to update 13 individual profiles on an annual basis is unachievable.

Ward Plans and Ward Budgets

- 2.7 Member interest in Ward Plans has varied from area to area. In 2015/16, out of 13 wards, 4 Ward Plans were submitted from the following wards; Broadmead, Hythe Rural, North Downs West and Hythe. At the close of the last financial year, Ward Plan Budget applications of £123,000 were approved by the Leader of the Council to support the 4 submitted Ward Plans.
- 2.8 However, from the Ward Plan Budget applications received, there is officer concern that the funding is being used to support the mainstream activities or responsibilities of a community or voluntary organisation. In some instances, little consideration has been given to the Ward Profiles, in particular, the opportunity to tackle health inequalities and community cohesion, social wellbeing and needs. In other instances, it is issues such as project management, permissions, sustainability and match funding that has been overlooked.
- 2.9 At present, there is very little distinction between projects being funded by the Ward Plan Budget funding and other sources of funding such as Ward Member Grants and Community Chest.
- 2.10 In 2015/16, Ward Plan Budget funding of £123,000 was approved supporting projects identified in local Ward Plans including; seagull proof bins, signage, replacement of a fence at Sellindge Sports Club and Social Club and the refurbishment of the Committee Room at Lympne Village Hall. Many of the smaller funding applications supported projects at around the £3,000 mark with secured match funding or in kind support. Although it is clear that the

funding supports actions contained within local Ward Plans, the funding framework means it is difficult to demonstrate a strong evidence base to identify community priorities, evidence of value for money or how the funding can be measured to show it directly engages and benefits local communities and other stakeholders to bring about positive change in wards across the district.

- 2.11 Whilst there is a genuine appetite from Ward Councillors to identify priorities and issues for their communities – and it is important that this is celebrated and encouraged - some of the intentions of Ward Profiles, Plans and Budgets have been lost.
- 2.12 In the Ward Member survey, members collectively commented that the district and individual ward community priorities should focus investment on the following five areas:
- Active and healthy lifestyles
 - Community cohesion
 - Environment (littering, dog fouling and fly tipping)
 - Social isolation and loneliness
 - Youth engagement
- 2.13 Although the responses received were low in the survey, the feedback given was helpful, in particular the steer from the Cabinet Member for Communities to ensure that priorities identified were ones that could be measured in terms of community engagement and cohesion outcomes, performance, customer satisfaction and value for money.

Ward Member Grant

- 2.14 It should be recognised that each of the 30 ward members currently receive an allocation of £1,500 per annum, which can be applied for and spent in their wards to support voluntary and community sector groups to deliver projects and activities in the locality for the benefit of the community. Through the Ward Member Grant, members have been able to actively target and support smaller, local initiatives and gain a wider local presence and understanding of their local community at a grassroots level.

Community Chest

- 2.15 A £95,000 grant awarded from Kent County Council (KCC) supports an annual programme of Community Chest grants to community groups and charities delivering projects for the benefit of Shepway residents, with one amount of up to £50,000 and smaller grants between £1,000 - £5,000 being made available.
- 2.16 In recent years, funding has supported similar initiatives to those highlighted in Ward Plans, including the Radnor Park play area improvement, village hall and community facility improvements and equipment, an online project supporting those in the early stages of living with dementia, community gardens, disability sports, youth engagement activities and wellbeing and therapeutic programmes. KCC is currently phasing out the funding arranged,

with a reduced allocation of 50% of the funding being provided in the next financial year, before being phased out completely.

- 2.17 The table below outlines the annual funding arrangements the Council currently provides to the community.

Funding	Purpose	£
Ward Member Grants (£1,500 per member)	Support voluntary and community sector groups to deliver projects and activities in the locality for the benefit of the community.	£45,000
Ward Plan Budgets	Support Ward Plans to deliver projects and activities in the locality for the benefit of the community.	£160,000
Community Chest	One-off grants to community groups and charities delivering projects for the benefit of Shepway residents.	£95,000
Community Team: Voluntary and Community Sector Grant Agreements	Grant Agreements with voluntary and community sector to deliver projects and services to reduce the impact on SDC core services.	£467,000*
Total		£767,000

*Includes £150,000 available to Folkestone Triennial in 2017.

- 2.18 The table above demonstrates a duplication of purpose with regards to community funding, with only the Community team's Voluntary and Sector Grant Agreements having grant agreements, which are regularly monitored and evaluated to highlight impact, value for money and alignment to the council's Corporate Plan objectives.
- 2.19 It is clearly positive, that in light of significant reductions in resources, including budgets and external grants, that the Council is investing in its local communities.
- 2.20 Any new proposal would need to help build on the Council's existing record of financially supporting projects, whilst delivering a degree of continuity and supporting better services to our communities.
- 2.21 The Communities Service is supporting the Cabinet Member for Communities, who represents the Council on the South Kent Coast Health and Wellbeing Board and is vice chair of the Local Children's Partnership Group, to embed health and wellbeing across all work areas by focusing on community engagement, cohesion and wellbeing measures and offering innovative ideas as to how the Council can work more effectively with partners and residents to ensure that our priorities are meeting the needs our most vulnerable and in need communities and reducing the resource impact on our services.
- 2.22 Therefore, any review of funding, should, where possible, support a holistic approach to embed community wellbeing within the Community Services team, enabling effective partnerships with the private, public and voluntary sector and work closely with community and third sector groups who provide

services within our neighbourhoods to create more resilient communities and support greater social responsibility.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 There are various options in relation to the future of community support and funding arrangements.

Option 1

- 3.2 Do nothing. However, this is not recommended, as this review has demonstrated that Ward Plans, Profiles and Budgets are failing in terms of impact, outcomes and value for money. The aim of this review has been to increase the impact of ward members working alongside and supporting their local communities.

Option 2

- 3.3 Continue successfully funding streams, including Ward Member Grants, Community Chest and Grant Agreement, but discontinue Ward Plans, Profiles and Budgets, which this report has shown are failing in terms of impact, outcomes and value for money. This would generate an in year saving of £160,000. However, based on the findings of this report, this would be a wasted opportunity to consider a more impactful, community funding model.

Option 3

- 3.4 The Council is empowered under the Localism Act 2010 to authorise expenditure benefiting local communities. Therefore, the third proposal recommends the Council continues to invest in those areas of work that demonstrate value, whilst redesigning initiatives such as Ward Plans and Ward Profiles to ensure that there is a more usable and impactful model to support the district's communities.
- 3.5 The Ward Profiles and Ward Plans would not be continued. In support of the Cabinet Member for Communities role in supporting community resilience, engagement and wellbeing agendas, a Shepway Profile and Action Plan could be introduced supporting a 2-3 year period. The profile and action plan would provide an overview of the district's community priorities and needs, with areas of focus and performance measures at ward level, to encourage community cohesion and increase healthier lifestyles and outcome based accountability working in partnership with key agencies and the voluntary sector.
- 3.6 The Action Plan will address priority community priorities and inequalities that currently impact both the Council's financial and staffing resources, including community engagement, cohesion, safety, housing and environmental health etc.
- 3.7 The actions of Shepway District Council as a local authority can have an influence, sometimes big, sometimes small on the health of our residents.
- 3.8 The overarching aim of the Shepway Profile and Action Plan would be to support the Corporate Plan priorities, whilst seeking to reduce the staffing

and financial resource pressures on Council services by building personal, economic and community resilience. The Action Plan will support people to make positive choices that maintain or improve their role in the community. The work of traditional community services, the Council and its partners – from tackling community cohesion, housing support, promoting employment, to improving sports and leisure activities– all affect the wellbeing of local people.

- 3.9 A further piece of work will be undertaken to utilise the asset mapping (including community groups, clubs, village halls etc.) from each of the Ward Profiles, to provide an accessible, online district community asset search facility (linked through the Council’s website), which is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The shape and form this will take can be proposed through the Council’s Digital Transformation Board. Although, not a direct service delivery improvement, it will require an ICT response in terms of project delivery. Interest in asset mapping databases has been shown by the South Kent Coast Clinical Commissioning Group, Kent Public Health and the voluntary and community sector as a useful and impactful way of signposting residents to access alternative support and help.
- 3.10 Individual Ward Member grants would be increased from £1,500 to £3,000 per member, per annum to give Members more control in supporting voluntary and community sector groups to deliver projects and activities in the locality for the benefit of the community. The existing grant criteria will remain unchanged. Where a Ward Plan has been previously developed, the grant could be utilised to ensure any partnership/stakeholder work is not lost. The availability of greater Ward Member grants will further enhance the Council’s involvement with local communities and assist with the delivery of efficient and effective projects and services to ward areas. This funding stream would continue to be open for applications year round and officers can assist Members with applications, if requested.
- 3.11 Community funding could then be provided or commissioned as follows in the new financial year (2017/18):

Funding	Purpose	£
Ward Member Grants (£3,000 per member)	Support voluntary and community sector groups to deliver projects and activities in the locality for the benefit of the community.	£90,000
Community Chest	One-off grants to community groups and charities delivering projects for the benefit of Shepway residents.	£47,500
Community Team: Voluntary and Community Sector Grant Agreements	Grant Agreements with voluntary and community sector to deliver public services to enhance SDC core services.	£467,000*
Shepway Profile, Action Plan and online Community Asset database	To commission a targeted programme of community projects and initiatives based on identified district priorities and needs, ensuring outcomes can be demonstrated to the	£35,000

	community.	
Total		£639,500

*Includes £150,000 available to Folkestone Triennial in 2017.

- 3.12 The above has the potential to bring an in year budget saving of £160,000 and would see next year's (2017/18) Council investment reduced by £80,000. However, more importantly, the above would ensure members continue to have a sense of oversight and leadership in local priorities, including those who may wish to retain their existing ward plans, which could be supported through an increase in individual ward grants.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 With such significant spend being allocated towards community projects and activities, it is essential that the Council can demonstrate that its community work and funding arrangements are making a difference in supporting local communities and priorities.

- 4.2 Therefore, this report supports the proposed Option 3 in line with the report's recommendations to ensure better value for money, sustainability and an outcome focused approach, which can be championed by ward members in partnership with their communities.

- 4.3 Option 3 provides members with additional resource (via the increased ward member grant) to support local services and projects in order leverage more impact in their communities.

- 4.4 The proposal to develop a Shepway Action Profile and Plan will support the Cabinet Member for Communities to establish a clear direction of travel for the Council to address community engagement, cohesion and the complex and interlinked health and wellbeing issues, which impact our services and identify how we need to work differently.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no resource implications that are not covered within the Finance Officer's comments below.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 6.1 Perceived risks as follows:

Perceived Risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative Action
Reputational risk: The review has demonstrated that Ward Plans, Profiles and Budgets are currently failing in terms community impact, outcomes and value for money.	Medium	High	Establish a clear direction of travel to ensure better value for money, sustainability and an outcome focused approach, which can be championed by

			ward members in partnership with their communities.
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7. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

7.1 Legal Officer's Comments (DK)

Whilst the Council has the power to allocate funding for various projects in accordance with various enactments, including the Local Government Act 1972 and the Localism Act 2011, it is important that such allocation is made with capacity to do so, following consultation and that the Council has ascertained justifiable cause for the funding, without potential that third parties may challenge such cause.

7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (DB)

This report relates to a review of the Ward Profiles, Ward Based and Ward Plan schemes. It also recommends continuance of the Community Chest scheme and other community funding schemes. Apart from the payment towards the Triennial, which is funded from a reserve, there are existing budgets of £767,000 for the schemes detailed. The report recommends that from 1 April 2017, option 3 is implemented. These schemes total £639,500. This means an in year saving to the Council of £160,000 and future annual saving of £80,000. This saving should be included as part of the Budget Strategy 2017/18. In relation to the Community Chest scheme, it should be remembered that the budget for the scheme is based on an annual contribution from Kent County Council of £95,000. This will be reduced from 2017/18, so would need to be included as part of the Budget Strategy 2017/18.

7.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ST)

The Council aims to provide the community with fair and equal treatment in all its activities. Members and Officers should ensure that all communities are able to participate in funding schemes wherever possible. Therefore, all community funding schemes need to be widely publicised and the Council should encourage applications from a wide range of community groups.

8. CONTACT OFFICER AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting.

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices:

App 1: Member consultation document