



**Report Reference Number: E/20/38**

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**To:** Executive  
**Date:** 11 March 2021  
**Status:** Non-Key  
**Ward(s) Affected:** All  
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**Lead Executive Member:** Councillor David Buckle, Lead Executive Member for Communities and Economic Development  
**Lead Officer:** Dave Caulfield, Director of Economic Regeneration and Place

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**Title:** Community Engagement and Funding 2021-23

**Summary:**

This report outlines the current position in relation to Community Engagement and Funding arrangements for the Council and proposes the need to review our recovery approach to community engagement and funding during the current Coronavirus pandemic.

With a Local Government Review (LGR) now in formal consultation, the report seeks to find an interim position for the Council to support local communities up until a clear direction for the Authority is developed.

**Recommendations:**

**The Executive is asked to recommend to Council to:**

- i) remove the Community Engagement Forum procedures from the Constitution; and**
- ii) develop an interim Member Funding Framework for 2021-23.**

**Reasons for recommendation**

To provide an interim solution to enable Elected Members to engage with our communities in response to, and recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic. To provide Members with time to consider longer-term plans in line with the Local Government Review implementation planning process (anticipated 2021-2023).

## **1. Introduction and background**

- 1.1 The Community Engagement Forums were established in 2010 as the Council's process of engaging with local communities; to consider how services could be best delivered for residents and to respond to priorities in their local area. The model includes a 'marketplace' approach for residents to attend a forum, ask questions of local public sector representatives and to hear about other initiatives in their community. The model includes a Partnership Board for each of the 5 CEF areas made up of Elected Member representation from County, District and Parish/Town Councils with some co-opted community representation. A development plan is shaped for each area and a decision-making process around funding agreements is in place. Majority agreement on funding is required in line with the Community Development Plan.
- 1.2 The process was suspended in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic and national restrictions preventing the CEFs from functioning effectively.

## **2. The Community Coronavirus response**

- 2.1 As an interim measure, emergency funding of £5,000 per CEF area was put in place to support the 5 areas and their responding community networks to access small pots of funding to support crisis response. This remains in place and is administered through the 3 district Community Support Organisations (CSOs) and is funded through the MHCLG emergency funding grant.
- 2.2 The Coronavirus pandemic has brought new challenges in the way we engage with our residents and communities, as well as our ability to flexibly respond with funding support. To respond in a way that best supports communities, we:
- worked with NYCC Stronger Communities to establish the Community Support Organisations in Selby, Sherburn in Elmet and Tadcaster, including directories of community support networks for each area. The CSOs are focused on providing essential care to those without any support networks and straddle the whole district.
  - focused activity on communicating with our most vulnerable. This included nearly 3,000 calls to Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents, continued calls to all Lifeline Service Users, and vulnerable and over 70yrs tenants.
  - letter dropped all residents with Assisted Bins collections (approx. 1,500) to ensure they had support needs met.
  - continued communications between community support networks
  - worked with NYCC Stronger Communities on building community organisation capacity for those support networks requiring additional help.

## **3. Learning from 2020 and Looking to the Future**

- 3.1 From the past year, and looking into the near future, communities and the groups that serve them will continue to be subject to levels of restriction which the current community engagement and funding model cannot effectively serve. The impact of this has been quantified through [a resilience survey](#) conducted by Community First Yorkshire (CFY). Headlines identify the ongoing struggle for many volunteer and community groups who are unable to return to their previous activities whilst restrictions continue. Support for such organisations is being offered through CFY and the Community & Partnership Team alongside NYCC to identify and support those groups who require larger funding and development support.
- 3.2 With the Local Government Review due to impact on council service delivery into 2022/2023, the longer-term development of community engagement remains uncertain. At this stage, the Council requires a more flexible, focused approach with residents that keeps Elected Members at the heart of understanding their local community issues. With this, they will require an ability to act quickly and accordingly.
- 3.3 Considering the level of support, engagement and access to funding as outlined above, it is proposed that, for this period of time, there is a stronger focus on supporting elected members to respond flexibly to their local resident and community needs than the current model can provide.

#### **4. Proposal**

- 4.1 To remove the Community Engagement Forum Procedures from the Council Constitution. The Constitution procedures currently require that all local area engagement and funding must go through this process. As detailed above, the current response and recovery from the pandemic requires a more agile approach. In removing the procedures, it should be recognised that the work of Elected Members from parish, district and county councils alongside dedicated community representatives across the 5 CEFs has contributed much to supporting their local communities over the last 10 years and we hope to develop such collaborative practices again for the future.
- 4.2 As an alternative and interim measure, it is proposed to develop an interim Member Funding Framework under current officer delegation processes which places Elected Members at the heart of local community support and should enable them to understand issues and act quickly for residents in their local area.

#### **5. Alternative Options Considered**

- 5.1 Alternative Option A – Do nothing. As the last year has shown, the ability to swiftly engage communities through the CEF model has not been something which the council has operationally been able to sustain whilst resources have been directed at immediate responses to the pandemic. Although there is a current roadmap for positive change, some forms of restriction on public gathering will remain for some time. The learning from this time includes how well communities have responded to other forms of community consultation – mainly through digital platforms – and the successful development of Community Support Organisations to reach our more vulnerable and isolated residents and support community groups.

5.2 Alternative Option B - Development of a longer-term model of community engagement, funding and investment. Due to the current Local Government Review, this places the council in an interim position where we will need to understand what future engagement and funding may look like. Both proposals submitted to the Government for consideration will look towards a place-based approach to local decision making which would include the principles of community engagement, action, and investment. To put in place a longer-term model at this stage is unlikely to be sustainable and it appears prudent to consider what the long-term landscape, from both the LGR and pandemic might look like in the coming months. The council can then look to contribute to the development of the successful model during the implementation planning phase (anticipated end 2021 onwards).

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Legal Implications**

The current CEF engagement and financial procedures are embedded in the Constitution. To enable more flexible Member engagement and funding, these procedures will need to be removed. The CEFs have an underpinning funding framework and criteria for communities to access funding. To duly consider effective and transparent spend of public money, a funding framework will still be required for this new approach.

### **6.2 Financial Implications**

Removal of the CEF financial procedures from the Constitution will enable community funding resources to be used in a more flexible and timely way. Officer delegation to support grant and operational spending would remain in place. As identified, an underpinning funding framework will still be required so Members are aware of the parameters of any spend in relation to their allocated budget for their local area.

The funding available during 2021-22 is £100,000. This is outlined in the core budget for the annual period.

There remains a budget available in 2020-21 which is unspent and totals £100,000. The Executive may wish to consider options for the funds use into 2021-22. Officers have outline ideas to support this discussion should this be required.

### **6.3 Policy and Risk Implications**

Risks in relation to the impact on communities are identified in the equalities impact assessment.

### **6.4 Corporate Plan Implications**

The proposal enables Members to drive a community centred approach to delivering services in line with the Council Plan.

## **6.5 Resource Implications**

The delivery of a new funding framework will involve administrative and officer costs. Managing 31 elected member requests for support with funding will require additional administrative support and increased officer decision making duties. There is funding available within the core budget for 2021-22 of £20,000 which will be used to support this interim process.

## **6.6 Other Implications**

None identified.

## **6.7 Equalities Impact Assessment**

Due to the current pandemic, we are aware that the Community Engagement Forum process is not enable at present to reach communities through the usual, traditional ways. We have a current, heavy reliance on digital channels and service delivery on a face-to-face basis remains focused on targeted approaches to responding to care and support needs of our more vulnerable residents.

Assessing impact of this change, there are limited impacts on most residents in the protected characteristics categories.

Positive learning from the current pandemic is that the council in general has seen an uplift in resident engagement on digital channels. We have seen this in relation to engaging on town centre regeneration plans, culture plans, recycling consultation and the budget consultation with record numbers of engagement and well-evidenced reach.

Recent use of public webinars (i.e., the Local Plan consultation) has also shown an increase in public engagement where this was usually less apparent.

However, there is potentially an impact on those individuals who are older or are digitally excluded. In mitigation, we have employed activities such as leaflet dropping for the Assisted Bins collection lists to identify how residents can continue to access support and have a say in local matters. Due to the pandemic, we have also taken an approach to remain in individual contact with more vulnerable residents through Neighbourhood Services, Lifeline and through contacting Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents. The Community Support Organisations established in the district are also responding to individual care and support needs as well as being the central point for local community networks to liaise and gain support.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The above proposal seeks to find a simple solution that enables Members to continue to support their local community and respond in a flexible way to local issues. It will provide the Council with an interim position whilst we shape

future activity and navigate the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and Local Government Review.

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