The City of Edinburgh Council

10.05am, Thursday, 7 February 2019

Review of Locality Committees

Item number	8.2
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council Commitments	

Executive Summary

In June 2018, Council had instructed a review of locality committees to take place at the beginning of 2019. This report reviews locality committees, considers the future of neighbourhood partnerships and makes recommendations on the next steps.

Report

Review of Locality Committees

1.   Recommendations

1.1   To agree to implement option A – to dissolve the locality committees on 1 April 2019 and to concentrate resources on community engagement to the Edinburgh Partnership Community Planning Framework.

1.2   To formally dissolve Neighbourhood Partnerships from 1 April 2019 to allow for their successor Neighbourhood Networks.

1.3   To delegate authority to the Chief Executive to make any such changes to the Council's governance documentation to implement these changes.

1.4   To note that officer support to community planning and community councils was being reviewed to explore how community engagement with the Council's decisions could be better supported.

2.   Background

2.1   At a locality and neighbourhood level the Council has four locality committees and twelve neighbourhood partnerships.

Locality Committees

2.2   Locality committees were established in October 2017, although they did not meet until February 2018.

2.3   Locality Committees were established to provide scope to:

2.3.1   Recognise the facilitation/leadership role of elected members in supporting and promoting participation

2.3.2   Support capacity building of all stakeholders - elected members, communities and officers

2.3.3   Support better/more meaningful relationships between the community and the Council - based on transparency and open and honest communication

2.3.4   Provide scope for innovation and creativity - recognising the strengths and role communities have in improving outcomes and providing solutions to difficult problems

2.3.5   Foster diversity and inclusiveness – supporting and removing barriers to participation, enabling all affected citizens and communities to be involved

2.3.6 Demonstrate impact – show clearly the difference the participation has made to the decision-making process

2.4 In June 2018 the Council agreed that locality committees should be reviewed at the beginning of 2019.

Neighbourhood Partnerships

2.5 Neighbourhood partnerships were established in 2007. As well as being Council committees, these groups form part of the community planning framework, led by the Edinburgh Partnership. Neighbourhood partnerships were retained when locality committees were established pending a review by the Edinburgh Partnership into its governance arrangements.

Edinburgh Partnership Review of Governance

2.6 In December 2017 the Edinburgh Partnership Board recognised that existing community planning arrangements in the city, having evolved over time, were complex and needed to be simplified. The Edinburgh Partnership agreed to review these structures with the aim of making the Partnership more streamlined, accountable and open, and improve the approach to working with communities.

2.7 Following a period of review and consultation, a set of proposals were approved in October 2018. The agreed model was designed to meet the aims of the review and consultation process, together with the statutory requirements placed on community planning partnerships and public bodies as set out in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

2.8 The agreed structure comprises the Board, four city level partnerships, four locality community planning partnerships and neighbourhood networks. The locality community planning partnerships will be responsible for leading, delivering and progress on the locality improvement plan which forms one part of requirements placed collectively on public bodies as part of the community planning legislation.

2.9 The neighbourhood networks will be based around the existing Neighbourhood Partnership boundaries subject to local consideration and confirmation by the Edinburgh Partnership Board. The role of the networks will be to identify the priorities and outcomes for community planning through building effective and meaningful community participation.

2.10 To inform the implementation of these decisions, a further period of engagement is taking place with stakeholders involved in the current partnerships in the city. The feedback from the engagement will help shape the final remits and memberships of the groups, and to identify the resources that will be needed to support them. The Edinburgh Partnership Board will consider the final arrangements and resource requirements in March 2019 with a view to having the new model in place from April 2019.

Impact of changes

2.11 The four locality community planning partnerships will be responsible for planning, overseeing and accountability for the development and delivery of the locality improvement plan. There will be Council representation on these groups but work will be taken forward on a partnership based approach. This should be more effective than individual partners considering the Plan, as it allows an efficient, partnership and outcome focussed approach which can identify solutions no matter the service provider. The Council will consider its position in the same way as it does Edinburgh Partnership decisions through its own executive committees.

2.12 Locality Committees have been tasked with the scrutiny of Council health and social care services in their area so they can provide feedback to the Integration Joint Board on the services they oversee. Since the remit was agreed the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board has reviewed its governance and will be looking at how scrutiny is undertaken across its services. This will also involve discussions with the Council, the EIJB and NHS Lothian to identify where scrutiny should best take place.

Resources

2.13 Locality committees meet five times a year, similarly to executive committees. It is difficult to quantify the cost of meetings especially as the time spent in meetings is, while significant, just one element of the total resource spent on servicing the committee. It does not for example, include the preparation of reports and presentations for each meeting or the agenda planning meetings that support the public meetings. The table below seeks to give an indication therefore of the basic or core resource spent facilitating locality committees. An average of elected member and officers attending committee meetings is included as further illustration. The impact of this resource commitment by all parts of the council should be considered against the overall evaluation considered in paras 3.3-3.12

	Hours	Items	Core Staff commitment	Additional Staff attendance	Elected Members Attendance
Average per meeting	12.20	14	Director, Locality Manager, Clerk Facilities Management	Based on an average of 15 items – 10 additional staff are estimated	14

2.14 The South-East Locality Committee has also agreed sub-committees which will require additional capacity and resource to meaningfully support. This option is

available to all of the locality committees and as a result there is potential for significant increases in meetings and all the associated costs.

2.15 As part of the change programme, officers are carrying forward a review of the current locality model. This will include the relationship between services delivered locally and city wide, and the balance between Council development and engagement and day to day services. This is likely to lead to a rebalancing of locality staff teams.

2.16 The Council has also considered a review of the Scheme of Community Councils in February 2019. It should be noted that the resources supporting community councils will also be looked at in the current year to reflect the outcome of the process and to explore if and where further support is necessary.

3. Main report

3.1 Given the changing environment since locality committees were established any review of the committees should include neighbourhood partnerships. This report seeks to examine the previous year's operations, the impact of the changing environment and make proposals on the next steps.

Locality committees

3.2 Locality committees have each met five times at the time of writing, since they were established, considering between eight and twenty-two items per meeting. There has been a range of business considered including presentations on best practice, performance reports, reports on the locality improvement plan, police and fire and consideration of traffic regulations orders. Motions have also been used by the committees although over half of all motions have originated from the North-West Locality Committee.

Benefits

3.3 Locality Committees have provided an avenue for elected member leadership at a local level. This was a missing ingredient in the locality model and resolving that democratic deficit was a key reason in establishing the committees. The principle of bringing decision making to a local level is also valuable and is core to the Council's approach to participatory democracy.

3.4 Feedback from officials has highlighted the usefulness and value of best practice discussions at committee. Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) in particular have also been considered successfully with more time for discussion than in executive committee and the added benefit of making use of local elected member knowledge.

3.5 Locality committees have most notably provided scrutiny of the locality improvement plan which was thought necessary due to a gap in oversight as the Edinburgh Partnership reviewed its governance. However, the consultation process associated with the Edinburgh Partnership review showed that a council committee

taking on this role has caused some confusion amongst city partners due to the Plan's status as a partnership document rather than a Council document and the Council not being able to scrutinise partner contributions.

Challenges

3.6   The main challenges for localities committees are two-fold, the structure and the expansive unfocused remit and the capacity and resource challenges. These are underpinned by the impact of the changes in the environment which have affected both the structure and the ability to effectively resource.

3.7   Locality committees were also considered as part of the consultation and engagement phase of the Edinburgh Partnership governance review. Locality committees were new when this consultation took place and were still to bed in but the comments highlighted that they were often very political, were Council and not partnership orientated and their role in community planning appeared complex.

3.8   The remit of the committees is extensive and this has been shown in the wide-ranging business considered. An impact has been that it has been difficult for locality committees to manage the breadth of their remit in the short amount of time they have to discuss matters. Many meetings have been two to three hours long often finishing near or after 9pm. This has meant pressure on the committee to finish business but also has resource implications for all officers and partners involved in the committee process.

3.9   While the value of the locality committees shouldn't be judged solely on the number of decisions taken, the specific actions arising out of locality committees has been low. The committee with the most actions per item has been 25% with one committee only taking an action in 7% of the items. When looking at actions compared to the number of decisions taken, then these figures are even lower, with the highest number of actions per decision being taken by committee being 10% and the lowest 5%.

3.10   For delegated decisions other than TROs there has been confusion with the remit and where it interacts with executive committees. This has resulted in limitations in the powers undertaken by locality committees and in other cases some duplication, with issues considered by the executive committee then locality committee and then back through both committees again. This is inefficient and resource intensive for elected members and officials as well as confusing for the public and stakeholders.

3.11   While there have been community representatives present at most locality committee meetings, the overall level of public engagement has been low. Again, during the Edinburgh Partnership review consultation there was criticism over the lack of community representation on the membership, which although not legally possible due to the financial decision-making powers has resulted in the community feeling excluded from decision making at a local level.

3.12   Webcast figures have also been disappointing with live viewers ranging from nine to forty-seven, in comparison the Finance and Resources Committee which has four times the viewers than the most watched locality committee.

Neighbourhood Partnerships

3.13   Neighbourhood partnerships have a dual role as Council committees and part of the Edinburgh Partnership's community planning framework. They were also the primary method of involving community representation in the formal governance and decision-making structures of the Council. Neighbourhood partnerships have continued to meet whilst locality committees have operated, with the community grants fund often being distributed through the partnerships rather than the locality committees.

3.14   The Edinburgh Partnership has agreed that instead of neighbourhood partnerships there will be neighbourhood networks which are based around the existing neighbourhood partnerships. The role of the networks will be to identify the priorities and outcomes for community planning through building effective and meaningful community participation. To be effective, the membership of the networks will need to be inclusive and open to all community bodies in the area.

3.15   The Council agreed in November 2018 to participate in the Edinburgh Partnership structure and the neighbourhood networks. As successors to the neighbourhood partnerships, and to avoid duplication it is proposed that the partnerships are dissolved as Council committees to allow for greater support to the new networks. The status of the neighbourhood networks as groups rather than committees, will allow greater flexibility on membership but there may still be scope to push some powers down to these meetings.

Options

3.16   Due to the factors outlined above two options are presented:

3.16.1 Option A – dissolve locality committees on 1 April 2019 to allow for Council resources to be allocated to support community engagement through the agreed community planning framework.

3.16.2 Option B –retain locality committees but remove the scrutiny of the locality improvement plan and health and social care services from the remit.

3.17   Option A is recommended by officers. Dissolving the committees would mean greater focus and resources could be targeted at the executive committees and the community planning framework, allowing the Council to drive forward service change, efficiencies and local based improvements all informed and guided by meaningful public engagement. Failing to make this change presents a high risk of overstretching resources, duplicating decision making and confusing partners and the public around community engagement.

4. Measures of success

4.1 To fulfil the Council's obligations under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and to ensure the Council operates in an efficient, democratic structure which engages with the public.

5. Financial impact

5.1 The financial impact of locality committees has not been identified. However, if locality committees are retained with the Council continuing to resource and support the Edinburgh Partnership structure this will result in an increase in costs in supporting this work.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1 There is a risk that the Council does not have sufficient resources available to ensure that it is fully contributing to the Edinburgh Partnership community planning structures and that it then struggles to comply with its duties under the Community Empowerment Act.

7. Equalities impact

7.1 There are no equalities impacts as a result of this report.

8. Sustainability impact

8.1 There is no sustainability impact as a result of this report.

9. Consultation and engagement

9.1 This report used data from the consultation and engagement phases from the Edinburgh Partnership's review of governance.

10. Background reading/external references

10.1 The City of Edinburgh Council – 22 November 2018 - Edinburgh Partnership Review and Consultation of Governance Arrangements

10.2 The City of Edinburgh Council – 23 November 2017 – Establishment of Locality Committees 2017

10.3 The City of Edinburgh Council – 26 October 2017 – Locality Committees 2017

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11. Appendices

None.