

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 8 August 2024

Neighbourhood Networks Evaluation

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Culture and Communities Committee is asked to note the evaluation of Neighbourhood Networks and that this information will feed into a wider review of Community Planning in the city.

Joan Parr

Service Director, Culture and Wellbeing

Contact: Andrew Field, Head of Community Empowerment

E-mail: Andrew.field@edinburgh.gov.uk

Neighbourhood Networks Evaluation

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on an evaluation of Neighbourhood Networks (NN). The information gathered will feed in to a wider review of Community Planning in the city which will be reported to Policy and Sustainability Committee in October 2024.

3. Background

- 3.1 Neighbourhood Networks (NN) were established in 2019 following a review of the Edinburgh Partnership governance model
- 3.2 The new governance model for the Edinburgh Partnership was approved by the Council in November 2018. This replaced the existing local arrangements based on 12 Neighbourhood Partnerships with four Locality Community Planning Partnerships and 13 Neighbourhood Networks.
- 3.3 Through their governance model review in 2019, the Edinburgh Partnership identified a range of areas where NNs could bring value. Integral to this was that each NN should operate flexibly, with structures and engagement developed at a local level. The only requirement for the organisation of the networks was that they should meet annually to agree a chair.
- 3.4 North West Edinburgh NNs have continued a formal structure. In the other three areas, after initial neighbourhood-wide meetings and selection of Local Community Planning Partnership (L CPP) representatives, focus shifted to smaller self managed area-based networks, or networks as tools for information dissemination. A number of things have contributed to these neighbourhoods not continuing to meet or select network chairs, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and development resource constraints.
- 3.5 On 7 December 2023, Committee approved a motion by Councillor Thornley on Neighbourhood Networks. The motion requested a report within three cycles providing an evaluation of the current situation of Neighbourhood Networks and Community Grants Funding, including a judgement of the success of the current model, suggestions for how community engagement could be improved, barriers to

that engagement removed, processes simplified to improve accessibility and how participatory budgeting can be preserved and enhanced.

- 3.6 This report responds to the first part of this action, evaluating the current situation of NNs. A separate report is on the agenda for Committee today on Community Grant Funds.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The current operation of Neighbourhood Networks has been evaluated against the following four criteria:
- 4.1.1 Community partners engage with each other and public sector bodies on locally identified issues and priorities;
 - 4.1.2 The Neighbourhood Network model increases influential community participation, particularly among priority groups;
 - 4.1.3 Community partners have a role in deciding on the allocation of devolved budgets; and,
 - 4.1.4 Neighbourhood Networks are appropriately supported and resourced.
- 4.2 The approach to data collection is summarised in Appendix 1 and included interviews with NN representatives and colleagues as well as a focus group. Additionally, two online questionnaires were used to gather the experiences of members of the LCPPs, elected members, and community groups across the city.
- 4.3 The full evaluation analysis is included in Appendix 1, including interview feedback, questionnaire responses and feedback from an officer focus group.
- 4.4 Responses to the questionnaire highlighted:
- 4.4.1 For criteria 1, while the response varied between Neighbourhood organisations and LCPP and Elected Members, feedback from both groups felt that networks that support contact between community and third sector groups are not well supported by public bodies;
 - 4.4.2 For criteria 2, again there was a mixed response between the two groups however there was some consistency in terms of the influence that groups have in decision making on local services;
 - 4.4.3 The responses to criteria 3 highlighted that networks feel that they provide a good format for allocating small amounts of money (e.g. Community Grants Fund) but both Neighbourhood organisations and LCPP and Elected Members disagreed that they provide a good format for directing larger and more complex budgets. Neighbourhood organisations also disagreed that they are able to influence decisions on how public money is spent; and
 - 4.4.4 LCPP and Elected members were neutral or strongly disagreed that existing networks are adequately resourced.
- 4.5 A focus group with Council officers highlighted the differences in how the networks engage with public bodies across the city, with suggestions made on how this could

be improved. Officers also felt that NNs needed more support from public bodies to support them to engage with their wider communities more effectively and that the current structure limits effectiveness. Current resources make effectively supporting NNs more challenging, NNs are not resourced to be self-supporting and NN involvement in allocation of budgets is dependent on support and co-ordination except in Leith where a participatory budgeting approach is in place.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 A wider review of Community Planning is currently underway and is expected to report to Policy and Sustainability Committee in October. The information gathered from the NN evaluation will be shared as part of this work and next steps will be recommended in the October report.
- 5.2 This report will provide a framework for where to make improvements.
- 5.3 The remaining actions agreed by Committee in December 2023 are likely to form part of an implementation plan which will follow the October report. This will include: suggestions for how community engagement could be improved, barriers to that engagement removed, and processes simplified to improve accessibility. Officers will also consider how participatory budgeting can be preserved and enhanced, although this will not form part of the October report or implementation plan.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The evaluation has been carried out using internal resources and therefore no additional costs were incurred.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 There are no equality or poverty impacts arising from the completion of this evaluation.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 There are no climate or nature emergency implications arising from the completion of this evaluation.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 There is a risk that communities are not appropriately involved in local decision-making that affects them.

- 9.2 There is also a risk that the inconsistencies between different areas means community participation in local decision-making remains inequitable, and not based on the needs of the community.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [Review of Neighbourhood Networks](#) - Edinburgh Partnership, 5 March 2024
- 10.2 [Governance and Resources Update](#) - Edinburgh Partnership, 11 June 2019
- 10.3 Governance Arrangements and Governance Engagement - Edinburgh Partnership, 2 April 2019

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood Network Evaluation Analysis

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood Network Evaluation Analysis

Introduction

Following the motion from Culture and Communities Committee in December 2023, an evaluation was conducted on the success for the current model of Neighbourhood Networks (NNs) in Edinburgh. Following the development of evaluation criteria, feedback was sought from a range of respondents using different data gathering techniques. This report details the data collection that was conducted to evaluate NNs.

NNs provide a structure for community and partner engagement across the city, overseen by the Locality Community Planning Partnerships (LCPP). While North West Edinburgh has seen a formal structure of NN meetings continue through the pandemic and beyond, this has not been the case in the other three localities therefore the analysis provided below considers this.

Methodology

A set of evaluation criteria was developed based on what NNs were intended to achieve at their inception (this is set out in Edinburgh Partnership documentation) and were considered alongside the National Standards for Community Engagement (which has been endorsed by the Scottish Government). This resulted in the following criteria:

- Criteria 1 - community partners engage with each other and public sector bodies on locally identified issues and priorities.
- Criteria 2 - the Neighbourhood Network model increases influential community participation, particularly among priority groups.
- Criteria 3 - community partners have a role in deciding on the allocation of devolved budgets.
- Criteria 4 - Neighbourhood Networks are appropriately supported and resourced.

From the criteria, a set of questions was developed and tailored to different respondent groups. Those groups were divided into three categories:

- NN Members This includes any partner or community organisation across Edinburgh's 13 Neighbourhoods
- LCPP and elected members Ward councillors and members of the four LCPP boards including NN representatives
- Colleagues and Partners Council officers and employees of EVOC with experience managing community and partner networks in Edinburgh.

Qualitative data collection involved:

- Four interviews with community and third sector NN representatives on the Locality Community Planning Partnerships (LCPPs);
- Four interviews with Council officers with experience of managing support for community planning in Edinburgh;
- An online questionnaire sent to members of the LCPPs and elected members;
- An online questionnaire sent to community groups across the city; and
- One colleague focus group for those who have supported community and partner networks at a local level.

NN mailing lists were used for each area of the city to invite community groups to participate in the questionnaire. All community and third sector representatives on the current LCPPs were invited to be interviewed, along with the current chairs of the NN in the North West. The focus group was attended by four City of Edinburgh Council employees with experience supporting NNs and local community planning, and two people from EVOC with experience of supporting local third sector networks.

Limitations to this approach included:

- Many of those contacted may not have understood the relevance of the evaluation or why they were being contacted as they have not been publicly active in three out of four localities; and
- There was limited response to both questionnaires.

Response Rates

Respondent	Number
NN representative interviews	4
Online NN Members questionnaire	30
Online LCPP and elected members questionnaire	14
Focus group	6
Colleague and partner interviews	4

Feedback from NN Members, LCPP members, and ward councillors

There was a mixed view of the current model of NNs across the city, with respondents from community and partner groups in the NN membership broadly agreeing that there are existing networks supporting contact between organisations and these provide a good format and are useful. However, there was less agreement that these networks ensure engagement of minority communities or are well supported by public sector bodies. Overall, those NN members that responded were more positive towards the current model on engagement than LCPP members and elected members who responded.

Considering how the model increases community participation the NN membership response was mixed, as few said they felt their group was able to influence decisions made about local services. They did however tend to agree that taking a formal approach increased their influence, although the response was more mixed as to whether a formal approach increased participation or diversity of those involved. In this case the responses from LCPP members and elected members were similar.

Respondents from community and partner groups in the NN membership generally agreed the current model is good for allocating community grants, however they were more neutral or disagreed that it would be a good format for directing larger more complex budgets. They also generally disagreed that they can influence how public money is spent by public sector bodies.

The LCPP and elected members who responded indicated they do not believe the NN model to be adequately resourced.

LCPP Representative Interviews

Interviews involved community and third sector representatives on LCPPs.

The respondents commented that knowledge of NNs or what they are for is not widespread or well publicised. They thought that local people are unaware they existed, and often the partner organisations they are intended to benefit are not aware of how to get involved. Looking at networks broadly in the community, there are often too many for people to attend. The reach and awareness of NNs is directly dependent on the resources made available to support them.

NNs have some influence but not enough authority, and partners are not accountable to the networks which limits their effectiveness. There has been success in developing community priorities through NNs, but without accountability services often do not incorporate them into their workplans.

Elected members often do not engage as much as they could, and involvement of Council officers has also reduced over time.

Diversity of engagement was highlighted as a gap in delivery. Given the range of different communities living in the city this diversity is not reflected in community and partner involvement.

The link between NNs and the community grants fund was viewed as important and, although it is a small amount of money, it is important to keep it at the Neighbourhood level (decided close to those that benefit).

Differing views from respondents were presented on the role and benefits of participatory budgeting with some in favour as a good way to engage new people and organisations, while others saw it as undermining participation as larger organisations have more supporters who can vote for them. A similar view was also expressed regarding how networks beyond NNs function – that without structures (supported by the Council to ensure equity between organisations of different sizes) larger organisations will dominate. However, it was acknowledged that without resources to manage them, more formal structures are unrealistic.

Colleague Interviews

Officers interviewed commented the intended aims of the formal NNs were positive as they sought to strengthen connections between community groups at a local level and give groups that were not part of the Neighbourhood Partnership structure more of a say at what happens locally. Additionally, they aimed to build capacity by bringing together a wider range of community groups in a trusted space that people could engage with and have their voices heard. This however was not fully realised, partly due to Covid-19 and a lack of resources.

Where NNs have failed, it is because they were not driven locally and often the Council was seen as the leader making other organisations less likely to use the network as a vehicle for sharing information and best practice. Networks regularly have had an overrepresentation of dominant voices, with weak cross partner engagement.

Several NNs did not do any engagement and involvement of more local voices is important if these structures are to work. The flexibility offered to NN in how they approached engagement was challenging for a number of networks and may suggest a more structured approach is needed in future. However less formality can encourage participation from residents who do not want to be part of an organisation. Solutions need to be co-created with communities.

So far NN decision-making has been limited, and there currently appears to be little opportunity to develop this. To do so would require NN structures to be sufficiently robust and well-attended to take decisions on budgets. As well as ensuring sufficient diversity of groups involved from across the wider community.

Questionnaire Response Data

Please Note:

- The tables give the number of responses in each case, **not percentages**, this is to avoid implying a higher response rate.
- The highest two values (or more when equal) are highlighted for each statement – deeper colours indicate the most common value.

Criteria 1 - community partners engage with each other and public sector bodies on locally identified issues and priorities

Neighbourhood Organisations

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I am aware of networks that support contact between community and third sector groups	7	19	2	2	0	0
Existing networks for community and third sector groups are useful	6	16	4	3	1	0
Existing networks ensure engagement of minority or disadvantaged communities	0	9	9	8	1	2
Networks that support contact between community and third sector groups involve the right organisations	9	14	4	2	1	1
Local groups such as mine, can use networks to agree shared priorities and goals with other groups	3	15	8	2	2	0
Networks that support contact between community and third sector groups are well supported by public sector bodies (eg. the Council, NHS, Police, etc)	0	5	13	9	2	1
I think formal meetings are important for effective networking at a local level	6	18	4	1	1	0
Existing networks provide a good format for identifying shared priorities	4	13	10	2	1	0

LCPP and Elected Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I am aware of networks that support contact between community and third sector groups	3	4	3	4	0	0
Existing networks for community and third sector groups are useful	3	4	5	1	1	0
Existing networks ensure engagement of minority or disadvantaged communities	0	2	4	6	2	0
Networks that support contact between community and third sector groups involve the right organisations	0	3	6	5	0	0
Networks that support contact between community and third sector groups are well supported by public sector bodies (eg. the Council, NHS, Police, etc)	0	2	3	8	1	0
I think formal meetings are important for effective networking at a local level	1	8	1	4	0	0
Existing networks provide a good format for identifying shared priorities	1	4	3	4	1	1
I find a formal approach to local networks helps me engage with them in my role	2	7	2	2	1	0
I support community and partner networks as part of my role	0	0	5	3	6	0

Criteria 2 - the Neighbourhood Network model increases influential community participation, particularly among priority groups

Neighbourhood Organisations

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
My group is able to influence decisions made about local services by being part of local network that engages with public sector bodies (e.g. the Council, NHS, Police Scotland etc)	1	4	15	7	3	0
I think taking a formal approach to local networks increases their influence on public bodies	6	15	7	2	0	0
I think taking a formal approach to local networks increases diversity of those involved	5	9	10	4	0	2
I think taking a formal approach to local networks increases participation in the network	6	8	7	8	0	1
Existing networks provide a good format for making collective decisions	5	9	11	3	2	0

LCPP and Elected Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Networks that support contact between community and third sector groups are able to influence public sector bodies (eg. the Council, NHS, Police, etc.)	0	2	4	7	1	0
I think formal meetings are important for effective networking at a local level	1	8	1	4	0	0
I think taking a formal approach to local networks increases their influence on public bodies	1	9	2	2	0	0
I think taking a formal approach to local networks increases diversity of those involved	1	4	2	6	1	0
I think taking a formal approach to local networks increases participation in the network	1	5	4	3	1	0
Existing networks provide a good format for making collective decisions	0	2	5	5	1	1

Criteria 3 - community partners have a role in deciding on the allocation of devolved budgets

Neighbourhood Organisations

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Existing networks provide a good format for allocating small amounts of money, such as the community grants fund	6	15	6	2	1	0
Existing networks provide a good format directing larger and more complex budgets	2	3	13	10	1	1
Currently, my group is able to influence decisions about how public money is spent by being part of local network that engages with public sector bodies (e.g. the Council, NHS, Police Scotland etc)	0	3	10	14	2	1

LCPP and Elected Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Existing networks provide a good format for allocating small amounts of money, such as the community grants fund	1	4	3	4	1	1
Existing networks provide a good format directing larger and more complex budgets	1	1	3	5	3	1

Criteria 4 - Neighbourhood Networks are appropriately supported and resourced.

LCPP and Elected Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Existing networks are adequately resourced	0	0	5	3	6	0

Colleague Focus Group – 8 May 2024

The focus group was made up of council and partner officers with current and previous working knowledge of the Neighbourhood Network model. Participants were asked 7 questions relating to the evaluation criteria and provided feedback in 3 ways:

- individual feedback on sticky notes without discussion (for questions 1 and 7).
- series of unfacilitated small group discussions with key thoughts summarised/captured on sticky notes (for questions 3-6).
- facilitated whole group discussion with key points summarised by the facilitator.

Table 1. Feedback summarised according to evaluation criteria.

Evaluation Criteria	Summary of feedback
We will evaluate the extent to which...	
Neighbourhood Network members engage with each other and public sector bodies on locally identified issues and priorities.	<p>The extent of engagement within networks and between networks and public bodies varies across the city. Few networks operate as per Edinburgh Partnership governance framework (4 in North West Locality, driven by officer input). We should engage with and support existing organic networks rather than using the NN framework. Consider moving away from geographic NNs and instead take a thematic approach e.g. city-wide forums themed on LOIP priorities, could give rise to more action focused working groups.</p> <p>NN members can share input on local priorities but are not necessarily able to identify/determine priorities. There is a missing link between wider community, NNs and strategic level decision-makers.</p>
The Neighbourhood Network model increases influential community participation, particularly among priority groups.	<p>NNs do not engage with the wider community as a matter of course. There are isolated examples of this but very scattergun. Very few people even within the Council know what an NN is.</p> <p>Under-represented groups are not reached, and little effort is made.</p> <p>Organisational membership structure of networks limits its effectiveness in involving the wider community. Network members do not have resource to allocate to engagement on issues beyond their organisational objectives. This requires support from public bodies.</p> <p>The current model does not meet this aim - we need to rethink the purpose of NNs and who it serves. A more innovative approach is needed.</p>
Neighbourhood Networks are appropriately supported and resourced.	<p>Main issue for voluntary groups is funding which public sector partners often can't support with. Lack of funding for NNs leaves no incentive or means for members to collaborate to deliver actions that address local priorities.</p> <p>NNs should be self-supporting but they are not – the only active NNs are driven by officers and require significant input – this isn't feasible for 13 networks with current staff resource available. Consider whether staff resource would be better spent on alternative engagement structures that are more effective.</p>

<p>Communities have a role in deciding on the allocation of devolved budgets.</p>	<p>NNs were previously involved in decision-making with NEP and currently involved in CGF – invited to join funding panels (membership and attendance is variable). Wider communities have no influence, except in Leith through Leith Chooses. NN members involvement is entirely dependent on panel coordination by officers which requires a significant amount of officer time.</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------