

# **REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCILS – Part 1**



## **Report of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group**

**19 January 2011**

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## 1. Introduction

At its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2010, the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish group to conduct a review of Neighbourhood Councils.

A Task and Finish Group was established to examine this in detail on behalf of the Committee.

The Task and Finish Group comprises the following members:



**Cllr Colin Burton**  
Conservative



**Cllr John Fox**  
Independent



**Cllr Stephen Goldspink**  
English Democrat



**Cllr Nazim Khan**  
Labour



**Cllr Nick Sandford**  
Liberal Democrat



**Cllr George Simons**  
Conservative



**Cllr Marion Todd**  
Conservative

## **2. Objective of the Review**

### **2.1 Scope**

- To review the processes and principles of Neighbourhood Councils and to come forward with recommendations for their continued development
- To examine all aspects of Neighbourhood Councils, including their funding, delegated responsibilities and logistical arrangements
- To look at how the meetings can be developed to meet the expectations of local residents

### **2.2 Terms of Reference**

To review the process and principles of Neighbourhood Councils, taking learning and experience from the first year of operations, in order to produce recommendations for their continued development. The review is to include:

1. The overarching terms of reference for Neighbourhood Councils as set out in the Constitution
2. The range of responsibilities and decision-making powers delegated to Neighbourhood Councils as set out in the Constitution
3. The relationship between Neighbourhood Councils and other Council forums, committees and meetings
4. The relationship between Neighbourhood Councils and other neighbourhood or community focussed forums (e.g. Neighbourhood Panels), to ensure minimum duplication and maximum delivery
5. The process of engaging with Councillors outside the formal Neighbourhood Council meeting to progress decisions made and actions agreed during the meeting
6. The revenue and capital funding delegated to Neighbourhood Councils
7. The process for making decisions on allocating delegated finance, including Section 106 funds
8. The logistical arrangements that support Neighbourhood Councils, including meeting venues, accessibility, times, dates, frequency, presentation including sound equipment, refreshments, seating arrangements and the associated costs.
9. The methods used to promote Neighbourhood Council meetings to the public and partners to ensure maximum and appropriate levels of attendance and public participation
10. The processes used to develop the agendas, including reviewing how best to ensure agendas are relevant, meaningful and interesting and how best to involve the public in the debates
11. The process of reviewing previous actions and how those results are presented to the public
12. The process for distributing the agenda packs before, and the minutes after, each Neighbourhood Council meeting

### 3. Approach and Timetable

To complete the review in a timely manner, the Task and Finish Group agreed to organise the review into four distinct but broad areas of focus:

1. **Financial**, including revenue and capital funding, and the costs associated with supporting Neighbourhood Councils
2. **Decision Making Powers and responsibilities** delegated to Neighbourhood Councils
3. **Relationships** with other committees, panels, groups, forums etc, both internal and external
4. **Engagement** with the public, officers, press, Councillors etc, both internal and external

**In order to meet the timetable for feedback on the Cabinet's financial proposals, the first of these four areas of focus (relating to financial issues) has been reviewed first, and the findings and recommendations from that part of the review form the basis of this report.**

The remaining areas of focus will be reviewed as part of the second stage of the review.

#### 3.1 Reporting Timetable

The reporting timetable for the review will be:

COMMITTEE	DATE
<b>Review Stage 1</b>	
Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee	19 <sup>th</sup> January 2011
Cabinet	7 <sup>th</sup> February 2011
Council	23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2011
<b>Review Stage 2</b>	
Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee	9 <sup>th</sup> March 2011
Cabinet	21 <sup>st</sup> March 2011
Council	16 <sup>th</sup> May 2011

#### 3.2 Key Witnesses

The Task and Finish Group identified key witnesses to be interviewed throughout the course of the review, and the following witnesses were invited for interview as part of the Review's first stage:

- Cllr Cereste, Leader of the Council
- Cllr Seaton, Cabinet Member for Resources
  
- Councillor Nash, Chair of Neighbourhood Councils in the North and West
- Councillor Lowndes, Chair of Neighbourhood Councils in Central and East
- Councillor Goodwin, Chair of Neighbourhood Councils in the South
  
- Cate Harding, Neighbourhood Manager, Central and East
- Julie Rivett, Neighbourhood Manager, North and West
- Lisa Emmanuel, Neighbourhood Manager, South

Cate Harding and Councillor Lowndes were unable to attend for interview.

## 4. Process and Findings

### 4.1 Stage 1 – Financial review

The Task and Finish Group met on the following dates:

- 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010 Initial meeting to scope the review
- 14<sup>th</sup> December 2010 Group Meeting
- 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010 Interviews with key witnesses
- 20<sup>th</sup> December 2010 Interview with key witness
- 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011 Group Meeting – draft initial report

It was agreed at the initial meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 6<sup>th</sup> December that the most appropriate course of action to start the review was to interview the Leader of the Council to ascertain what his original vision was for Neighbourhood Councils, and to obtain his comments and views on how he considered they had developed in the past year along with his vision for the future. It was also agreed that similar views needed to be sought from Councillor Seaton, Cabinet Member for Resources, the Chairs of the Neighbourhood Councils and the Neighbourhood Managers.

On 16<sup>th</sup> December the Task and Finish Group sent an email to all Councillors asking for their comments, both positive and negative, on Neighbourhood Councils requesting them to feed back to the group by 23<sup>rd</sup> December. **Comments related to matters associated with stage 1 of this Review are included below.**

During the most recent round of Neighbourhood Council meetings a short paper survey was conducted to gather feedback from attendees at the meetings. **Comments related to matters associated with stage 1 of this Review are included below.**

A request for information was made from other local authorities who run Neighbourhood Councils or similar structures. **Information related to matters associated with stage 1 of this Review is included below.**

### 4.2 Findings

This report will deal with the findings relevant to stage 1 of the review only, specifically financially-related matters. All other findings will be reported in the report from the second stage of the review.

#### (i) Interviews with key witnesses

*N.B. A summary of interviews held relevant to stage 1 of this review are included below; all other information will be included in the stage 2 report*

Both the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Resources articulated a clear and passionate vision for Neighbourhood Councils, and reaffirmed their continued support for them. Cllr Cereste stated that he was keen to establish Neighbourhood Councils so that local people are able to make or influence decisions, and have a say on how resources are used in their own community. This is therefore the context that the overall review has been taken forward within, supported by the cross-party review group.

Other interviewees also shared their vision for Neighbourhood Councils, with most agreeing that they should create the ideal opportunity for local people to have a real and meaningful say in decisions that affect their own community.

Some interviewees confirmed that, based on their knowledge, research and experience, fully establishing similar models can take up to three years. However, it is noted that the Council committed to a review after the first year of operation of Neighbourhood Councils, and that this review is timely given the experiences so far and the opportunities still available.

It was also commented upon that Neighbourhood Councils in Peterborough already operate differently in different areas, some more successfully than others. The Review Group were keen to better understand this and will be exploring this in more depth as part of the second stage of this review.

### **Financial Responsibility and Delegation**

The greater delegation of funding from whatever source to Neighbourhood Councils was unanimously supported throughout the interviews and discussions. It was recognised that this offers greater transparency in decision making, greater accountability to the public, and better decisions in austere times.

However, it was also acknowledged that to date, although a capital budget of £25,000 has been delegated to each Neighbourhood Council, the allocation of relevant *mainstream* Council budgets has not yet been achieved. Both Cllr Cereste and Cllr Seaton confirmed their determination to see this happen, and confirmed that officers should not feel threatened by this but should instead see it as being a supportive process to help departments spend their money more wisely. The process for achieving this was recognised as being a disaggregation exercise where mainstream budgets are analysed by spend in each of the seven Neighbourhood Council areas, and supported by appropriate Constitutional delegations where relevant. The role of Councillors then in the process of allocating mainstream resources becomes critical as they would know best what their constituents want and need.

It was also acknowledged that 2010/11 had been a challenging year, particularly in relation to preparing for significant financial pressure in future years, and this uncertainty is likely to have played a part in the slow progress of disaggregating mainstream budgets.

The budget proposals published by Cabinet are being taken through the Neighbourhood Council process as part of the consultation of those proposals, and this was seen as an extremely positive milestone.

It was acknowledged that Neighbourhood Councils have had some successes with small community issues, but that until more significant financial delegation was made further progress of a more sizeable scale would be challenging. Several examples were given during interviews of other key successes however, including, for example, the recognition from bidders, as part of the outsourcing of City Services, of the significance and importance of Neighbourhood Councils and the role the successful bidder will need to play in the Neighbourhood Council structure in the future.

The new Localism Bill is a significant opportunity for reasserting the role of Neighbourhood Councils as being fundamental to involving local people in deciding local action, investment and improvement. To facilitate this in Peterborough the process for developing Neighbourhood Plans, which have been used so far to help determine how the allocation of £25,000 per Neighbourhood Council should be spent, will be reviewed and their preparation and production escalated.

The current budget proposals for next year confirm that a proportion of Planning Obligations Implementation Scheme (POIS) funding (formerly known as section 106) will be delegated to each Neighbourhood Council for determining its use in local communities. Discussion took place regarding the likely level of this funding, with some concern expressed that the allocation will be greater in areas where more development takes place. However, it is envisaged that the process for allocating this money to Neighbourhood Councils would be carefully thought through to ensure equity across Peterborough. The Council will also benefit from a new cash incentive from the Government for building new homes, and it is possible that a proportion of this funding could also be delegated to Neighbourhood Councils.

The current allocation through the Community Leadership Fund of £10,000 per ward was also discussed with a view to determining whether this should be managed through Neighbourhood Councils.

### **Number of meetings**

The current budget proposals for next year talk about the number of Neighbourhood Council meetings in each area reducing from four to two per year. This was included as a proposal in the budget consultation document as feedback had suggested that the Neighbourhood Council meetings weren't working and that there was some duplication with other meetings, including Police-organised Neighbourhood Panels.

Differing views were expressed regarding the optimum number of meetings per year required, although it was acknowledged that this needed to be considered in the context of Neighbourhood Councils with more substantially delegated budgets, and where decisions were being taken readily and successfully. It was generally felt that reducing the number of meetings to two per year was not appropriate as this would not enable issues to be debated or decisions to be made in a timely manner. Maintaining four meetings per year was well supported, with other suggestions of either three or six meetings per year.

This aspect of the review also needs to be considered alongside the other community meetings that take place, including, for example, the Police Neighbourhood Panel meetings, as well as the Council-organised Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings. Determining an appropriate recommendation for how each of these needs to work more effectively together will have a direct impact on the recommendation for the number of Neighbourhood Council meetings held per year. There has also been a separate review of the relationship between the Rural North Neighbourhood Council and the Parish Councils in that area as significant tension had arisen.

### **Role of Chairs**

The role of the Neighbourhood Council Chairs was discussed, including the process for appointing the Chairs, the Special Responsibility Allowance they receive, and the principle of having three Chairs covering seven separate Neighbourhood Councils.

As the Neighbourhood Councils are committees of the Council, the Chairs are currently appointed by the Leader in the same way as the Chairs for Scrutiny Committees are appointed. They also receive a Special Responsibility Allowance of £7,166 per annum in the same way that, for example, Scrutiny Committee Chairs do.

The volume of work carried out by the Chairs was discussed, and the Chairs themselves felt that the preparatory work for, and follow-up work after, each Neighbourhood Council increased their workload. This includes contact with the relevant Neighbourhood Manager throughout the year, as well as liaison with key partners and fellow Councillors. Other interviewees confirmed this to be the case, although the role of the Chair has never been defined to include an enhanced role incorporating liaison between meetings.



The issue of one Chair covering more than one Neighbourhood Council was also discussed, with the issue of how appropriate that is being a particular focus. It was generally felt that the Chair of each Neighbourhood Council should also be a ward Councillor from one of the wards represented at that meeting, which would result in seven Chairs rather than the current three. However, a counter view that was expressed stated that more can be achieved through three Chairs that operate co-terminously with the areas covered by the Neighbourhood Managers, and that greater co-ordination across larger areas can be achieved with fewer Chairs.

Clearly this would have the effect of increasing the budget for Special Responsibility Allowances paid, and it was suggested that in fact the Chairs should receive no payment at all.

## **(ii) Comments from Councillors**

The Review Group would like to thank those Councillors who contributed valuable information to this review process. Whilst it is acknowledged that not every Councillor is in favour of the Neighbourhood Council model, the Task and Finish group have taken a pragmatic view to try to support their continued development. ***Comments received that are relevant to stage 1 of this review are included below; all other comments will be included in the stage 2 report.***

### **Councillor David Harrington**

I am really trying to fit in with my Neighbourhood Council, but I am finding it very difficult. I see my role as a ward councillor as a champion for equality and fairness, firstly to my constituents and subsequently to all the citizens of Peterborough. How can this happen when we as ward councillors are expected to vote for approval of money being spent in another ward at the expense of our own?

What we are being asked to do is partake in a lottery. Tell me, how are the residents of my ward going to benefit from money being allocated in Barnack or visa versa? It should be up to the people to decide where the money should be spent, not ward councillors and certainly not officers. Ward councillors are there to support and lobby for their wards.

To make these councils work effectively, you have to have the support of the local community and I am afraid that is not the case in NW1. If we had enough of the residents attending we could have a show of hands and decide what projects they would like funded. It would then be up to the members and community leaders to support their decision. That is democracy in its simplest terms.

If we are going to persist with the present arrangement, it would be fairer for each ward within NW1 to bid for the whole £25,000 and not piecemeal at the beset of officers or spilt evenly among the 5 wards. I feel if we continue with this system of voting by members alone, it will cause ill feeling amongst the communities. Everyone in the 5 wards should benefit from this community fund equally or not at all.

Finally, where are all the other agencies that are invited to partake? The Police Fire & Ambulance services quite obviously cannot sustain these visits due to funding cuts in their budgets.

I understand that we too are finding it impossible to keep the initial number of meetings and that from next year there will only be 2 meetings per council. How is that going to work?

**Councillor David Over**

There was little money. Deciding what to do with the initial £25,000 was a shambles and rushed. For parish councils there is no motivation to become further involved.

The £25,000 fund is to be abolished. Section 106 money will largely go to the City Council. The remaining 30% will go to the Neighbourhood Council but it is impossible to see that money raised from, say, Eye, could be spent in Barnack.

The pressure on councillors is too great. Personally I can easily have six meetings a week. The NC has increased the number of meetings; not by one every few weeks but there have been pre-meetings, priority settings and agenda setting.

Village rivalry is an issue which has not been taken into account. Simply to suggest that 'The villages have to learn to work together' shows a lack of understanding and human nature. Personally, I found that putting a ward structure together took three years but has slowly become a successful way of working."

**Councillor Michael Fletcher**

No one can make a judgement without knowing what has actually been achieved and at what cost. I have asked on a number of occasions to be provided with the actual cost for last year. To date I have never been provided with this information. I have previously asked for a breakdown (middle of last year) of what has actually been achieved for both North and South Bretton.

This is the reply:

*Cllr Fletcher,*

*Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding. See responses to the queries you raised below:*

*Previous consultation event which took place outside Sainsbury's in Bretton - the information which was collated was used in conjunction with the survey results to structure the Community Planning Event which took place at The Cresset in Bretton.*

*The most recent consultation event results will be used to feed into the Community Action Plan for Peterborough West. Actions which we have taken forward already in response to the consultation are looking in to the green area in Naseby Close (PCC have selected this area for an upgrade and will be renewing the play equipment shortly), enquiries regarding activities for young people in the area (The Spinney play centre has advised that they will now be opening one night a week for 13 – 19 year olds and are seeking funding in respect to lighting to enable them to open during the winter months) and concerns are being addressed in respect to the speed limit in Eyrescroft (Average speed surveys are to be carried out at the start of the school day and under free flow conditions, the Road safety team are also looking at repeating a campaign they carried out in the area last year to encourage drivers to slow down).*

*The condition of the Copeland Car Park – Senior officers are continuing to examine the options available regarding the issue of the Copeland car park. As you are aware the land is currently owned by The Crown who have no active part in maintaining the area. Despite numerous attempts to contact and arrange meetings with The Crown's solicitor we have been unable to discuss the situation with them, therefore it has been very difficult to make any progress. We will keep you fully informed of any updates with this case.*

**Councillor Michael Fletcher continued**

*The cost of Neighbourhood Councils – This is currently being calculated as part of the current budget review work. As soon as we have some information to share we will of course ensure you receive it.*

*I hope this clarifies the situation with the queries you have raised. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me either by email or my mobile 07984 044373.*

*Caroline Rowan, Neighbourhood Manager.*

It is blatantly obvious that at that time, nothing worthwhile had been achieved. It also demonstrates that monthly costings are not being prepared and highlights the gross failings of the finance department to keep this kind of expenditure under tight review. To date, they have been unable to provide the financial information that should be readily available to prove the viability of the undertaking. When members are unable to get this information it is certainly unacceptable and makes the due process of a scrutiny review impossible.

Yesterday evening (20/12/2010) I attended the North West Neighbourhood Council meeting. There were a total of 23 people in attendance. Of these 9 were local residents. The rest made up of council employees, one from Cross Keys and an ET reporter. Clearly, the residents are not supportive of this in sufficient numbers to make the exercise worthwhile. Why do more people not attend? It could be as a result of the extreme cold. Or maybe better advertising is required.

As a direct result of the way the proposals under discussion were put forward, voted upon and a decision made does not in any way involve the residents. It is my opinion that the meeting was actually a waste of time and money. It is somewhat illogical to call a public meeting, put forward certain proposals that have been decided upon in advance and then those councillors who have made the proposals in the first place are the only ones allowed to vote. That surely defeats the whole objective of involving the community in the decision making process.

**To sum up.**

On past and present performance the neighbourhood councils do not appear to be working.

Can the whole idea be improved?

Is there a sufficient amount of residents who are actually interested enough to attend the meetings?

Should residents have a better opportunity to put forward their own proposals?

After almost two years should not the cabinet members be coming up with a revised proposal to make the idea work, or are they bereft of any new initiative?

It could be argued that if a ward councillor is doing the job correctly then the neighbourhood councils are completely unnecessary.

I hope my observations will provide a basis for logical debate.

**Councillor Pam Kreling**

As far as I am concerned, I find the Neighbourhood Councils a complete waste of money, which is very scarce at present. The money could be better spent on Crossing patrols for schools which are under review at present

**(iii) Survey results**

A copy of the survey issued at the latest round of Neighbourhood Council meetings is attached at appendix 1. For the purposes of this report, the focus is on the following survey questions:

- Do you believe that the Neighbourhood Council has given you a greater say in what happens in your community?
- Do you believe that you can really influence the Council and its decision makers through the Neighbourhood Council?
- What changes would you make that you think would really encourage your friends and neighbours to attend Neighbourhood Councils regularly?
- Do you have any other comments regarding the Neighbourhood Council, for example what their objective should be, choice of venue, etc?

To date 68 surveys have been completed, and the results are described below. Many comments were added to completed surveys, **but only those directly associated with this stage of the Review of Neighbourhood Councils are captured below.** ALL other results and comments will be recorded in the report for the second stage of the Review.

**Do you believe that the Neighbourhood Council has given you a greater say in what happens in your community?**

Yes:	36 (53%)
No:	22 (32%)
Other (no answer or not sure)	10 (15%)

***Specific comments relevant to Stage 1 of the Review:***

“Waste of taxpayers money; duplication of Parish Council Liaison and Rural Scrutiny Commission”

“Too early to say, infrequent meetings, lack of teeth and budget responsibility”

**Do you believe that you can really influence the Council and its decision makers through the Neighbourhood Council?**

Yes:	22 (32%)
No:	16 (24%)
Other (no answer or not sure):	6 (9%)
Question not asked:	24 (35%)

***Specific comments relevant to Stage 1 of the Review:***

“When it comes to money being spent there is a reluctance to take account of our views”

“Climate of budget reductions means influence likely to be highly marginal”

**What changes would you make that you think would really encourage your friends and neighbours to attend Neighbourhood Councils regularly?**

“Less regular meetings”

“The Neighbourhood Council would be of much greater interest to the general public if it had more funds to use to deal with problems”

“If the Chairmen and officers weren’t paid”

**Do you have any other comments regarding the Neighbourhood Council, for example what their objective should be, choice of venue, etc?**

“Regarding the Neighbourhood Council budget – this item needs careful monitoring. You must list the following from each area and present the result at each meeting:

- What is going to be done
- Who is going to do it
- When are they going to do it
- Where will it be done
- The financial situation”

“Please combine this with the Police Panel meeting”

“Unless drastically revamped, they represent poor value for time and cost”

“If the Government want to pass down decisions to local people then the money should follow”

“Tonight was a big waste of taxpayers money, a good panto”

“This was a waste of time and money”

#### **(iv) Information from other local authorities**

*N.B. Information directly associated with this stage of the Review of Neighbourhood Councils is included below; all other information will be included in the stage 2 report.*

##### **Thurrock Council**

Thurrock Council are in the process of establishing Area Forums, but report that it is unlikely that any funding will be delegated to them. Their proposal is that each forum is chaired by a Councillor, but that they will receive no additional allowance for doing so. Instead, a budget will be devolved to each individual Councillor.

##### **Luton Borough Council**

This Council operate 5 Area Committees with an approximately equal population size in each. They also operate a model of Ward forums – a meeting specific to each ward that runs immediately before an Area Committee meeting.

Each Area Committee has a delegated budget of £12,000 to support local projects, and this largely makes up the extent of their delegated powers.

The Chairs of each of their Area Committees receives an allowance of £1,000.

##### **North Lincolnshire Council**

This Council are in the process of establishing a structure similar to that of our own Neighbourhood Councils. They currently do not plan to delegate any funding to them, but have told us that they're aware that Sheffield's Neighbourhood Councils have £300,000 each.

They confirm that their Chairs will not receive a special responsibility allowance.

They envisage that their meetings will be held monthly.

They also provided a paper previously produced highlighting the experiences of other areas who have established Neighbourhood Councils or similar. Of those they say:

- Tameside have devolved £11.8m and 233 staff to its Area Assemblies
- Cardiff operate a 6-area model, comprising Area Committees (Members only), Area Forums (Members and wider community) and multi-agency neighbourhood management
- Hull operate a 7-area model, comprising Area Committees (Members only) and a network of neighbourhood forums
- Islington have 4 Area Committees each with a delegated budget of £80,000
- Oxford operate 6 multi-agency Area Committees with responsibility for developing an area plan
- Glasgow have one Area Committee per ward, with a total citywide budget of £1.7m allocated across the Committees

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations for Stage 1**

It is clear that if Neighbourhood Councils are to be the key forum for making decisions about a local community, as much funding as possible needs to be delegated to them. Whilst it is acknowledged that not every decision or improvement requires financial investment, it is also acknowledged that where such investment is available it needs to be prioritised and spent in ways that meet local needs that are best identified through Councillor and public involvement, in a process supported by Council officers. This is reflected in the spirit of the new Localism Bill which supports decentralisation and greater community input.

### **Recommendation 1:**

That the principle of delegating as much revenue and capital funding as possible is agreed as a driving principle behind Neighbourhood Councils, in line with the spirit of the new Localism Bill, and that this principle is agreed by Councillors and shared with officers.

### **Recommendation 2:**

That a commitment is made to reviewing the Constitutional delegations to Neighbourhood Councils in support of maximising funding delegated to them. More detailed recommendations on Constitutional delegations will follow in the second stage report.

In 2010/11 £25,000 has been available to each Neighbourhood Council to spend on local capital projects. Although in some areas decisions on this investment are still being debated, it is clear that this relatively small level of funding has been critical in helping to demonstrate that Neighbourhood Councils are meaningful and can address local priorities.

From 2011/12, it is anticipated that Planning Obligations Implementation Scheme (POIS) monies will be delegated, in part, to each Neighbourhood Council and this is warmly welcomed. However, there remains significant concern regarding the process for allocating this money and precisely how equitable it will be across the whole of Peterborough.

### **Recommendation 3:**

That the current level of £25,000 funding is guaranteed from 2011/12 onwards as a minimum sum available to each Neighbourhood Council, but could be offset by any POIS monies that become available in a Neighbourhood Council area. This would mean that if POIS totalled more than £25,000 it would replace the £25,000 core funding; if POIS totalled less than £25,000, then the minimum total of £25,000 would still be guaranteed.

### **Recommendation 4:**

That the process for determining and allocating POIS monies be carefully assessed and agreed to ensure that all parts of Peterborough benefit from growth and new development.

A small capital budget and the POIS monies form only part of the overall potential for delegating budgets to Neighbourhood Councils. If Neighbourhood Councils are to perform to their maximum potential they need to be able to direct the way that appropriate **mainstream** revenue funding is spent in their area. Whilst this may not be possible with some mainstream budgets – for example, spending in schools – there are significant other budgets where this type of disaggregation would be possible. The experience so far, for example, with seeking to disaggregate elements of the City Services budget as part of the outsourcing programme is encouraging and lessons can be learned from this.

**Recommendation 5:**

That mainstream revenue budgets are disaggregated, wherever possible, feasible and legal, and delegated to Neighbourhood Councils to prioritise and control in order to best meet local needs. To facilitate this as early as possible, a pilot programme should be implemented focussing on a specific part of Council activity before a more expansive roll-out programme.

In order to ensure that all available financial and other resources are allocated by Neighbourhood Councils in the most appropriate way, the need for robust, evidence-based and comprehensive Neighbourhood Plans is ever more critical. The new Localism Bill identifies the purpose of such plans in its drive to involve local people in making the right decisions for their area.

**Recommendation 6:**

That Neighbourhood Plans are produced for each of the Neighbourhood Council areas in line with the thinking articulated in the Localism Bill in order to help determine how all funding and other resources delegated to Neighbourhood Councils should be spent.

Currently the Council has a budget of £240,000 which is delegated to Councillors at a rate of £10,000 per ward, to form the Community Leadership Fund (CLF). This Fund has enabled a significant number of local projects to be funded easily and rapidly, and has supported many local groups and organisations. However, in the current austere climate the CLF budget needs to be working as hard as possible on projects and interventions which are determined to be the highest priority for local communities.

**Recommendation 7:**

That the Community Leadership Fund is maintained at £10,000 per ward, but that 25% of that budget is allocated by Councillors to meet needs identified through the Neighbourhood Council Neighbourhood Planning process.

One way of reducing costs would be to reduce the frequency of Neighbourhood Council meetings. However, this works absolutely against the vision for Neighbourhood Councils shared by most, and against the principles behind the Localism Bill. It is recognised that continuing with the meetings at their current quarterly frequency whilst they have limited or no real decision making potential is counter-productive, but there is a huge level of confidence that this review will transform Neighbourhood Councils into the type of forum they were established to be. There has also been some good progress made in relation to the Rural North Neighbourhood Council and its role in relation to Parish Councils. Appropriate learning should be drawn from this.



As part of the issue of frequency, other community-based meetings should also be reviewed with a view to ensuring no duplication and, where possible, to combine meetings. This should include meetings arranged by our partners in addition to any organised by the Council.

**Recommendation 8:**

To maintain the frequency of Neighbourhood Council meetings as four per year in each area. Any future change to this pattern should see an *increase* rather than *decrease* in the frequency of meetings.

**Recommendation 9:**

To conduct a thorough review of all other community-based meetings with a view to combining meetings wherever possible.

**Recommendation 10:**

That the ongoing but separate review of the Rural North Neighbourhood Council be included in the overall review of Neighbourhood Councils to ensure shared learning and avoidance of confusion and misinformation.

Greater credit needs to be given to the process surrounding and supporting Neighbourhood Councils that is managed by the Neighbourhood Managers. Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings, where they exist already, are proving to be highly successful at progressing lower level actions with little or no financial resources required, and are a meaningful way of engaging with partners to achieve value for money as well as identifying issues that need to be escalated to the full Neighbourhood Council. The relationship and link between the Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings and Neighbourhood Councils should be clearly articulated, so that the Neighbourhood Council remains the overall decision making body, with the Neighbourhood Management Delivery meeting progressing actions it agrees.

**Recommendation 11:**

That Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings, led by the relevant Neighbourhood Manager, be created in **all** Neighbourhood Council areas as a means of engaging and progressing actions between Neighbourhood Council meetings. Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings should usually take place or otherwise communicate each month, and all ward Councillors for that area should be invited, along with a range of partners (e.g. Police, social landlords, voluntary sector etc), and supporting officers as appropriate.

The cost of running a Neighbourhood Council meeting is in the region of up to £900 per meeting. This comprises costs for venue hire, refreshments, sound equipment, printing, publicity, and the staff costs of the Neighbourhood Management and Democratic Services teams, but excludes the costs of any other staff present and the Chair's Special Responsibility Allowance. It has been normal practice for a number of Council officers to be present to support the debate and discussion, but this adds significantly to the costs of running Neighbourhood Councils.

**Recommendation 12:**

To maintain minimal staffing costs by ensuring only essential Council officers are present at each Neighbourhood Council meeting. One Neighbourhood Manager and one Democratic Services Officer should be sufficient for most meetings, with others generally there only to present on specific items.

Each Neighbourhood Council Chair receives a Special Responsibility Allowance of £7,166 per year. In addition to chairing between eight and twelve meetings each year, the Chairs also engage frequently with their Neighbourhood Manager and fellow Councillors on matters directly associated with Neighbourhood Council business. Whilst not diminishing the significance of the Chairs role, ALL Councillors should be actively involved in their Neighbourhood Council meeting and the supporting and communicating framework that exists around it, enabling Neighbourhood Councils to be seen as 'business as usual'. Further, it would be of greater relevance if the Chairs were also Councillors from one of the wards represented at that Neighbourhood Council.

**Recommendation 13:**

That ALL Councillors are encouraged, through a flexible and modern programme of continuous training and development, to actively participate in all aspects of Neighbourhood Council business, this training and development programme to incorporate the broader aspects of Neighbourhood Management, Localism and Big Society.

**Recommendation 14:**

That the Special Responsibility Allowance for Neighbourhood Council Chairs is no longer awarded, reflecting the greater role to be played by ALL Councillors in relation to Neighbourhood Councils. Each of the seven Neighbourhood Councils should elect its own Chair who should be a Councillor from one of the wards represented at that Neighbourhood Council.

Finally, as it is anticipated that Neighbourhood Councils will develop rapidly and positively, it will be essential that the recommendations in this report that are eventually agreed are monitored and regularly reviewed. The Task and Finish group have agreed that they would like to continue to function as a cross-party working group after the review is complete in order to oversee its implementation and development.

**Recommendation 15:**

That the Recommendations, when agreed, form part of an overall implementation plan for Neighbourhood Councils alongside the recommendations that emerge from stage two of the Review. This implementation plan should be overseen by the cross-party working group formed from the task and finish group, and become a standing item at all Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meetings, with regular updates also provided to Cabinet and Group Representatives.

## 6. Summary list of recommendations, with lead officers and target dates identified

	RECOMMENDATIONS	LEAD OFFICER	TARGET DATE	CONTRIBUTES TO SAVINGS??
1.	That the principle of delegating as much revenue and capital funding as possible is agreed as a driving principle behind Neighbourhood Councils, in line with the spirit of the new Localism Bill, and that this principle is agreed by Councillors and shared with officers.	John Harrison	31/3/11	Potentially – through better decision making and reducing waste
2.	That a commitment is made to reviewing the Constitutional delegations to Neighbourhood Councils in support of maximising funding delegated to them. More detailed recommendations on Constitutional delegations will follow in the second stage report.	Helen Edwards	28/2/11	Potentially – through better decision making and reducing waste
3.	That the current level of £25,000 funding is guaranteed from 2011/12 onwards as a minimum sum available to each Neighbourhood Council, but could be offset by any POIS monies that become available in a Neighbourhood Council area. This would mean that if POIS totalled more than £25,000 it would replace the £25,000 core funding; if POIS totalled less than £25,000, then the minimum total of £25,000 would still be guaranteed.	Steven Pilsworth	23/2/11	Yes – if POIS revenue exceeds the minimum £25k
4.	That the process for determining and allocating POIS monies be carefully assessed and agreed to ensure that all parts of Peterborough benefit from growth and new development.	Adrian Chapman	28/2/11	Yes – through maximising POIS revenue to be spent on priority projects
5.	That mainstream revenue budgets are disaggregated, wherever possible, feasible and legal, and delegated to Neighbourhood Councils to prioritise and control in order to best meet local needs. To facilitate this as early as possible, a pilot programme should be implemented focussing on a specific part of Council activity before a more expansive roll-out programme.	Steven Pilsworth & Adrian Chapman	31/3/11	Potentially – through better decision making and reducing waste
6.	That Neighbourhood Plans are produced for each of the Neighbourhood Council areas in line with the thinking articulated in the Localism Bill in order to help determine how all funding and other resources delegated to Neighbourhood Councils should be spent.	Adrian Chapman	1/5/11	Yes – through ensuring investment is prioritised
7.	That the Community Leadership Fund is maintained at £10,000 per ward, but that 25% of that budget is allocated by Councillors to meet needs identified through the Neighbourhood Council Neighbourhood Planning process.	Steven Pilsworth	23/2/11	Yes – through ensuring a proportion of investment is prioritised
8.	To maintain the frequency of Neighbourhood Council meetings as four per year in each area. Any future change to this pattern should see an <i>increase</i> rather than <i>decrease</i> in the frequency of meetings.	Adrian Chapman	23/2/11	No

	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>TARGET DATE</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTES TO SAVINGS??</b>
9.	To conduct a thorough review of all other community-based meetings with a view to combining meetings wherever possible.	Adrian Chapman	31/3/11	Potentially – by reducing officer costs, venue costs etc
10.	That the ongoing but separate review of the Rural North Neighbourhood Council be included in the overall review of Neighbourhood Councils to ensure shared learning and avoidance of confusion and misinformation.	Adrian Chapman	31/1/11	No
11.	That Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings, led by the relevant Neighbourhood Manager, be created in <b>all</b> Neighbourhood Council areas as a means of engaging and progressing actions between Neighbourhood Council meetings. Neighbourhood Management Delivery meetings should usually meet or otherwise communicate each month, and all ward Councillors for that area should be invited, along with a range of partners (e.g. Police, social landlords, voluntary sector etc), and supporting officers as appropriate.	Adrian Chapman	31/3/11	Yes – by ensuring that agreed actions are taken forward promptly
12.	To maintain minimal staffing costs by ensuring only essential Council officers are present at each Neighbourhood Council meeting. One Neighbourhood Manager and one Democratic Services Officer should be sufficient for most meetings, with others generally there only to present on specific items.	Adrian Chapman	March 2011	Yes
13.	That ALL Councillors are encouraged, through a flexible and modern programme of continuous training and development, to actively participate in all aspects of Neighbourhood Council business, this training and development programme to incorporate the broader aspects of Neighbourhood Management, Localism and Big Society.	Adrian Chapman	May 2011	Yes – by encouraging and enabling better decision making
14.	That the Special Responsibility Allowance for Neighbourhood Council Chairs is no longer awarded, reflecting the greater role to be played by ALL Councillors in relation to Neighbourhood Councils. Each of the seven Neighbourhood Councils should elect its own Chair who should be a Councillor from one of the wards represented at that Neighbourhood Council.	Helen Edwards	23/2/11	Yes
15.	That the Recommendations, when agreed, form part of an overall implementation plan for Neighbourhood Councils alongside the recommendations that emerge from stage two of the Review. This implementation plan should be overseen by the cross-party working group formed from the task and finish group, and become a standing item at all Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meetings, with regular updates also provided to Cabinet and Group Representatives.	Adrian Chapman	21/3/11	Yes

The Review Group would like to note their thanks for the support given to them by Paulina Ford, Scrutiny Performance and Research Officer and Adrian Chapman, Head of Neighbourhood Services whilst conducting this review.

They would also like to thank and acknowledge the support and information given to them by Councillor Cereste, Councillor Seaton, Councillor Nash, Councillor Goodwin, Julie Rivett and Lisa Emmanuel.



**Neighbourhood Councils - Evaluation and feedback**

1. Do you believe that the Neighbourhood Council has given you a greater say in what happens in your community?

Yes  No  1a. Please explain your answer: .....

.....  
.....

1. Why have you attended your Neighbourhood Council?

I regularly attend  to report a single issue  Network

Other  Interested in a particular agenda item

If other, please explain:

.....  
.....

3. Do you believe that you can really influence the Council and its decision makers through the Neighbourhood Council?

Yes  No  2a. Please explain your answer: .....

.....  
.....

3. How would you prefer to receive feedback from your Neighbourhood Council?

Verbal next meeting  PCC Website  Email  Letter  Your Peterborough

Other  (specify) .....

4. How did you hear about this meeting?

Your Peterborough  PCC Website  Email  Poster  Direct Invitation  Other

If other, please explain:.....

**5. Do you have any other venues that you think these meetings should be held at to increase attendance?**

.....

**6. What changes would you make that you think would really encourage your friends and neighbours to attend Neighbourhood Councils regularly.**

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**7. Do you have any other comments regarding the Neighbourhood Council, for example what their objective should be, choice of venue, etc?**

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