

CABINET

Urgent Business

Connecting Communities 10 November 2009

Report of Corporate Director (Community Services)

| PURPOSE OF REPORT | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| To request Cabinet support to submit a formal bid to Government Office North West (GONW) to take part in the Connecting Communities initiative. | | | |
| Key Decision | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Non-Key Decision | Referral from Cabinet Member |
| Date Included in Forward Plan | 02 November 2009 | | |
| This report is public | | | |

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLORS FLETCHER AND KERR

- (1) That Cabinet agree to submit a formal bid for funding to Communities and Local Government to take forward a Connecting Communities Project to engage communities in Skerton East and West, on the basis that it does not result in any additional call on the Council's finances.
- (2) That if the bid is successful, the Head of Financial Services be given delegated authority to update the Revenue Budget accordingly.

1.0 Information

- 1.1 On the 14 October 2009, John Denham, Secretary of State, Communities and Local Government (CLG), announced an initiative called Connecting Communities. At the launch, he identified that a core objective was to encourage local people to speak out about their concerns, to be more aware of opportunities arising from public investment in their community and have an opportunity to have a say about local services. This includes supporting more community leaders who can help local authorities to respond to the concerns of communities – councillors and other community leaders. £12 million is available to support 100 projects nationally.
- 1.2 It is an opportunity to practise intensive community engagement, identify key local issues, develop community leaders and actions to tackle the priority areas identified by those communities.

1.3 The support offer from CLG through GONW is to work on intensive engagement in local neighbourhoods/estates and includes

- specialist advisor support
- initial funding in the region of £50,000
- bespoke training packages for community leaders including Councillors and tenants representatives

1.4 Initial discussions and a submission of interest to GONW indicate that two of our wards, Skerton East and Skerton West meet the criteria for consideration of this project.

1.5 There are two bidding rounds – November and December. The advice from GONW is to submit a bid in the first round – hence the urgency of this report.

1.6 In terms of the council's strategic approach to engaging communities, this bid is an opportunity to test the community engagement toolkit recently agreed by the LSP. Whilst the timing may not be ideal in terms of the council's adoption of an engagement strategy and toolkit, it is an opportunity to test the toolkit in practice and to learn from this in rolling out practice across the district.

2.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

2.1 There are only two options: either to submit a bid or not. The submission of a bid – if successful – would enable the council to engage with our communities in Skerton East and West and develop action plans to take forward the priorities identified. It will also support Council Housing's tenant empowerment initiatives.

3.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

3.1 To submit a funding bid

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Engaging communities and community cohesion are Corporate Plan key actions. This funding opportunity will help the Council to progress those actions in two wards of the district.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The project will support delivery of NI1 and NI4 and key actions 7.1 and 7.2 of the Corporate Plan

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

The project is intended to help create more cohesive communities which are more sustainable communities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Depending upon the success of the bid, it is anticipated that up to £50,000 will be available to the end of March 2010 to support project delivery. It is anticipated that the project will run for a period of six months and any support will be met from within the council's existing budgets.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Given the short notice attached to this bid, there has been little opportunity to explore any potential project, but should Members approve the bid, the project would be developed and appraised as appropriate under the Council's internal arrangements. Any delegated authority given to update the revenue budget would only be used should there be a successful outcome both to the bid itself, and its internal appraisal.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Connecting Communities file

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Ref: reports/cabinet/09/06