



Communities and Localism Select Committee – Community Boards Rapid Review

Contents

Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Aim of the Rapid Review	4
Context	5
Summary of Recommendations	6
Key Findings and Recommendations.....	7

Introduction

Hello, I am Mimi Harker OBE, Buckinghamshire Councillor for Great Missenden and Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee. In December 2021, the Select Committee decided to undertake a rapid review of Community Boards and after some initial discussions across the wider Select Committee, a smaller group of councillors volunteered to participate in further evidence gathering meetings with a number of stakeholders which took place across two consecutive days in March 2022. I was joined in this endeavour by six colleagues, Cllrs Paul Bass, Peter Cooper, Frank Mahon, Linda Smith, Gregory Smith and Ashley Waite.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the review group for all their hard work, as well as Cllr Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities and Claire Hawkes, Service Director for Localism and Strategic Partnerships and all the staff dedicated to supporting the Community Boards. In addition, I would like to thank the Community Boards who welcomed me to their meetings in Autumn 2021 and all contributors to our meetings in March, when we spoke to Community Board Chairmen and Co-ordinators, Council officers, Town and Parish Councillors and Clerks and Community Groups and Charities who had benefitted from funding from Community Boards. These meetings were incredibly valuable in widening the review group's understanding of the issues faced by different Community Boards, as well as highlighting some of the real successes that the Community Boards have facilitated.

Cllr Mimi Harker OBE, May 2022



Mimi Harker OBE
Great Missenden



Cllr Paul Bass
Denham



Cllr Peter Cooper
Wing



Cllr Frank Mahon
Grendon Underwood



Cllr Gregory Smith
Bernwood



Cllr Linda Smith BEM
Chalfont St Peter



Cllr Ashley Waite, Stone & Waddesdon

Aim of the Rapid Review

The Communities and Localism Select Committee recognise that the Community Boards play a vital role at the forefront of Buckinghamshire Council's Localism agenda. The Community Boards are the most recognised public interface between the Council, voluntary organisations, Town and Parish Councils and local people. Buckinghamshire Councillors are all members of Community Boards and as community leaders they regularly interact with other key stakeholders such as Town and Parish Councillors, community groups and residents and had received a lot of varied feedback about the Community Boards.

The Select Committee was therefore very keen to undertake a cross party Rapid Review to gain a better understanding of both the challenges and the successes of the Community Boards during their first two years of operation. In addition, the Rapid Review would identify areas for refocus as the Community Boards emerge from a period of being reactive to the emergency of the Covid-19 pandemic into a time of working more proactively on wider engagement and embedding the Community Boards as a means of inspiring and enriching local communities.

Methodology

The review group gathered evidence as follows:

October - November 2021 – The Chairman attended a number of Community Board meetings, at their invitation, and had informal discussions with stakeholders after the meeting to understand their experience of the Community Board to date.

Amersham
Aylesbury
Wycombe
Haddenham
Chiltern Ridges
Wing & Ivinghoe
South West Chilterns

December 2021 – Select Committee members discussed experiences with their own Community Boards alongside the feedback the Chairman had gathered at the above Community Board meetings.

January 2022 – Discussion with Cabinet Member and Service Director

14th March 2022 – Review Group meeting with Stakeholders – Separate sessions with Community Board Chairmen, Co-ordinators and Council Officers.

15th March 2022 – Review Group meeting with Stakeholders – Separate sessions with Town and Parish Councillors and Clerks and Community Board beneficiaries.

18th March 2022 – Review Group meeting to discuss and consider all evidence gathered to date and to identify areas of recommendation

Context

Buckinghamshire Council launched in April 2020, a new Unitary Council replacing five legacy councils which covered the whole geographical area of Buckinghamshire, excluding Milton Keynes. Whilst the new Unitary Council had been several years in the planning, no one could have predicted that it would launch during a global pandemic which meant that the first elections for the Council had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 lockdown and a large proportion of Council staff had to work from home.

A commitment to establish a network of 16 Community Boards had been an integral part of 'Modernising Local Government in Buckinghamshire', which was the 2016 business case for a Unitary Council. The Community Boards were seen as an important way to ensure that residents, town and parish councils, community groups and other key partners could get involved and influence service delivery of the Unitary Council in their local area. Other large Unitary Councils had used similar mechanisms to enhance community engagement effectively and Councillors and officers from Buckinghamshire who had visited Durham and Wiltshire to see their respective Area Action Partnerships and Area Boards had been impressed with what they had achieved.

Therefore, despite the constraints of Covid-19, the 16 Community Boards were quickly launched and began to hold their first meetings, albeit virtually, in July 2020. The Community Boards played a key role in supporting local community responses to the pandemic and in administering emergency Councillor Covid Support grants, with a streamlined process to enable community groups to access funding quickly. The Community Board Co-ordinator team were immediately heavily involved in supporting grass root community initiatives, but it wasn't the ideal scenario in which to have launched the Community Boards. (The Councillor Covid Support grants were the subject of a Select Committee Inquiry which was presented to Cabinet in March 2021)

In May 2021, the postponed Buckinghamshire Council elections were held. The total number of councillors reduced to 147 and of those 147, 55 brand new councillors were returned. Summer 2021 was then the ideal time to reset the Community Boards, with a view to establishing a bit more of a 'business as usual' footing, but because of the continued Covid-19 restrictions, the year was still very challenging and meetings continued to take place online.

By Autumn 2021, Members felt it would be opportune to review how the Community Boards were operating. It was recognised that each Community Board area was very different and therefore the Boards would all work differently but at the same time it was felt that there should also be some consistency across all 16, particularly in relation to funding processes. As we now approach Spring 2022 and all hope that we are emerging from the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been helpful to reflect on what has been learnt over the first two years of Community Boards and look to make improvements to areas that have caused frustrations, whilst also building on their undoubted successes.

"It was valuable to hear different views on Community Boards and the Select Committee's questions were very helpful in determining what we should be aiming to achieve in future"
Cllr Howard Mordue, Chairman, Buckingham and Villages Community Board



**Community
Boards**



Summary of Recommendations

The Communities and Localism Select Committee Rapid Review group recommend that:

- 1) A refreshed vision for Community Boards should be agreed and widely promoted to ensure a shared understanding for residents, key partners, elected members and council officers about the role of the Community Boards in enriching local communities.
- 2) The unique skill set required to be an effective Community Board Chairman, as well as the necessary commitment in terms of energy and time, should be given due consideration when appointing Community Board Chairmen.
- 3) Cabinet should ensure that there is sufficient resource and resilience in the Community Board Co-ordinator team due to the pivotal role they play in delivering the Council's localism agenda.
- 4) Community Boards should be allowed full autonomy to identify and agree their own local priorities, in line with Buckinghamshire Council's priorities and to establish relevant sub-groups in order to tackle key issues in their area.
- 5) A proactive communications strategy for Community Boards should be developed as a matter of urgency, to enable a 'step change' in community engagement, the promotion of Community Boards and the positive impacts they have had in their local area.
- 6) There must be greater clarity around the Community Board funding process and improved transparency around decision making. The process should be revised to deliver both the necessary governance and oversight and efficient processing of monies in a realistic and proportionate way.
- 7) Consideration should be given to an alternative mechanism for the delivery of local Highways schemes.
- 8) Community Board Champions should be appointed in each service area of the Council, to demonstrate corporate commitment to the CBs as the local face of the Council and to act as a dedicated contact point for Community Boards Co-ordinators. In addition, guidance should be issued which sets out clear expectations for service officers in supporting Community Boards and manages expectations of the Community Boards, in terms of the resource that might be available, especially in smaller service areas.
- 9) An overarching plan, we suggest a three year road map, for the development of the Community Boards should be drawn up, with clearly defined milestones to enable their progress to be evaluated.
- 10) The success of each Community Board and individual projects that receive funding should be evaluated in a simple and proportionate manner. (This could be as straightforward as each CB reflecting on the priorities they set at the beginning of each year and how well the projects they have supported have delivered on those priorities at year end)
- 11) A mechanism should be established to enable greater sharing of best practice ideas across Community Board areas and to consider opportunities for working in partnership across Community Board boundaries.

Please read on to understand more fully the reasoning and evidence behind the recommendations.

Key Findings & Recommendations

After carefully considering the evidence we collected across a number of meetings, the review group wish to report on our observations and key findings across a number of important themes, as follows:

A Clear Vision for Community Boards

- It became clear during our discussions with different stakeholders that Community Boards represent different things to different people and we heard from both Town and Parish Councillors and Council service officers that they were not 100% clear on the role of the Community Boards.
- Cllr Ashley Waite, a member of the review group and also the Chairman of Haddenham and Waddesdon Community Board drew a very effective analogy. He commented that at the beginning 16 Chairmen were given a pot of money and a blank canvas and were told to go away and paint community, which has resulted in 16 very different pictures.
- Whilst it is recognised and accepted that the Community Boards are likely to all be very different due to their geography, demographics and varied local needs, a shared understanding of the role and purpose of the Community Boards is still important. As the Community Boards continue to establish themselves and look to increase public engagement and build improved relationships with key partners, a clear vision of what the Community Boards are about and aspirations for their future growth and development is vital.
- In 2021, when the Community Boards entered their second year the vision and aims were set out as follows:

Our Vision

- *To proactively support council priorities at a very local level, and in a way which is the best fit for that local community.*
- *To connect the council with community groups, partners and residents to understand what matters to them and work together to problem solve.*

Community Boards aim to:

- *Represent the voice of local people*
 - *Capture thoughts, ideas and suggestions to address council and local priorities within the community*
 - *Bring together key community partners and residents.*
 - *Identify local needs and work to produce creative solutions*
- Although the review group believe that much of this remains relevant now, they would like to see a more dynamic vision which will appeal to local residents and inspire them to get involved. It should be more ambitious in encouraging 'grass roots' engagement, rather than being focussed on delivering the Council's agenda.
 - The following suggested vision could be a starting point for discussion:

Our Vision

Community Boards will be the 'local face' of Buckinghamshire Council and will deliver the council's key priorities in a way that is relevant to each Community Board area.

Community Boards will support delivery of the aspirations of Parish and Town councils, their community groups, partners and residents based on the specific local needs of each Community Board area. Their aim will be to work in partnership to identify local needs and deliver imaginative workable solutions to create a new sense of local community.

- Members are supportive of the vision not explicitly referring to funding, as the underlying purpose of the

Community Boards is more than simply facilitating grants for local projects and there is a sense that some of the networking and community capacity building that Community Boards have done to date has been overshadowed by the funding aspects.

Recommendation 1 - A refreshed vision for Community Boards should be agreed and widely promoted to ensure a shared understanding for residents, key partners, elected members and council officers about the role of the Community Boards in enriching local communities.

Leadership

- Another theme that came through strongly during our discussions with stakeholders was the importance of committed leadership for the Community Boards. The Chairmen we spoke to believed they had a crucial role to play in shaping their Community Board and in driving its success.
- Town and Parish Council representatives also paid tribute to the work of their Chairmen in involving them in discussions and the work of sub-groups. Some Town and Parish Councillors told us that initially they had struggled to feel part of their Community Board but over time they now felt more involved and could see that their views were valued.
- It is important that a Community Board Chairman is proactive and energetic and someone who can inspire the trust and confidence of key partners and local residents. The role of the Chairman is much more than being able to run a meeting efficiently, in accordance with the Council's constitution. They need to be a respected community leader who can bring people together and encourage creative thinking around how to resolve local issues.
- Commitment of time is also a consideration, as a Community Board Chairman will need to be able to devote a lot of time in between Community Board meetings in order to deliver real change in their local area.

Recommendation 2 – The unique skill set required to be an effective Community Board Chairman, as well as the necessary commitment in terms of energy and time, should be given due consideration when appointing Community Board Chairmen.

- In addition to the importance of the role of the Chairman, another key player in the success of a Community Board is the Community Board Co-ordinator. Each Community Board has a dedicated Co-ordinator, most of whom work full time. Whilst speaking to stakeholders it was immediately apparent that the Co-ordinators were universally well-respected and there were lots of comments about the sheer volume of work that they have undertaken over the past two years.
- When speaking to Community Board Co-ordinators it was clear that whilst they have worked hard, launching the Community Boards during Covid has been very challenging and a lot of their time – an estimated 80% - had been very focussed on dealing with funding applications, rather than proactive community engagement work.
- We heard from community groups how helpful the Co-ordinators had been in supporting them with preparation of funding applications and in some cases, in proactively connecting them to sources of third-party funding as well.
- It appeared that Town and Parish Councillors saw the Co-ordinator as the 'go to' person for Council related queries and issues and whilst this is testament to the relationship building skills of the co-ordinators, it could also lead to them getting bogged down in dealing with complicated queries.
- In addition, there appeared to be a misconception that the Co-ordinator would be able to 'project manage' different initiatives on behalf of the Community Board. The Co-ordinator is there to support community groups by acting as a link to the Board and facilitating connections between organisations that might have shared goals, but they do not have sufficient resource to proactively manage projects on behalf of the community.
- Where some Co-ordinators had changed due to a member of staff leaving or being redeployed to cover maternity or sick leave, it was clear that stakeholders felt the lack of continuity had undermined the

progress of their Community Board. With a team of 16 Co-ordinators, there will inevitably be changes but the review group can see that consistency of support is important, particularly when the Community Boards are still relatively immature.

Recommendation 3 - Cabinet should ensure that there is sufficient resource and resilience in the Community Board Co-ordinator team due to the pivotal role they play in delivering the Council's localism agenda.

- In the first two years of operation, Buckinghamshire Council ringfenced a certain proportion of the Community Board budgets to address particular issues and also proposed that each Community Board should set up three sub-groups on Transport/Highways, Environment and Economic Recovery. The areas were chosen in line with Buckinghamshire Council's corporate priorities but some stakeholders were unhappy that these parameters were set for them by the Council, as not all of them felt relevant to every Community Board.
- If one of the key principles of the Community Boards is that the needs of individual communities should be identified at a very local level, then the Community Board priorities should also be set locally. Much of the feedback received from stakeholders around the setting of priorities and the establishment of sub-groups to address specific issues reflected strong feelings that the Community Boards are best placed to identify these themselves.
- Interestingly some stakeholders felt that the sub-groups were more representative of their local communities than the main Community Board meetings and were often more engaging, so it is important that there is a feeling of ownership with sub-groups, as this is where a lot of work is actually delivered.

Recommendation 4 - Community Boards should be allowed full autonomy to identify and agree their own local priorities, in line with Buckinghamshire Council's priorities and to establish relevant sub-groups in order to tackle key issues in their area.

"We need people to understand that they are the Community Board and we can achieve amazing things if we work together."

Elaine Hassall, Community Board Co-ordinator, Haddenham and Waddesdon

Importance of Communications and Engagement

- From the outset, members of the review group shared the view that more could be done to support the Community Boards in terms of proactive communications and other members frequently commented that there was a lack of Community Board branding on projects that had been funded during the past two years.
- Communications was repeatedly raised as a concern with the Chairman during her visits to Community Boards in the Autumn and we heard from other stakeholders who echoed these views during our meetings in March. For example, some representatives from charities commented that they hadn't heard of Community Boards as residents or seen promotional material around their towns and had only become aware of them due to their professional connection and the draw of possible funding opportunities.
- This is perhaps unsurprising as the Community Boards launched during the Covid 19 pandemic and the public and indeed the Council were more focussed on crucial public health messaging. It may also reflect the pressures for the new Unitary Council delivering services in an unprecedented situation, where a lot of staff had to suddenly work remotely.
- The review group is aware of some good supporting comms that were produced including an introductory video for service officers on The Source (Council's internal website) and a Community Board Handbook which was designed for Chairmen/Vice Chairmen and Co-ordinators to use but could have been more widely promoted. This included very useful information and the review group would like to see this refreshed and publicised more widely for use by all Community Board members.

- Social media is another way of promoting Community Boards. We note that some Community Boards have Facebook pages but it is important that they are kept fresh and up to date. A member also commented that an email bulletin developed by Elaine Hassell, Community Board Co-ordinator for Haddenham and Waddeson, had been very informative and well-received.
- Of course, more face to face public engagement is needed and we hope that this will be achieved going forward. This is the best way of reaching local residents who may not have heard about their Community Board. The Chairmen we spoke to were very keen to have Community Board stands at local events/shows. The review group are aware that the Co-ordinator team now have event 'grab bags' and gazebos for this purpose and hope they will identify a programme of events to attend over Spring and Summer 2022 across the County.
- We heard about a community event that had been held recently in Amersham where projects who had received funding from the Community Board and other partners had an opportunity to showcase their work. This had been very well-attended and had a buzzing atmosphere, which can hopefully be replicated in future elsewhere.
- In addition to reaching out to members of the public at events, consideration should also be given to how to make Community Board meetings more inclusive and engaging, in order to encourage more residents to attend and get involved.
- The review group would welcome further engagement with key partners such as Thames Valley Police and the NHS and also voluntary sector organisations at Community Boards. It is noted that in the south of the county the Police have made a commitment for senior officers to attend each Community Board annually and it would be good to see a similar level of commitment elsewhere. It is important that the Council works together with key partners to agree clear expectations and to ensure that engagement can be meaningful for all involved.
- Finally, it is recognised that all Buckinghamshire Councillors have a role to play as advocates for the Community Boards. Training for members around a refreshed vision and other changes that may result from the Select Committee's recommendations would be helpful to ensure a shared understanding and consistent messaging from members.
- The review group acknowledge that as the Community Boards were launched on an emergency footing and have continually evolved over the past two years, there may not have been enough opportunity to reflect and consider how effective communications have been. Now is the ideal time to review what has worked well, what more can be done, especially as there is now more freedom to engage with stakeholders in person and to take on board some of the above suggestions of the review group in developing a proactive communications strategy for the Community Boards.

Recommendation 5 - A proactive communications strategy for Community Boards should be developed as a matter of urgency, to enable a 'step change' in community engagement, the promotion of Community Boards and the positive impacts they have had in their local area. The Community Board Handbook should be refreshed as part of this and promoted more widely.

Clarity regarding the Funding Process

- The Community Board budgets which enable funding of local projects in support of their priorities are universally welcomed by stakeholders and we heard details of a number of different projects which have supported vulnerable adults, mental health in young people, youth led conservation and recycling and waste reduction. In total, over 350 local projects have been funded over the course of the last two years.
- However, it was noted that there had been some issues with different aspects of the funding application process and there was concern from Community Board Chairmen, Town and Parish Council representatives and other stakeholders that delays and uncertainties related to funding applications could undermine the credibility of the Community Boards.
- The review group appreciate that governance and oversight are necessary when public money is being spent but it is important that the funding process is not so over-engineered that it becomes inefficient. We heard of a number of cases where relatively small sums of money took an unreasonable length of

time to gain approval, with the process described as 'slow and clumsy'. Community Board Co-ordinators also estimated that they were spending 80% of their time on dealing with funding applications, which is not ideal.

- The review group would like to see a more streamlined funding process with a simplified application form. One of the charities we spoke to admitted that their professional fundraisers found the funding application form challenging, as some of the boxes that needed to be completed were very prescriptive.
- In addition, we would like to request more support for very small groups who may have a great idea for a local project but don't have a bank account or are not formally constituted. Several members had examples of local groups who had been put off by the process - the Council should look at creative ways to assist smaller groups.
- It would also be helpful if consideration could be given to how best to administer applications that might cut across Community Board areas. We heard from some community groups that they were unsure if they could submit one funding application form to cover multiple localities and they wouldn't necessarily have the resources to make multiple applications, although we did hear of some projects that had been undertaken by South West Chilterns in partnership with the High Wycombe Community Board.
- Town and Parish Council representatives also requested clear guidance around the requirements for contributory funding. Whilst the reasoning behind contributory funding was accepted there was concern that very small parishes might be disadvantaged in getting local projects off the ground and the review group would like this to be considered and reflected in the guidance.
- The review group heard that different Community Boards handled the decision making around funding applications in different ways, with some approval decisions being taken by funding sub-groups, others at the formal Community Board meetings and sometimes discussions being undertaken via email. Whilst we understand the logic behind the different approaches it is important that members of each Community Board are clear about how and when decisions are taken and there should be a clear line of sight so that everyone is aware of which projects have received funding to increase transparency.
- Consideration should also be given to introducing a scoring matrix to assist members in assessing funding applications consistently.
- The review group also suggests that there could be scope for the Community Boards to each have a 'Small Grants Fund' which may set an upper limit on grants of perhaps £500. The approval process for these smaller sums could be lighter touch to enable rapid delivery of the money, empowering local groups to act quickly and decisively.
- The review group would like all these comments to be taken into account and recommend that the funding process should be revised to improve clarity and transparency around both the funding process and decision making. It was clear from our discussions with stakeholders that improvements to the efficiency of the funding process would improve 'buy-in' to the Community Boards.

Recommendation 6 - There must be greater clarity around the Community Board funding process and improved transparency around decision making. The process should be revised to deliver both the necessary governance and oversight and efficient processing of monies in a realistic and proportionate way.

Alternative mechanism for the delivery of Local Highways Projects

- Linked to the above general discussions about funding, the review group also sought the views of various stakeholders on the highways spending that falls within the remit of the Community Boards.
- Some Community Board Chairmen felt that discussions about highways schemes could dominate the agenda when they wanted Community Boards to focus more on community issues. It was noted that some issues such as installation of yellow lines could be quite divisive as whilst it helped some residents it simply pushed parking problems along to the next road.
- Community Board Co-ordinators expressed some frustration with the current system as they felt like 'ineffectual middlemen' as they lacked the technical highways knowledge to be able to advise on schemes at an early stage and had to go to and fro between Transport for Bucks and Town or Parish councils, often delivering unwelcome news about what was actually possible or the associated costs.

- Town and Parish representatives recognised that the Community Board Co-ordinators lacked the highways expertise and expressed frustration at the costs associated with highways projects and the length of time they took to be delivered. Many also questioned whether the Community Boards were the right forum for delivering local highways projects.
- The Community Board Co-ordinators reported that they had good working relationships with colleagues in Transport for Bucks who always provided the necessary information, but there were often timing issues because they were under resourced and the Community Boards had generated considerable additional workload. In addition, it was noted that often a costly highways scheme that would only benefit a small group of residents will come forward for consideration at the Community Board only to be inevitably rejected.
- We also spoke to Rosie Tunnard, Highways Community Liaison Manager who explained that Highways wanted to be more focussed in their work with Community Boards going forward. She commented that it was challenging to support 16 Community Boards but several changes that would be coming in following the appointment of a new Highways contractor in April 2023, should help.
- With all this feedback in mind, the review group suggest that this aspect of the Community Board's remit should be revisited. It might be that Community Boards could have a reduced scope, perhaps considering very small-scale projects such as drop kerbs, vehicle activated speeding signs and line painting and the rest of the local highways budget could be administered via a different route.
- As a new Highways contractor will be taking over in April 2023 it would seem an opportune time to explore different options for the delivery of local highways schemes.

Recommendation 7 - Consideration should be given to an alternative mechanism for the delivery of local Highways schemes.

Service Area Champions

- As part of our evidence gathering, we spoke to some Council Service Officers about their experiences to date in working with the Community Boards. This might have been in connection with attendance at Community Board meetings to deliver presentations linked to their service area or work undertaken in support of specific Community Board funded projects. In addition, some officers had been asked to comment on funding applications which were relevant to their service.
- It was clear from our discussions that service officers were not totally clear about how they should be interacting with Community Boards and what the expectations were. We spoke to very small services who really wanted to engage but due to limited resources this had been quite ad hoc so far, whilst other services had tried to take a more strategic approach but still felt unsure of what was expected and acknowledged that it was challenging to balance Community Board engagement alongside their 'business as usual' activities.
- Community Board Co-ordinators also confirmed that services had responded to requests from Community Boards in varied ways and it was acknowledged that it would be helpful for Co-ordinators to have stronger service links, for example, to know in advance about different service campaigns which could then be promoted at Community Board meetings.
- The review group is aware that each Community Board has a Service Director linked to it, but this will not represent every service area of the Council. Therefore, we recommend that Community Board Champions are appointed in each service area to act as a dedicated contact point for Community Board Co-ordinators. In addition, guidance should be issued to help the Community Board Champions fulfil this role.
- It is important that the whole Council understands the importance of the Community Boards and can work to support the Community Board Co-ordinators in delivering the Council's Localism agenda. In addition, consideration must be given to the resources that are available to ensure that the expectations of Community Boards can be realistically managed.

Recommendation 8 - Community Board Champions should be appointed in each service area of the Council, to demonstrate corporate commitment to the CBs as the local face of the Council and to act as a dedicated contact point for Community Boards Co-ordinators. In addition, guidance should be issued which sets out clear expectations for service officers in supporting Community Boards and manages expectations of the Community Boards, in terms of the resource that might be available, especially in smaller service areas.

Evaluating Success – What does ‘good’ look like?

- Another strong theme which emerged during the course of our review related to evaluating success. It was recognised that the Community Boards had launched very quickly in difficult circumstances – a brand new service with staff in brand new roles in a brand new Council during the unprecedented situation of a global pandemic. Staff admitted that they had reacted to the emergency situation and systems and processes had been stood up very quickly, which would inevitably lead to issues that then had to be ironed out.
- The review group hope that this review of the Community Boards alongside the internal service review means that now is an appropriate time to refocus on what the Council’s ambitions are for Community Boards, what the Council wants them to achieve in the short and medium term and how they might need to evolve in order to deliver that goal. The learning that has been gained from the past two years will obviously inform this, but we should also look to best practice ideas from elsewhere and revisit our original aspirations.
- A three-year road map for the development of the Community Boards should be drawn up, with clear goals and key milestones to measure their success. It was interesting to observe how Community Boards successes have been ‘measured’ informally to date – some stakeholders held up examples of good community engagement, others cited individual projects that had been funded and others the fact that their Community Board had spent 100% of its budget within the year.

Recommendation 9 - An overarching plan, we suggest a three year ‘road map’, for the development of the Community Boards should be drawn up, with clearly defined milestones to enable their progress to be evaluated.

- Alongside this overarching ‘road map’, there needs to be more focus on the success of each individual Community Board and evaluation of the projects that receive funding from them. There is a sense that so much energy has been invested in processing and approval of funding applications to date, that there has not been much scope for routinely following up with beneficiaries in a reliable way. Community Board Chairmen, Co-ordinators and other stakeholders all highlighted this, yet it was agreed that Community Board members would definitely like to hear about the projects that had been supported.
- As we have already mentioned, the promotion of these successful projects will also help to create a brand for the Community Boards, increase engagement and provide further momentum to continue to drive them forward.
- We heard about Local Action Plans from the Service Director for Localism and Strategic Partnerships, which are a mechanism for Community Boards to forward plan and proactively manage the delivery of their agreed priorities over the year. They weren’t mentioned during our discussions with other stakeholders, but the Local Actions Plans could be a vital link between individual Community Boards and the ‘road map’, if they are developed and owned by the Community Boards and not simply used as an oversight/management tool for the Community Board Co-ordinators.
- The review group suggest that whilst evaluation of each Board and individual projects is important it should also be simple and proportionate. Community Boards should be involved in identifying ‘What does Good look like’ for their Board.

Recommendation 10 - The success of each Community Board and individual projects that receive funding should be evaluated in a simple and proportionate manner. (This could be as straightforward as each CB

reflecting on the priorities they set at the beginning of each year and how well the projects they have supported have delivered on those priorities at year end)

- Across our two days of gathering evidence from different groups of stakeholders, many people commented that it had been interesting to hear about how other Community Boards worked and to share ideas. This seems to the review group to be an opportunity for a quick and easy win and we suggest that a mechanism should be established to enable and encourage greater sharing of best practice ideas across Community Board areas.
- Members are aware that the Community Board Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen have regular meetings and a standing item to share ideas or to ask advice from each other could be valuable. We heard from a number of Community Boards who were keen to engage with young people in their area for example and Aylesbury Community Board had designed a survey in partnership with Aylesbury Youth Action and the Buckinghamshire UTC. This could be useful insight to share with others.
- Likewise, the Community Board Co-ordinators have regular meetings where they could also discuss and share best practice.
- It would also be useful for considering opportunities for cross-boundary working. We heard that in some areas certain communities felt more of an affinity with their neighbouring Community Board and there were also initiatives that whilst based in one Community Board, served residents in other areas. There may also be projects where economies of scale could be achieved by delivering across Community Board areas.

Recommendation 11 - A mechanism should be established to enable greater sharing of best practice ideas across Community Board areas and to consider opportunities for working in partnership across Community Board boundaries.



- | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Buckingham and Villages |
| 2. | Winslow and Villages |
| 3. | Haddenham and Waddesdon |
| 4. | Wing and Ivinghoe |
| 5. | Aylesbury |
| 6. | Wendover |
| 7. | North West Chilterns |
| 8. | Chesham and Villages |
| 9. | Missendens |
| 10. | Amersham |
| 11. | High Wycombe |
| 12. | South West Chilterns |
| 13. | Beaconsfield and Chepping Wye |
| 14. | Denham, Gerrards Cross and Chalfonts |
| 15. | Beeches |
| 16. | Wexham and The Ivers |