



Community Boards Review – Recommendations from the C&L Select Committee review group Chairman – Cllr Steve Bowles

Response from Cabinet (June 22); update on progress (January 2023); update on progress (October 2023)

Recommendation	Cabinet’s Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Agree it is important to have a shared understanding of the role of Community Boards as the local face of the Council, leading local place shaping in collaboration with partners and local organisations and groups. We need to move away from the perception that they are simply grant giving bodies.</p> <p>January 2023: much change has taken place with the Boards which were the result of not just the select committee review, but also a Member Task & Finish Group and corporate service review. These changes have been brought together to provide for a refreshed vision and new ways of working. Community Boards have set their priorities for 2022/23 and projects and other activities are focused on delivering these priorities.</p> <p>Messaging has taken place with key partners on the changes to the funding criteria and for projects to deliver the agreed priorities with key VCS stakeholders and with town/parish councils (through individual Boards). Community Board Managers also explain the</p>	<p>Steve Bowles /Roger Goodes June 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	vision when working with new partners and organisations, as part of their daily work.	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>The Community Board Chairmen play an important role and it is positive to see that the review has recognised their contribution. The appointment of Community Board Chairmen is made by the Leader, alongside other key council appointments.</p> <p>January 2023: no further action required.</p>	<p>Martin Tett June 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>In part.</p> <p>The Committee will be aware that the Council has agreed to deliver a saving from the service review of the localities team in the current financial year to support the overall budget position. Whilst there is a reduction in the total number of posts however, the intention is to deliver increased resilience through streamlined processes and a new support function. Greater emphasis will also be placed on clarifying the role of the coordinators which is primarily around supporting the Community Board with local engagement and facilitating solutions, rather than direct project delivery. The service review has also identified a single point of contact for Town and Parish Councils in the service to help these organisations know who to contact in future.</p> <p>January 2023: a new structure was implemented on 1 June which saw the introduction of a new management team and a new Funding & Support team. The new structure has a dedicated Head</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/ Roger Goodes June 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>of Community Boards, two Senior Community Board Managers and a Funding & Support Team Leader. The Seniors are experienced Board managers and each continue to support a Board.</p> <p>The funding application process has now moved into the funding & support team with the Community Board Managers now only responsible for the initial discussions with the applicant and seeking Board approvals for projects. The removal of this work has allowed the Managers to refocus on their engagement work and spend more time in their Board areas working with their communities and residents.</p> <p>In terms of resilience, whilst the Managers continue to cover for each other, the funding & support team are also able to support Board Managers and cover as appropriate. Adjustment of resourcing has allowed for one part-time Board Manager role to be increased to full-time which further helps with resilience and support across the team.</p> <p>As part of the service review changes, a new revenue budget was established for the operational costs of running the Community Boards which provides for improved oversight and management of the service; this budget is separate to the £2m project budget allocated across the Boards. Taken together, these changes have delivered a more streamlined and effective structure, together with £160k savings to the support costs.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>In part</p> <p>As an integral part of the Council, the role of Community Boards is to support Council priorities at a local level. Within that framework, however, the particular issues which they wish to focus</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/ Roger Goodes June 2022</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>on as a Board will of course reflect local need. I have recently advised Community Board Chairman that funding in 2022/23 will not be ringfenced and the use of sub-groups is entirely a matter for them to determine.</p> <p>January 2023: as covered above, at Board meetings across the summer months, priorities were discussed and agreed with Board members. Boards have the discretion to use task & finish or action groups, whichever is the best fit for the priority they are working on. Boards can work as it suits them, in some cases, Boards have a priority for each quarter they have chosen to work on whilst others have decided to work on several at the same time. Priorities continue to deliver against the corporate priorities.</p> <p>The Boards are also able to flex to consider more immediate needs in their communities such as Ukraine, Opportunity Bucks or Cost of Living.</p>	<p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>A communications plan for the Community Boards will be developed, building on areas of good practice to date and ensuring that there is greater recognition of the work led by the Boards. In particular, the plan will focus on expanding opportunities for face-to-face engagement, and training will be provided as required.</p> <p>January 2023: a communications strategy has now been agreed, training and implementation will be completed by the end of January 2023.</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/ Roger Goodes October 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>October 2023: this recommendation is complete</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>Going forward, communications and promotion about the purpose of the Boards and their overall aims and outcomes will be delivered by the corporate communications team.</p> <p>Individual Board activities and outcomes, social media and newsletters will be the responsibility of each Community Board Manager, supported by the corporate communications team.</p> <p>Where funding has been approved for a projects, terms and conditions now include the requirement to advertise/brand projects supported/funding by the Boards. Discussion about the promotion or branding will be discussed with the applicant when initiating the project.</p> <p>October 2023: Following development of a communications strategy, training has now been provided on social media and all Boards have seen an increase in followers.</p> <p>The strategy for increased promotion of the Boards using the 'Humans of Buckinghamshire' theme is underway with promotional videos to be published shortly and ongoing.</p> <p>A monthly collation of Facebook posts is now posted on the corporate channels to increase awareness to a far higher number of followers.</p> <p>In relation to ensuring projects funded by the Boards receive the relevant recognition, applicants now have to detail on the application form how the Board will be credited and this is followed up to ensure it has happened or is in place when the project is evaluated.</p>	
<p>6. There must be greater clarity around the Community Board funding process and improved transparency around decision making. The process should be</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/ Roger Goodes May 2022</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet’s Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
<p>revised to deliver both the necessary governance and oversight and efficient processing of monies in a realistic and proportionate way.</p>	<p>A review of the funding process has been undertaken and a series of changes are being introduced to streamline decision making and provide clear guidance, for example around the expectations about contributory funding.</p> <p>January 2023: following the establishment of the new funding & support team, a review of the funding process from start to finish has been undertaken and has seen process steps and governance streamlined but continuing to meet audit and financial requirements.</p> <p>A small grants process for projects up to £1k was also introduced in October; this scheme very successfully provides for small, ground roots organisations who don’t usually meet the main funding requirements, to deliver projects with the Boards.</p> <p>Targets were established for the timeliness in processing applications for Board approvals of 10 working days of a fully completed application for main project funding, and 3 working days for small grant applications. (‘Processing’ includes due diligence and governance checks, reports written and with Board Managers for each Board’s approval process to start.)</p> <p>To-date, a total of 329 project applications have been received. 62% of applications for main project funding have been processed within 10 working days and 78% within 20 working days; 78% of small grant applications have been processed within 3 working days.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member has retained oversight of main funding projects going to the Boards for their decision through a fortnightly Funding Panel meeting which forms part of the 10 & 20 working day target.</p>	<p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>Contributory funding was a requirement introduced through the Member Task & Finish Group, very few applications do not have financial contributory funding and to-date this has generated c£743,381/87p for every £ CB spent on projects.</p>	
<p>7. Consideration should be given to an alternative mechanism for the delivery of local Highways schemes.</p>	<p>In part</p> <p>There are no plans to reduce the scope of the Community Boards to invest in a range of different highways schemes, although we will draft a protocol which identified projects more suited to funding through Community Boards, and include example projects and indicative costs to help develop proposals.</p> <p>With the new contract for Highways services coming into operation in 2023, there is an opportunity to consider changes in process in order to address the concerns identified. We will revise the protocol for the relationship between the Community Boards and the Highways service which will provide a framework for the delivery of local schemes and seek to address issues with transparency.</p> <p>January 2023: due to the change in highways contractor in April 2023 a review of the highways projects was undertaken. Some c55 PIDs had been produced but were yet to be formally considered for funding by the Boards, with a further c60 projects which had been funded and had either been started, due to start or not started and which were RAG'd for delivery under the current contract. Several projects have been able to progress to completion or to a suitable point for the new contractor to take</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/Steven Broadbent</p> <p>Richard Barker/ Roger Goodes</p> <p>September 2022 January 2023: this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>October 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>forward. Several schemes remain unable to start or require repricing by the new contractor, including the unfunded PIDs. Community Boards and Highways are working closely together on the current situation and have begun to establish a suitable process for Community Board schemes.</p> <p>October 2023: Following the start of the new highways contract and formation of Buckinghamshire Highways, working processes between Highways and Community Boards has been established, with a 6-step process in place which considers root cause of issues raise and non-financial solutions before applying financial solutions. A highways handbook has been created for Community Boards which provides details of the process together with outline costs for the most common requested and low level solutions.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>In part.</p> <p>It would not be practical to identify single champions in each service area, due to the breadth of issues that community boards address. We do however recognise the need to improve engagement with services about the way in which they link in and support Community Boards. We will work with the key service areas to agree appropriate mechanisms for them to engage with Boards and to better manage expectations. We will also review the role of Service Directors assigned to Boards to ensure this is working positively in helping Boards and the engagement with the wider council.</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/ Roger Goodes</p> <p>December 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>January 2023: a review of Service Directors on the Boards has been undertaken and realigned where requested or needed. They have also received a presentation on their role in terms of supporting their Boards.</p> <p>Presentations on the Community Boards have been made to some SLTs and staff forums. Strong relationships continue to be built between the Community Board team with the main services in the Council.</p> <p>The Service Director and Head of Service met with Chairmen and within those meetings discussed the role of the Service Directors on the Boards and support which could be provided to the Chairmen and Board Managers. They have also met with Service Directors to discuss their role on the Boards and help they could provide, particularly where matters which may need some additional attention to ensure progress.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Recognising the significant level of change we are experiencing both nationally and locally, we will produce a high level road map covering a three year period, with more detail for the next 12 months. We will then update this annually. This will recognise the evolving role of Community Boards and the reduced funding available.</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/Roger Goodes July 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is in progress.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>January 2023: this work has been delayed due to a focus on actioning operational improvements.</p> <p>As part of the 2023/2024 MTFP a review of Community Boards will take place during 2023 to take account of the learning from operating the Boards over the last four years and other changes likely to affect the Boards, e.g. Boundary Review. The overarching plan will therefore be developed following this review.</p> <p>October 2023: A review is to commence shortly to consider the boundary changes due in 2025 and how these may affect the Board boundaries and consider future management arrangements and any opportunities to management costs. This work will inform future Board activity and any milestones.</p>	<p>October 2023: this recommendation is now superseded.</p>
<p>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)</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Agree that it is critical to introduce a way of evaluating projects supported by the Boards linked to outcomes. We will develop a simple and proportionate approach.</p> <p>January 2023: an evaluation process has been in place since July and all projects for 2021/22 have now been issued with an evaluation form ready for when the project is complete. Bespoke evaluation conditions are now included in funding award letters as appropriate.</p> <p>An evaluation report is currently being established and will be reported to the Cabinet Member.</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/Roger Goodes July 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>October 2023: this recommendation is now complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>October 2023: An evaluation form has now been introduced for all funded projects. The form is completed jointly by both the applicant and Community Board Manager, and includes the original project objectives, Board priority/priorities and details how the project has met the identified priority and project aims. It also confirms the Community Board branding/promotion undertaken. A summary of evaluation is provided to the Cabinet Member and Chairmen on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Individual Board annual reports for 2022/23 were produced which detailed their work across the year and the impact they had in their area.</p> <p>The annual Community Board report for 2022/23 was presented to Council in May 2023. This report provided a summary of the work undertaken during the year including engagement work and the value this is now bringing to local communities.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Agree that we should ensure there are mechanisms to improve understanding and sharing of best practice. In addition to the existing meetings of Chairmen and Coordinators, we will seek to identify further opportunities for Community Boards to have better visibility of what others are doing and consider working together on similar issues.</p>	<p>Steve Bowles/ Roger Goodes July 2022</p> <p>January 2023: this recommendation is complete.</p>

Recommendation	Cabinet's Response – Y/N & comments	Lead Member/Officer & Timelines
	<p>January 2023: a knowledge library has now been established for the Community Board Managers where details are available for processes as well as sharing information.</p> <p>Team meetings regularly cover best practice and information sharing.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member Chairmen's Sessions also provide for an opportunity to share ideas and projects.</p> <p>The Boards continue to work across boundaries – not just local but more widely where there are matters of similarity or interest to deliver the priorities.</p>	