

REVITALISING NEIGHBOURHOODS**RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED AT FINANCE, RESOURCES AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON 19 DECEMBER 2002****(1) That the Committee express its concern to Cabinet regarding the level of funding for Revitalising Neighbourhoods.**

The funding for the Revitalising Neighbourhoods initiative is derived from a number of sources. In the current year this amounts to £1.7 million

	£000's
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF)	1,140
Other budgets	315

	1,455

There is an annual sum of £860k allocated from NRF monies, and savings of £400k from rationalising service provision by eliminating the client/contractor split will also be directed towards revitalising neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Renewal fund.

This funding is being used to support a number of aspects of revitalising neighbourhoods, including:

- Meeting the costs of the devolved budgets given to the 10 areas
- Contributing towards the necessary capacity building within the Council and the community and Community cohesion
- Assisting in the administration of the area forums
- Contributing towards the development of the customer service centre at New Parks

Training and capacity building in particular is a major issue which is being tackled in different ways, using NRF money. A specific sum of £70k has been allocated for the internal programme of "Culture change" and, in addition, much of the remainder of the Revitalising Neighbourhoods NRF money is related to Community Capacity building – in Forum development, neighbourhood co-ordination etc.

Although not strictly a part of the core revitalising neighbourhoods project the various provisions made, using NRF money towards the objective of

training and capacity building in the community should not be overlooked. For example, the final allocations from the year 1 NRF monies included the sum of £50k spent, through Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL), on preparing the community/voluntary sector for the forthcoming Community Empowerment fund. There is also some allocation from the NRF in 2002/03 towards community capacity building involving the following projects:

- Faces in Da Crowd / Youth voice: £103,000 over 2 years
- Empowering women: £61,700 over 2 years
- Beaumont Leys Asylum seekers and refugees forum: £59,000 over 2 years
- Springboard for Women: £ 7,625 over 2 years

Other projects may also emerge, as time goes on.

The need for training and capacity building is also being met directly from other sources, viz:

- a) The Community Empowerment Fund.
This is a fund, totalling £400k over three years, paid directly from the Regional Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) to VAL. It is not paid *via* the Local Authority but uses need to be developed in consultation with the Leicester Partnership . The primary objective of this fund is to develop skills and capacity within the communities
- b) The Community Chest Fund.
This fund totals £550k over three years and is also administered by VAL, who make direct grants to new or existing groups. The aims include capacity building, and the allocations from this fund are reported to the Leicester Partnership for information.

NRF is being used to pump prime change. Once NRF ceases, there will be a need to change what the Council does, and the way it does things, to enable the initiative to deliver its objectives. There is no commitment, for instance, to pay £50,000 to each area once the neighbourhood renewal fund ceases (although we may ask the LSP to extend the programme of payments for doing this, if Leicester continues to benefit from NRF).

The key strategy will be to “bend mainstream resources”, to use the vogue terminology. This will involve neighbourhoods becoming increasingly responsible for their own decisions, and budgetary responsibility being transferred to them as a consequence. I do not doubt that this will be difficult, but believe it is achievable given the drive and commitment we have to make this initiative a success. Current best practice seems to

suggest that, whilst there are a number of reasons why such a programme will encounter difficulty, it can succeed. Our aim will be to ensure it does.

Other budgets include:

- The contributions made by the Resources and Housing departments in 2002/03 towards the cost of the New Parks customer Service centre.
- The rationalisation of the Client contractor split. This will save £400k recurrently and this will be directed towards the needs of managing services within the new areas.

The Revitalising Neighbourhoods initiative is still evolving. The shape of the area forums, and the views of the communities they will serve have yet to be finalised and this will inform the next wave of budget decisions that need to be taken, both in terms of revenue and capital provision.

(2) That the Committee express to Cabinet its concern at the lack of significant capital provision for the development of the project.

With regard to capital provision, a key element of the project is the improvement of local access to Council and other services. The developments of new technology including internet and intranet has created opportunities not previously available. The New Parks Customer Services Centre has been developed as a pilot integrating a local Housing Office with a local Customer Service Centre. A sum of £150,000 in 2001/02 and £75,000 year up to 2004/05 has been made available from NRF to develop and evaluate this pilot. The ongoing costs of £75,000 is currently an unfunded spending commitment that will need to be considered in future budget strategies. A capital sum of £100,000 a year for three years was also earmarked to support the further development of this initiative once the results of the pilot have been evaluated. Other options of providing local access points through libraries, neighbourhood centres and as part of the Health & Social Care LIFT developments are also being investigated.

In respect of any new Customer Services Centre:

- (a) there need not be 10, and the needs of different areas will be different - these could range from a full service centre to a telephone access point;
- (b) We envisage, over the coming months and years, a robust consideration of the Council's property holdings. We must use revitalising neighbourhoods as the catalyst to rationalise

our ownership of property, bringing together services under one roof, and redirecting savings to secure our objectives. Whilst there is some limited provision in the capital programme to support the roll out of new Customer Services Centres, this will not be enough, and will need to be supplemented by additional sale receipts. Ongoing revenue savings can be used to help run new facilities.

(3) That the Committee express to Cabinet its concern that no method of choosing forum members has been agreed

The issue of choosing forum members is covered in the Guidelines or Neighbourhood Forums under the section on 'Elections or nominations to forums'.

The Guidelines say:

It is recommended that in the first instance members of the forum are sought by nomination rather than election. This is because of the high cost of elections and because of the barriers elections can represent to certain groups. The forum steering group should advertise for individuals living the area to come forward. If in future it is decided that members will be sought through elections, the cost of the election will be met from the £50,000 allocated to each forum through the Neighbourhood Co-ordinator.

We will soon be launching a city wide communications campaign to get people interested and this will be followed up by campaign in each locality – organised by the neighbourhood coordinators and supported by the Revitalising Neighbourhoods Team.

The risk factor here is that we may attract the usual suspects. However we think that if there are people who are willing to give up time and effort to be active in the community they should be welcomed and supported. But in the medium to longer term we are also focusing on building community capacity amongst a wider base of people, particularly those who are under represented either on the forums or in terms of community activity generally – for example young people.

At the same time in the forums there will be a clear emphasis on working inclusively. Though our general approach in the forums and through the training and development of forum members we will be emphasising that the expertise they bring is **not** that their views are the necessarily the views of the community as a whole . More importantly what they bring is better knowledge of how to connect with, involve and consult the wider community.

Sometimes it will be important to the Council and other service providers to be sure that a view, a recommendation or a plan produced by a forum is the view of people living in the area. If a forum claims this, it will have to back its claim by evidence of involvement, consultation or research in the area.

The Guidance also gives advice on subdividing the area into two or three sub areas based on natural boundaries as has been done in areas such as Leicester North West – to try to get people from across the area.

(4) That the Committee express to Cabinet its concern that the proposed neighbourhood areas are insufficiently related to local communities.

In the first consultation over the Revitalising Neighbourhoods proposals in November/December last year, there were some respondents who wanted the boundaries to be based on a more natural notion of neighbourhoods. But from the MORI survey last year and from other national evidence we know that people's real notion of their neighbourhood is of a very small area – the streets around where you live, the catchment area of a primary school for example. This was the kind of definition used in Islington in the 1980's; but those forums did hit problems in achieving the kind of change that is needed to tackle the levels of deprivation that existed.

In the past, where area based arrangements have been set up, there was evidence that although it was easier to engage people on issues like the street environment, there were other important agendas which small forums were unable to influence so well. This is partly because large organisations like the Council and other service providers didn't have the capacity to engage as effectively as was necessary with a large number of small forums.

Because of the lesson learnt from this experience – it seems that most cities who are developing area based arrangements are going for bigger areas. The potential risk of this is that the forum isn't as well connected to the 'grass roots' community infrastructure. So for this reason we are stressing the importance of community involvement and community consultation in our approach – as can be seen from the Guidelines for Neighbourhood Forums. We are also emphasising that forums will need to work closely with the existing community infrastructure and indeed to develop it in future. If necessary the forums may set up sub forum structures.

The second pressure against having a greater number of smaller forums is the cost. The forums will depend in large part on the resources and

support we and other partners can provide them with – more forums would mean resources spread more thinly – so there is a case for economies of scale.

The view was taken that although we should make every attempt to draw the lines in a way that would suit as many as people as possible, it would be impossible to please ‘all of the people’ – because everyone has different perspectives on the issue. Not least of these are service providers – each of which would want the boundaries to fit their own service delivery map.

It would be tempting to spend a lot of time and energy on getting agreement from a wide range of people on the optimum ‘map’ of neighbourhood forum boundaries; and it could be the case that total consensus may never be achieved. But there are likely to be much more important issues that impact on the success or failure of neighbourhood forums. If they fail, it probably will not be because of having the wrong boundaries.

Setting up the forums will, like all creative processes, be iterative. We will try things and they will either succeed or fail; but if they fail we will learn from that and use it as an opportunity to do something better. It was felt that the sooner we begin on that process the sooner we will have something that works in place.