

## **Report to COUNCIL**

# **Reviewing District Working in Oldham**

### **Portfolio Holder:**

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### **Reason for Decision**

Oldham has a long history of District and Area working. The current District infrastructure has been in place since 2009. Since that time, a number of reviews have taken place that have resulted in changes being made, most notably to the ward footprint within Districts.

A further review has been undertaken, and this report sets out a number of recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

1. Dis-establish District Executives and establish a dedicated District Lead Elected Member role responsible for overall coordination of local activity and investment.
2. Increase individual elected member budgets from £5,000 to £6,000.
3. Create a £500k Local Improvement Fund to support District priorities.

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## Reviewing District Working in Oldham

### 1 Background

1.1 The purpose of the District Review was to:

- Review District Executives in the context of meaningful local democratic engagement, devolved decision making and support for elected members to secure local democratic engagement and strong leadership.
- Consider how elected members can be supported in their role as democratic leaders and in particular at a place based level.
- Review the resources allocated to Districts and district working.
- Consider district working in the context of the wider reform agenda, to ensure we operate in the most effective way to support elected members and deliver better outcomes for residents.

1.2 The approach taken has involved:

- A series of face-to-face consultations and workshops with key stakeholders, including:
  - o Elected members
  - o Directors of front line services
  - o District Teams
  - o Relevant strategy leads connected to reform and place based working
  - o Partner organisations, represented across the Oldham Partnership
  - o Multi-agency teams currently operating across the borough
- A desktop review of:
  - o District budgets
  - o District Team role descriptions
  - o Other models of district working across GM and nationally
  - o The links to Oldham Cares, including the knowledge gained by integrated health and social care teams around place based working

### 2 District Working – current arrangements

2.1 Oldham has a long history of area and District working with the current District infrastructure in place since 2009. The aim of the teams is to support ward councillors in their capacity as local leaders and members of the District Executives, and to join up with other services to ensure delivery meets the need of the local area.

2.2 The District Executive operates as the formal decision making element within area working, taking decisions about funding or other resources delegated to them by Council, as described in the District Executives Terms of Reference and Delegated Powers (under part 3 of the Council Constitution – Responsibility for Functions). The primary role of each District Executive is to set priorities and take decisions at a local level, and to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area. They are responsible for

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developing a plan for their area, within the context of the Oldham Plan and allocating resources in support of this.

- 2.3 Elected members for the wards comprising the District Executive are all members of the District Executive. Each District Executive has a Chair and a Vice Chair, responsible for setting the agenda and overseeing the business of the District Executive. Each District has a dedicated team of staff including a District Coordinator, Member Support (caseworker) and a Community Development Officer.
- 2.4 District Executives were originally formed to champion their local area by raising issues of concern to residents and businesses with the Council and other organisations, and to influence how services are delivered and spending allocated in their local area.
- 2.5 District Executives (DEs) have decision making authority over a capital and revenue budget that is provisioned over a 5 year period and 2 year period respectively.
- 2.6 Each District Executive is allocated £10,000 revenue per ward and £10,000 capital per ward per year, to help meet the priorities set out in the District Plan. Each Ward Councillor has an allowance of £5,000 to fund local priorities. In some areas councillors also decide to pool their individual allowance to joint fund agreed projects. (Please see Appendix 1 for further details of Capital and Revenue budgets).

### **3 District Executives – feedback from the review**

- 3.1 District Executive meetings provide a formal decision making function within area working, taking decisions about funding or other resources delegated to them by Council. District Executive meetings comprise:
- 1) Public Questions.
  - 2) Petitions.
  - 3) Making decisions about local resources and services delegated to them by the Council.
- 3.2 When discussing District Executive meetings specifically, feedback from elected members was that these meetings fulfil a primarily ‘business function’ for deciding on budgetary spend and do not fulfil their intended community engagement function. Engagement with residents is typically through other interactions directly with individual councillors rather than via District Executive meetings.
- 3.3 The pattern of spend for both the Capital and Revenue budgets allocated to District Executives indicates that significant reserves have accumulated for both areas.
- 3.5 During consultation the funding of larger-scale improvements and projects in local areas was identified as a continuing priority. It is proposed that the implementation of a borough-wide Local Improvement Fund be established to respond to this. This fund would be available to all Districts, who would be required to submit expressions of interest for funding. A member panel would oversee the allocation of the money, inviting successful expressions of interest to submit a complete application for funding as detailed in Appendix 2: The Local Improvement Fund.
- 3.6 Each elected member has a personal annual budget of £5k. This can be used to support resident and community groups with local events and activities. This money is often used to meet short term, urgent priorities, for example, providing room hire for a mental health workshop or repairing vandalised church windows. Elected members felt that the value of this funding was in its flexibility, allowing them to act fast to make a difference in their local area.

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- 3.7 As part of the proposals for District working it is recommended that elected member budgets be increased to £6k, allowing members to continue to support local priorities.
- 3.8 The role of the Chair of the District Executive involves working closely with all elected members in their District to support them in their role as strong local leaders, encouraging and coordinating the contribution of all members across ward and District boundaries. The Chair also plays a vital role in championing the needs of the District. They provide leadership and ensure corporate and local priorities align.
- 3.9 It is proposed that the role of District Executive Chair is amended through the creation of a District Lead role. District Leads would still be responsible for supporting and championing their District but would also have a number of other responsibilities detailed in Appendix 3: District Lead Role Description.
- 3.10 The proposals in relation to District Executives are part of a wider programme of work. This will include:-
- A member development programme that will ensure members have the skills and support needed. The 2019/20 programme is currently being developed, with a new Learning Needs Analysis survey (to help identify any gaps in elected member skills and knowledge) sent to all members. Work is ongoing to engage elected members with the programme, with a cross-party elected member development group now established to support the development and promotion of the programme.
  - A review of how District Teams are connected into and supported by Council services. This will involve developing networks between Districts, the wider organisation and partners and reviewing governance arrangements to improve integration and joint working.
  - More effective ways of engaging with residents. It is recognised that a wider range of approaches to engagement are required.
  - A new Casework system to improve management of casework and communication.
  - Better tools and more systematic partnerships to identify the area priorities and to plan effectively for more integrated working with partners. Over the next twelve months work will continue to develop a placed based operating model of which Districts and elected members will be an integral part. This requires detailed work in the meantime, ensuring Districts are well placed to integrate with this developing place based model.

#### 4 Options/Alternatives

1.	Continue with District Executives as currently constituted for 2019/20, revisiting the option to remove once multi-agency decision making teams are in place.
2.	<p>Dis-establish District Executives with immediate effect, including the attached revenue and capital budgets.</p> <p>Establish the District Lead Role.</p> <p>Increase elected member budgets to £6k.</p> <p>Remove any unallocated additional revenue funding, totaling £225k.</p> <p>Create a £500k Local Improvement Fund to support District priorities,</p>

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	reprioritising the remaining £752k in the capital programme.
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## 5 Recommended Option

2.	Dis-establish District Executive functions with immediate effect, including the attached revenue and capital budgets.  Establish the District Lead Role.  Increase elected member budgets to £6k.  Remove any unallocated additional revenue funding, totalling £225k.  Create a £500k Local Improvement Fund to support District priorities, reprioritising the remaining £752k in the capital programme.
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## 6 Financial Implications

6.1 The recommended option is to remove the District Executive functions as per option 2 in paragraph 4.

### Revenue

Resources of £200k can be reassigned within the revenue budget for 2019/20. At the end of 2018/19, resources of £732k were available within a District Partnerships earmarked reserve. Work has been undertaken to determine that £508k of these resources are committed to approved projects leaving £224k available for other priorities.

### Capital

The capital programme for 2019/20 was approved with funds of £1.3m available over the period 2019/20 to 2023/24. It is proposed that the resources be realigned with a one-off fund of £500k created in 2019/20 for District Executives with the balance available to support other priority projects. (Anne Ryans)

## 7 Legal Services Comments

7.1 The Council Constitution does allow for the removal of the current District Executive functions including the revenue and capital budgets. Cabinet will however need to appoint a Sub-Committee to undertake the review of applications made to the Local Improvement Fund. The Sub-Committee will be subject to the Council's procedure rules, Cabinet procedure rules and the access to information procedure rules. (Alex Bougatef, Group Lawyer, Legal Services).

## 8 Co-operative Agenda

8.1 As a co-operative council, we are committed to reforming public services and encouraging innovation, leading to better outcomes and delivery. The District Review will ensure that Districts are best able to meet the needs of both elected members and the residents they represent. (Jonathan Downs – Strategy, Partnerships and Policy).

## 9 Human Resources Comments

9.1 None

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10	<b>Risk Assessments</b>
10.1	None
11	<b>IT Implications</b>
11.1	None
12	<b>Property Implications</b>
12.1	None
13	<b>Procurement Implications</b>
13.1	None
14	<b>Environmental and Health &amp; Safety Implications</b>
14.1	None
15	<b>Equality, community cohesion and crime implications</b>
15.1	None
16	<b>Equality Impact Assessment Completed?</b>
16.1	No
17	<b>Key Decision</b>
17.1	No
18	<b>Key Decision Reference</b>
18.1	N/A
19	<b>Background Papers</b>
19.1	None
20	<b>Appendices</b>
20.1	Appendix 1 – District Executive Budgets Appendix 2 - The Local Improvement Fund Appendix 2 – District Lead Role Description