

**Meeting** Executive

**Portfolio Area** Neighbourhoods & Cooperative Working

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## CO-OPERATIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS

### KEY DECISION

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### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 This report sets out proposals for the next stage in the development of Cooperative Neighbourhoods; the division of the Borough into 6 localities, with the objective of coordinating services at a neighbourhood level, providing clear points of accountability and supporting the growth in capability of residents and communities.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That approval is given to the establishment of 6 Cooperative Neighbourhood areas, based on the pre-2017 Hertfordshire County Council divisions (see appendix A for map). The 6 teams will form the basis of the Council’s strategic approach to: delivering localised, responsive, coordinated and collaborative services; working with partners; and engaging with the different communities of Stevenage.
- 2.2 That approval is given to the direction of travel set out in this report and that the development of Cooperative Neighbourhoods serves to reassert and strengthen Stevenage’s commitment to Cooperative Council Principles; with

staff, Members, residents and partners working together to help people help themselves and to plan for the future of neighbourhoods.

- 2.3 That the phased implementation is approved, including the selection of St Nicholas and Martins Wood as the prototype neighbourhood, with basic team and collaboration arrangements put in place in the remaining 5 neighbourhoods.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

3.1 Cooperative Neighbourhood Management is one of the five key strategic objectives of Stevenage Borough Council's 'Future Town Future Council' Corporate Plan. To provide an infrastructure to support this objective, it is proposed to establish a Cooperative Neighbourhoods model across the whole of the Borough, comprising 6 neighbourhoods. This will maximise the benefits of localised, accountable and collaborative service delivery and community engagement. The purpose is to ensure that residents benefit from more responsive, flexible and proactive services, whilst the Council fulfils its ambitions, meets its responsibilities and responds to needs and aspirations, by recognising the strengths and building the capability of communities and residents.

3.2 Each of the 6 neighbourhoods will cover both residential and non-residential areas within their boundaries. However, some areas, such as the town centres, whilst working within the neighbourhood structure, will operate through partnerships which support their specific character, needs and function.

#### *3.3 Definition and Purpose*

3.3.1 A Cooperative Neighbourhoods approach involves local organisation and delivery of core services within a recognisable area, with a logical identity, clear boundaries and manageable size for a single organisational structure and team.

3.3.2 Cooperative Neighbourhoods will:

- Serve to reassert and strengthen Stevenage's commitment to Cooperative Council Principles and describe an overall approach to delivering services, working with partners and engaging with the different communities of Stevenage
- Use a variety of activities to meet the overall purpose, with staff from different council services, Members, residents and partners working together to help people help themselves and to plan for the future of Neighbourhoods.
- Complement and inform the Transformation and Organisational Development programmes in order to make services more accessible, joined up, with a stronger focus on activities over service structures and improving productivity.

### 3.4 *Structure*

3.4.1 Cooperative Neighbourhoods will establish structures, governance and ways of working based on three key principles:

- Coordination of services: within neighbourhoods; between neighbourhood teams, centralised teams and the back office; and with partners, bringing improvements for residents through more collaborative, proactive, ambitious and responsive services
- Establishing clear points of accountability for Council services in each locality, ensuring responsibility for delivery and responsiveness to issues raised
- Growing the capability of residents and communities, extending networks, connecting resources and taking a cooperative approach to making Stevenage a place where people can live a good life.

### 3.5 *Strategic Alignment*

3.5.1 Cooperative Neighbourhoods will be the overarching structure through which the Council both delivers its community facing services and achieves its strategic objectives. It will provide strategic alignment with and complement:

- Stevenage's Cooperative Council Principles
- Future Town Future Council
- The HRA Business Plan
- Asset Management Strategy
- Community Wealth Building

### 3.6 *Operational Alignment*

3.6.1 Cooperative Neighbourhoods will be the overarching structure through which the Council manages core services collaboratively, engages with communities and plans improvements to neighbourhoods. Teams will:

- **Engage** with residents on what matters to them
- **Respond** in a proactive way to things that they come across and that are brought to their attention.
- **Plan** improvements in neighbourhoods and community provision

### 3.7 *Partnership Working*

3.7.1 Whilst the initial focus will be on the Council's own services, Cooperative Neighbourhoods will provide the infrastructure for working with partners from the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. It will enable

partners to relate to Stevenage's distinct neighbourhoods, collaborate with Council services, engage more effectively with communities and focus on growing capability, early intervention and prevention. It will help bring business, including SME's, closer to the community and facilitate their connection with, and the extension of, community networks.

### 3.8 *Community Centre Review*

- 3.8.1 Complementing the current review provides an opportunity for community centres to give a physical focus for Cooperative Neighbourhoods and community engagement. They could provide a location for community-based staff to work from, meet with each other and have formal and informal discussions with residents. They could also give a focus for engagement of partners and for the delivery of core and commissioned services, focusing on community strengthening, prevention and early intervention.

### 3.9 *Implementation*

- 3.9.1 Cooperative Neighbourhoods complements other aspects of the Council's Transformation Programme, including Business Unit Reviews, more agile ways of working, new IT and processes. However, the roll-out needs to take account of the capacity of managers and staff for additional management of change. In addition, its cooperative nature, which will entail staff and crucially residents collaborating in making the change happen in an evolutionary and iterative way, needs to be in evidence from the very beginning. This will include experimentation with new ways of working, flexibility, innovation and not being afraid to fail.
- 3.9.2 To take account of the demands of such a change, it is proposed that implementation is phased, with an initial, intense focus on one area, whilst putting more basic collaboration arrangements in place in the five other localities.
- 3.9.3 The recommendation for the prototype neighbourhood is St Nicholas and Martins Wood, due to the current Cooperative Neighbourhoods work programme and the engagement infrastructure that has been built up there. Examples of the type of work undertaken in the prototype neighbourhood might include trialing new housing caretaking arrangements, work with communities to support the move to digital services, Community Wealth Building initiatives and identifying and removing barriers to dealing swiftly with problems or making decisions.
- 3.9.4 Although this approach requires the whole of the Council to orient itself to neighbourhood working, staff from Housing and Investment, Stevenage Direct Services and Communities and Neighbourhoods will initially form the prototype team. All other services will be scoped, briefed and prepared to respond to the needs of front-line services. This will enable the future development of Cooperative Neighbourhoods to be designed from the bottom up rather than top down.

- 3.9.5 A template ‘Who’s Who’ information sheet that will be produced for each neighbourhood is shown in appendix B. Strategic leads will be appointed for each neighborhood in due course.
- 3.9.6 An appropriate level of delegated decision making to the team will be developed, whilst maintaining accountability to senior managers, who will keep in close contact with developments. Guiding principles will be established but the team will begin with a blank canvas, allowing a genuine cooperative and collaborative approach that grows the model through building ‘human relationships’ with each other and crucially with residents.
- 3.9.7 There should be no pre-ordained structures for involvement or models for consultation, but the team will respond in a genuine way to everyday conversations that they have with residents.
- 3.9.8 The team will have a learning ethos and time will be dedicated to reflection, mutual support, planning and developing a set of measures to determine progress and effectiveness.
- 3.9.9 The six neighbourhoods should be allowed to develop in line with the principles established but in a way that acknowledges that one model will not suit all. Therefore, the full roll-out across the six neighbourhoods should not be a fully developed model but the roll out of a way of thinking and making change.
- 3.10 *Next Steps*
- 3.10.1 An extract from the Project Initiation document showing the key next steps is shown below:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Time</b> (deadline estimates)
<b>Executive</b>	16/12/19
<b>Establish Project Board</b>	17/1/20
<b>Sign off Project Initiation Document</b>	17/1/20
<b>Operating Principles for Prototype N’hood agreed by Project Board</b>	17/1/20
<b>Establish Project Team</b>	31/1/20
<b>Team/Department Briefings</b>	31/1/20
<b>Establish HQ for Prototype Neighbourhood Team</b>	31/1/20
<b>Establish officers for Prototype Neighbourhood Team</b>	28/2/20
<b>Establish light touch liaison arrangements and lead officers for remaining 5 localities</b>	28/2/20
<b>Communicate details of teams and contact details to Members and staff</b>	28/2/20
<b>First Prototype N’hood Team Meeting</b>	13/3/20
<b>Prototype N’hood key stakeholders event</b>	31/3/20
<b>Prototype N’hood Experimentation, monitoring, iteration and learning –</b>	30/6/20
<b>Prototype N’hood final report</b>	31/7/20
<b>Full roll-out across remaining 5 neighbourhoods</b>	31/8/20
<b>Final Project report and Plan for regularisation</b>	30/9/20

### 3.11 *Communication*

- 3.11.1 A Communication strategy will be developed, building on examples of work already happening in neighbourhoods, inviting residents to join the Council in planning for the future of their community. The strategy will take in related areas that will complement the CNM approach, such as community wealth building and the locality reviews. An outline communication plan is shown in appendix C.

## **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The formalisation of a structured Cooperative Neighbourhoods approach is recommended as a logical development from Stevenage's Cooperative Council principles (appendix D) and the Future Town Future Council Corporate Plan.
- 4.2 The pre-2017 County Council wards provide logical neighbourhoods, as set out above (see 3.2.1). However, they should be considered as administrative areas rather than descriptions of recognisable communities. The latter are determined by residents themselves and won't conform naturally to any attempt to divide the Borough into manageable areas. Cooperative Neighbourhoods will be sufficiently flexible to recognise both the administrative boundaries and the differing notions of community held by residents.
- 4.3 Alternative options considered included the full roll-out of Cooperative Neighbourhoods across all 6 areas simultaneously and the inclusion of all Council services. However, for the reasons set out in paragraphs 3.8.1 to 3.8.4, a phased roll-out is recommended.
- 4.4 A Cooperative Neighbourhoods approach can bring a range of short, medium and longer term benefits.
- 4.4.1 In the short term, the benefits include;
- Creation and communication of a simple team structure for each area
  - Clear lines of responsibility and accountability for neighbourhood services and problem solving
  - Staff embedded in communities, more visible to residents, owning and proactively dealing with issues and acting on conversations
  - A focus on conversation with residents about what matters to them
  - Development of a learning approach to understanding how services meet demand and purpose
- 4.4.2 In the medium term, the benefits include:
- A proactive, joined up, tenure blind approach

- Responsive services, enabling the dynamic deployment of resources, through local staff and new technology
- Efficiency & economy, with savings from collaboration, driving out waste, reducing failure demand & alternative delivery options
- Improved outcomes through coordinated and effective case management
- Increased on-line capability of residents, e.g. through 'my account'
- Area Plans developed for each neighbourhood

#### 4.4.3 In the longer term, the benefits include;

- Increased capability of residents and communities; development of local networks enabling connection of resources
- Increase in quantity and quality of resident input into service delivery
- Preserving and renewing a 'Sense of Place'. Making Stevenage's neighbourhoods 'places of choice', where people can live a 'good life'.
- Positive contribution to improving health, community safety and tackling the Climate Emergency

4.5 Detailed consultation at this stage has been restricted to the Senior Leadership Team and Portfolio Holders. An outline of proposals was also presented to an All Members Briefing session on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019, as part of the discussion on ward walkabouts. Briefings for teams of staff are being arranged which will emphasise the collaborative nature of the implementation plan and the opportunity for staff to shape the development of Cooperative Neighbourhoods along with Members. Similarly, no specific resident consultation has taken place at this stage. However, the nature of the implementation means that the future development of Cooperative Neighbourhoods will respond to both the informal and formal conversations that staff have with residents. The communication strategy will invite residents to talk to the Council about how they can get involved. Formal consultation will precede any significant changes where it is required by the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

## 5 IMPLICATIONS

### Financial Implications

5.1 Save for already budgeted project management costs, the initial development of Cooperative Neighbourhood teams will be cost neutral, in that it will be delivered by existing staff and resources. Once it is established, consideration will need to be given to the way in which the Council sets budgets to reflect an area and activity-based method of service delivery and investment. Careful attention and consideration will also need to be given to any impact that changes have on any specific service charges. It is expected that Cooperative Neighbourhoods will improve the efficiency and economy of service delivery, with savings arising from collaboration, driving out waste,

reducing failure demand and exploration of alternative delivery options. There may be a need to consider ‘invest to save’ initiatives that would support more effective area working, for example, training and development, enhanced IT or adaptations to enable the use of community buildings as off-site workspaces.

### **Legal Implications**

5.2 There are no specific legal implications identified at this stage

### **Risk Implications**

5.3 Set out below is an excerpt from the Project Initiation Document outlining the high-level risks identified.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating action</b>
Amount of other change happening across the Council	Restrict prototype to one locality and work with Ops Managers to discuss capacity and potential solutions to any problems
Services may be unable to resource the project and/or provide the right staff	As above
Insufficient delegation of decision making to allow true experimentation within initial locality	Levels of delegation to be set out in principles and agreed with Project/Programme Board. Highlight reports to Project Board will flag issues
Services and procedures may be insufficiently flexible to allow true experimentation	As above
IT systems insufficiently flexible to support new ways of working	IT support to be attached to project and highlight reports will flag issues
Finance systems, ring-fences and budget headings may be insufficiently flexible to support new ways of working	Finance support to be attached to project and highlight reports will flag issues
Concerns about working differently in one locality, experimentation and associated risks	Principles to be signed off by Project/Programme Board/Cabinet. Ensure good communication channel with Members. Highlight reports to Project Board will flag issues
Data Processing requirements in order to share experiences, experiment and learn	Data processing advice to be taken as per GDPR implications.

### **Policy Implications**

5.4 Future development of policies will need to determine how they relate to and impact on the different neighbourhoods of Stevenage

### **Environmental Implications**

5.5 It is anticipated that there will be positive environmental implications, in that Cooperative Neighbourhoods will enable greater engagement and



opportunities for conversations with residents on environmental issues and support environmental based voluntary work

### **Staffing and Accommodation Implications**

- 5.6 Staff will begin to relate both to their service structures and professional disciplines, as well as orienting their thinking and activity to the neighbourhood structure. For some staff this will involve increased presence in communities and greater engagement with residents. Much of the preparation for this change has been anticipated in the recent and ongoing Business Unit Reviews.

Depending on the outcome of the current review, staff may also increasingly use community centres as places to work and meet.

### **Human Resources Implications**

- 5.7 As above, but it should specifically be noted that the neighbourhood teams will operate without traditional hierarchical management structures. This will provide an opportunity for staff at all levels to develop leadership roles covering specific activities. A comprehensive Organisational Development strategy needs to accompany the progression of Cooperative Neighbourhoods.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.8 It is anticipated that Cooperative Neighbourhoods will have positive equality and diversity implications. A focus on greater engagement of residents, enabling the development of stronger communities, building capability and extending networks can bring specific benefits for those experiencing disadvantage. It will aim to ensure that residents get the support they need, as well as being helped to help themselves. It will also enable greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

It will be essential to ensure that all voices are heard and that those who often find themselves excluded are supported to play a full part in the life and future of the community. An ongoing Equality Impact Assessment will build on the Full Inclusion Report produced following the recent community mapping exercise. This has started to give the Council far greater information about the spatial dimension of the Borough's diversity and the current picture relating to issues of equality.

### **Service Delivery Implications**

- 5.9 These are set out in the report.

### **Community Safety Implications**

- 5.10 It is anticipated that Cooperative Neighbourhoods will have positive implications for community safety, with a focus on community engagement and strengthening, early help, prevention and improved partnership working and case conferencing. Community Safety Officers are assigned to patches which also provides an operational link to the Police.

### **Information Technology Implications**

- 5.11 There will need to be close liaison to ensure links to the IT infrastructure and that IT supports the new ways of working

### **Safeguarding Children Implications**

- 5.12 See Community Safety implications. In addition, safeguarding considerations will follow the SBC policy with relevant frontline staff and responsible officers identified.

### **Other Corporate Implications**

- 5.13 The development and progression of Cooperative Neighbourhoods needs to be managed in tandem with other parts of the Council's transformation agenda. The nature of Cooperative Neighbourhoods means that change needs to happen from the front end of service delivery and community engagement and will require a scheme of delegated decision making to match. This needs to follow on from the experience of staff attempting to bring about the desired changes to engaging, responding and planning.
- 5.14 There is an opportunity through Cooperative Neighbourhoods to enhance the youth work provision and this will be developed in partnership with the Youth Council.

## **APPENDICES**

- A Map of 6 Cooperative Neighbourhoods Areas
- B Example 'Who's Who' Information Sheet for a Cooperative Neighbourhoods Area
- C Cooperative Neighbourhoods Outline Communication Plan
- D Stevenage Borough Council Cooperative Principles