

CABINET MEETING – 8th April 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET

Title of Report: Working Neighbourhoods Strategy – Use of Consultants over £100,000	
Author(s): Chief Executive	
Purpose of Report: The Working Neighbourhoods Strategy sets out the proposed approach to the allocation of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund. This report requests Cabinet approval to seek consultants to independently set baselines and evaluate the programme and its projects identified to deliver the Strategy.	
Description of Decision: Cabinet is requested to approve the use of consultants to independently set baselines and evaluate the Working Neighbourhood Strategy programme and projects.	
Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? Yes	
If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework	
Suggested reason(s) for Decision: The consultancy project is central to the successful monitoring and evaluation of the Working Neighbourhoods Strategy.	
Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected: Without Cabinet agreement for the use of consultants, it would not be possible to independently set baselines and evaluate the programme or projects within it. Although not required as a condition of grant, good practice shows that independent evaluation of the impact of programmes and the projects that make them up is central to ensuring effective future delivery. Evaluations could be carried out internally, but this would prejudice the independent nature of the evaluation and as such the credibility of the findings. Similarly as the evaluation is large scale and will need to be carried out quickly, there is no scope for carrying this out either in house or through the use of temporary staff. Measuring the success of the Working Neighbourhoods Strategy is especially important in light of the current economic climate. As the above options would affect the programme's effectiveness in measuring success and are therefore not recommended.	
Is this a “Key Decision” as defined in the Constitution? Yes	Relevant Review Committee: Regeneration and Community
Is it included in the Forward Plan? No	

Report of Chief Executive

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Working Neighbourhoods Strategy sets out the proposed approach to the allocation of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund. This report requests Cabinet approval to seek consultants to independently set baselines and evaluate the programme and its projects identified to deliver the Strategy.

2. Description of Decision

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to approve the use of consultants above £100,000 to independently set baselines and evaluate the Working Neighbourhood Strategy programme and projects as per the Appendix to the Procurement Procedure Rules (Section 7, Part 4 of the Constitution).

3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 Sunderland has been allocated £30.1 million of the national £1.5 billion Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF), to enable it to contribute to the government's drive to reduce long term unemployment and benefit dependency now and in the future in our the City's most disadvantaged communities.
- 3.2 The Working Neighbourhoods Fund is a new dedicated fund to develop more concentrated, concerted approaches to getting people in the most deprived areas of England back to work.
- 3.3 The Working Neighbourhoods Strategy sets out the proposed approach to the allocation of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund through Assisting People into Work and Boosting Enterprise.

4. Current Position

- 4.1 Cabinet approved the Working Neighbourhoods Strategy in December 2008.
- 4.2 Within the Strategy, commissioning requirements were established that would require the use of consultants, of which one was of a value exceeding £100,000, specifically to seek suitable experienced evaluators to evaluate the programme and component projects to the total value not to exceed £350,000.
- 4.3 The evaluation project is central to the management of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund without which the evaluation elements of the Strategy would not be able to proceed. A full independent evaluation of programmes and projects funded through Working Neighbourhoods Fund is vital to assess whether or not interventions are working and in the cases where they are found not to be working, to ensure that action can be taken to stop funding or make recommendations for action to improve performance.

- 4.4 Cabinet is requested to approve the use of consultants in line with the Appendix to the Procurement Procedure Rules (Section 7, Part 4 of the Constitution).

5. **Reasons for the Decision**

- 5.1 The consultancy project is central to the successful monitoring and evaluation of the Working Neighbourhoods Strategy.

6. **Alternative Options**

- 6.1 Without Cabinet agreement for the use of consultants, it would not be possible to independently set baselines and evaluate the programme or projects within it. Although not required as a condition of grant, good practice shows that independent evaluation of the impact of programmes and the projects that make them up is central to ensuring effective future delivery.
- 6.2 Evaluations could be carried out internally, but this would prejudice the independent nature of the evaluation and as such the credibility of the findings. Similarly as the evaluation is large scale and will need to be carried out quickly, there is no scope for carrying this out either in house or through the use of temporary staff.
- 6.3 Measuring the success of the Working Neighbourhoods Strategy is especially important in light of the current economic climate. As the above options would affect the programme's effectiveness in measuring success and are therefore not recommended.

7. **Relevant Considerations / Consultations**

- 7.1 The City Treasurer and City Solicitor have been consulted and their comments are contained in the body of this report.

8. **Glossary**

NRF – Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
WNF – Working Neighbourhoods Fund
WNS – Working Neighbourhoods Strategy

9. **Background Papers**

The Working Neighbourhoods Strategy
DWP – The Working Neighbourhoods Fund November 2007
Sunderland For a Better Future...The Sunderland Strategy 2008-25
Regional Economic Strategy 'Leading the way' 2006
Local Area Agreement 2008 - 2011