CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT CARE, COMMUNITIES AND HOUSING

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REFERENCE

AREA BOARD FUNDING 2013/14

Purpose of Report

1. To provide clear and simple policy guidance to the Area Boards on the use of the delegated grants budget 2013/14.

2. To recommend that pursuant to the budget agreed by the Council, the area boards are provided with funding as described below:

    A. a capital grants budget allocated to the 20 community areas using a formula based on population, deprivation and sparsity; and

    B. a revenue allocation to support Community Area Partnerships and/or community-led planning activities.

    C. a smaller revenue allocation to support the Area Board's special events and/or local activities.

    D. a capital allocation to support digital literacy projects

3. To revise the Area Boards budget allocations to reflect the recent change to capital funding approved by the Council - as set out in Appendix 1 (attached)

Background

4. Since the establishment of area boards in June 2009, councillors and area board managers have strived to make improvements in terms of how area boards can distribute their budget (excluding the proportion allocated to Community Area Partnerships).

5. A small group was established, made up from Councillor Christopher Williams and officers to review, revise and improve (where necessary), the area board funding criteria and processes.

6. The Localism Bill places emphasis on community and voluntary sector involvement and it was considered important that area boards continued to reflect this when considering the funding opportunities and criteria for 2013/14.

7. The majority of area board funding is managed by community area managers who will continue to make recommendations to the area boards in line with approved criteria. All decisions are made by the unitary members of the area

board, frequently in consultation with their wider membership and the community.

8. Area board funding should be linked to local priorities, including those identified in their Community Plan, Local Area Joint Strategic Assessment and any other community based consultative work. Area Boards are encouraged to identify specific project areas to receive funding in 2013/14.

9. Councillor/Area Board led projects, introduced in 2010/11 enable councillors to pursue and resolve 'sticky' issues' brought to their attention through the Community Issues process or other community priority setting processes. This funding is not to be used to provide a local subsidy to council services or make up for budget shortfalls.

10. There is an increasing expectation that funding applications can be made on-line and with this in mind a single entry on-line process is being developed for use by all applicants in 2013/14. It is accepted, however that support may be required by some applicants and paper versions will also still be made available.

11. Since the inception of Area Boards in 2009/10, the council has agreed the following funding of Area Board Grants:

    - 2009/10 - £0.750m
    - 2010/11 - £1 million
    - 2011/12 - £1 million
    - 2012/13 - £1 million

    Historically the funding was provided through the Council's base revenue budget, however with pressures on this budget, the majority of the area board budget will be capital in 2013/14. The £1 million will be allocated across the 20 Area Boards based on population, scarcity and deprivation factors. Area Boards have been able to carry forward unspent grant budget at the end of each financial year, providing additional budget in the following year above the £1 million. This will continue in 2013/14.

12. In adopting the budget for 2013/14, the Council approved a change to the funding for the Area Boards. The discretionary grants budget delegated to the Boards is now funded from capital. This necessitates some changes to the grants scheme and amendments to the budget allocations process. The proposed budget allocations are detailed at Appendix 1.

Main Considerations

13. Funding

    In 2013/14 the funding available to area boards will be largely capital and this will impact on the type and range of funding applications received this year. Revenue funding will be limited, the majority being allocated towards Community Area Partnership operational costs.

14. Improvements to the Community Area Grants Process

The application process and funding criteria for area board funding has been revised (see Appendix 2), based on observations received from councillors, officers and applicants during 2012/13. These changes seek to improve the application process for those seeking funding, assist consideration of applications by officers while reducing the administrative processes and provides clarity for decision making by area board councillors.

The greatest change is the introduction of a single on-line application process. It is anticipated that this will simplify the process for applicants as well as ensuring efficiencies within the area board's team. In making this move to an on-line application the onus will be placed on the applicant to honestly represent their group/organisation with supporting information being made available for inspection by council officers upon request.   Like last year councillors will rely on community area managers to ensure that only eligible applications are considered by area boards.

15. Wiltshire Online Funding

During 2013/14 each area board will receive £1,500 capital funding for digital literacy grants aimed making the elderly, disabled and low income families more confident in using technology. The maximum award will be £500 which may be matched by the area board and this will be processed using the Community Area Grant criteria and process.

16. Small Grants

The Small Grant scheme introduced in 2012/13 will cease - evidence has shown that it was not as widely used as originally anticipated. This change will not disadvantage applicants as the threshold for match funding has been set at £500 with a simplified application process below this level. This should enable the Boards to continue to support small scale projects.

17. Community Area Grants

In 2013/14 councillors are encouraged to support projects which demonstrate a link to a local priority such as the Community Plan, Joint Needs Assessment of other community identified priority. Area boards may wish to agree and publicise their specific funding priorities for 2013/14.

Some minor changes have been made to ensure clarity of the criteria and includes that no funding will be given to schools for curriculum projects.

In 2013/14 the maximum amount of unmatched funding available from an area board will be £500. Council funding previously distributed by Community First has ceased and in 2013/14 village halls will approach the area board for funding.

18. Legacy Funding

In support of the Olympic and Paralympic legacy, in 2013/14 the Area Boards

will be encouraged to support applications that encourage young people and people with disabilities to become more actively involved in sports, outdoor activities, recreation, arts and volunteering.

19. <u>Grants to Community Area Partnerships</u>

Over the last four years the Council has continued to help Community Area Partnerships with revenue funding to support their operational costs. Revenue funding will be made available in 2013/14 to enable this support to continue in line with the Community Area Partnership Funding Agreement.

20. <u>Support for Community and Voluntary Groups</u>

It is important to acknowledge the emphasis on the Localism agenda when considering the funding criteria for 2013/14 and support the ethos of volunteering and community involvement. With this in mind area board funding should be encouraged from and awarded to these groups.

21. <u>Area Board Projects and Councillor Led Initiatives</u>

The purpose of this funding enables councillors/area boards to resolve 'sticky' issues' brought to their attention through the Community Issues process or other community priority setting processes. This funding is not to be used to provide a local subsidy to council services or make up for budget shortfalls or where it is possible for them to be resolved through use of the Community Area Grants scheme. Minor revisions have been made to the criteria contained in Appendix 3.

22. <u>Town and Parish Councils & statutory service providers</u>

There will be no change to the guidance in respect to funding to parish/town councils or statutory service providers. Area boards should not consider applications from town and parish councils or statutory service providers for purposes that relate to the normal duties, services or activities of such bodies (such as those costs which should be funded through the parish precept) . However, this will not preclude bids from such bodies for a projects or scheme delivered in partnership with a local community group that has a benefit to the wider community area and/or delivers new community assets for the area concerned.

<u>Environmental Impact of the Proposal</u>

The decentralisation of decision making and community governance arrangements is in accordance with the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for Wiltshire 2007-2016.

<u>Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal</u>

Improvements to the funding process adopted by the Area Boards should ensure that it is open and transparent and as accessible to the community of Wiltshire.

<u>Risk Assessment</u>

The risks associated with making minor changes to the process and procedures to the distribution of Area Board budget, are minimal and outweigh the risk to retaining the current scheme, which is causing minor irritation and confusion. The Area Boards grants system was subject of Audit Review in 2011 with no significant issues raised and it will be reviewed again during 2013.

Financial Implications

In 2013/14 the proposals set out in this report can be funded within the budgets approved from the Council.

Legal Implications

In developing the area board funding criteria for 2013/14 officers have sought to demonstrate being fair open and transparent and complying with principles of best value in all grants awarded by the area board.

Options Considered

The group considered a number of options to bring about the suggestions contained in this report, the majority of which arose from user feedback.

Conclusion

The adoption of the recommendations set out in this report will ensure improved mechanisms for the distribution of the area board budget and in so doing advance the satisfaction levels of those engaging with the process as well as providing greater opportunities for councillors to enhance their community leadership role.

Proposals

1. The emphasis in 2013/14 will be that the Area Board funding will support volunteering, community involvement and addressing community priorities.

2. In 2013/14 the Area Boards grant scheme will be restricted to capital projects that deliver enduring community infrastructure improvements – such as new equipment, facilities or environmental improvements. Guidance will be provided to applicants on eligibility.

3. Area Boards will be provided with revenue and capital budget allocations as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

4. Area boards should adhere to the 2013/14 funding criteria.

5. Area Boards will be encouraged to develop ways of linking grant funding to locally agreed priorities emerging from the Joint Strategic Assessment, the local community plan or other relevant local evidence

6. An on-line funding application process will be introduced for all applicants.

7.   In 2013/14 up to £500 unmatched funding will be available to support small local projects. All applications for projects exceeding £500 will be expected to provide match funding (either in cash or in kind) to the value of 50% of the total requested - advice will be provided to applicants on the calculation of 'in kind' contributions.

8.   In 2013/14 applications for village hall funding will come to the area board for consideration.

9.   In 2013/14 applications specifically for Wiltshire Online will be considered, with an £1,500 being allocated to each area board and distributed through the community area grants process.

10. In support of the Olympic legacy, in 2013/14 the Area Boards will particularly encourage and welcome applications that encourage young people and people with disabilities to become more actively involved in sports, outdoor activities, recreation, arts and volunteering.

11. Community Area Managers will provide area boards with officer recommendations in respect to all funding applications, with the exception of councillors led projects, where project information should be provided.

12. There will be no change to the guidance in respect to funding to parish/town councils or statutory service providers. Area boards will not consider applications from town and parish councils or statutory service providers for purposes that relate to the normal duties, services or activities of such bodies.

13. The Area Board Projects/Councillor Led Initiatives process is used by councillors to enable them to tackle 'sticky' community issues and projects and initiatives which have been identified by the community as priorities. It should not be used to fill gaps where there are service shortfalls or where it is possible for them to be resolved through use of the Area Grant funding scheme.

14. The funding process and criteria for the distribution of area board funding outlined in Appendices 2- 3 of this report are approved.

Reason for Proposals

These proposals seek to ensure the smooth delivery of Area Boards grants through the adoption of clear and simple funding policy, criteria and guidance to ensure an easily accessible and transparent process for both the community and voluntary sector and members of the Area Boards and that greater emphasis is put on activities and projects led by the community and voluntary groups.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Area Board budget allocations 2013/14

Appendix 2: Community Area Grant Funding Criteria and Information

Appendix 3: Area Board/Councillor Led Projects - Funding Criteria