

LOCAL COMMITTEE FUNDING PRIORITIES

Agenda Item 6a

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Background Papers:- None

Financial Implications:- None arising directly out of this report

Equalities Implications:- None arising directly out of this report

Legal Implications:- None arising directly out of this report but note paragraph 3 of report in respect of future plans

Risks: If funding is not allocated within a reasonable timescale, there is a risk that Local Committees will not use all of their funding within the current financial year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent Review of Decision Making examined the Local Committee funding scheme and it concluded that the funding available to Local Committees ought to be directed to local priorities rather than awarded through a grant system. Each Local Committee has been allocated capital and revenue funding for the financial year 2009/10 and now has to decide how to allocate this funding in light of the outcome of the review.

This report provides suggestions on how Local Committees could approach this issue.

DECISION

To determine the approach for identifying local priorities and allocating funding for the financial year 2009/10.

1. Background and Introduction

During the Review of Decision Making, it was noted that there had been benefits to the funding scheme with a wide range of projects being funded to address a local need. This had also enabled Members a further opportunity to work closely with their community as all applications needed support from their ward member. Notwithstanding this, the Local Government Reform Sub-Group took the view that the funding should be aligned to local priorities thus providing a sound financial framework. The Sub-Group did not consider that this would necessarily preclude Local Committees from allocating a small proportion of its funding to applications from the community but it would assist Local Committees in addressing local priorities.

This paper has been prepared so that Local Committees can explore and consider how they might identify local priorities and having done this, how they might best use their funding to deliver on those priorities. This would need to be done within a reasonably tight timescale so that each Local Committees can begin to use its funding for this financial year. It is anticipated that each Local Committee will be in a position to make decisions on their funding in July.

2. Identifying Local Priorities – the Approach

Local priorities should be developed using a ‘bottom up’ approach to ensure that the views, needs and aspirations of local people are reflected. Consultation with local people should be carried out at an early stage and where possible engagement should be through the ward member. In this regard it is noted that ward members are already actively engaging with their local areas through ward or telephone surgeries, casework or attending community interest group meetings. These methods will remain effective in identifying local concerns or issues but there are many other ways in which the ward member can engage with their community.

Local Committees can also enhance and support the ward member’s engagement role by organising local consultation events to encourage local people to give their views on the issues that affect them. In this respect, the Local Committee’s attention is drawn to the draft Annual Plan for 2009/10 and in particular to a project titled “Local Committee Consultation Event”. A paper on this project is currently being prepared by the Locality and Rural Co-Ordinator and will be presented to Local Committees in the next cycle of meetings.

For the time being however, Local Committees will need to consider to what extent they can involve local people in identifying priorities for 2009/10. Given the time constraints, it is suggested that we utilise existing information and that each Member should, if possible, identify upto 3 current key issues from their ward. This could then be supplemented with information held by officers from the following sources (area based extracts):-

- Results of Local Development Framework and Sustainable Community Strategy Joint Consultation;
- Parish Plans;
- Key priorities identified from the Parish Evening in March; and
- Priorities identified at previous Local Committee meetings.

By taking this approach we will be ensuring that each local priority is evidence based, relevant and has involved input from local people.

Having identified all the possible priorities, the Local Committee can then categorise these into priority areas and then discuss and agree what actions need to be taken to meet the priority. These actions would then be pulled together into an Action Plan and the funding could be allocated to that plan.

In order for this work to take place, it is being suggested that a separate action planning event be held for all Members. Ideally the event would take place in one session with Members working in their Local Committee groupings with the assistance of facilitators. It is however acknowledged that this may not secure attendance of all Members and each Local Committee is being asked to consider whether they would prefer a single session attended by all Members of the Council or a separate session for each Local Committee. These sessions would need to be held before the next cycle of meetings. If Members indicate a preference for a single session, we have identified 19th June as a date when the Council Chamber would be available for the event which would take place during the day. If this was not supported, then a single session would be conducted in the evening on a date identified by the Local Committee.

The format for the event would enable Members to identify and set priorities, reach agreement on actions to achieve the priorities and give consideration as to how the funding could be allocated. Consideration could also be given to whether any of the funding should be allocated for applications by the community. If this was approved, then each Local Committee would need to determine the conditions of any funding (ie. Match funding, capped sums, etc) and what role the ward member would play in the funding process.

The event would take the form of facilitated workshops with the outcome being that each Local Committee will have developed a draft Action Plan that can be formally approved at their meetings in July.

3. Process for 2010/11

The duty to involve came into legal effect on 1st April this year and it requires local authorities to inform, consult and involve local persons in the exercise of its functions. In meeting this duty, local authorities should be able to demonstrate that:-

- They understand the interests and requirements of the local community;
- They use their understanding to ensure information, consultation and involvement opportunities are provided on the right issues, to the right people and are accessible to those that they are trying to reach;
- They have an appropriate corporate approach to providing information and consulting and involving and that they co-ordinate their engagement activities with partners where appropriate; and
- Local people feel that the local authority provides relevant, timely and accessible opportunities and will know how to get involved either directly or through their ward member.

The involvement of local people and local stakeholders will be a key feature of any future process for identifying local priorities. Local Committees can play an important role in helping the Council meet the duty as can the ward member whose community leadership role will enable the Council to engage and reach local people more effectively in order to understand local needs and to respond appropriately.

The process that the Local Committee adopts will therefore be of vital importance and Members will have the opportunity to give this greater consideration at its meeting in July.

