

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM TASK GROUP

19 July 2016

Present: Councillor S Cavinder (Chair)
Councillors K Hastrick, A Joynes, R Martins and M Mills

Officers: Head of Democracy and Governance
Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

1 **Election of Chair**

Councillor Cavinder was elected Chair.

2 **Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

3 **Disclosures of interest (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

4 **Scope of review and background papers**

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the task group had been proposed by the Head of Democracy and Governance in conjunction with the Mayor. She advised that the task group had been agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March and the membership was approved at its June meeting.

Providing some context to the review, the Head of Democracy and Governance outlined the change from Area Committees to Neighbourhood Forums in 2008. This had been in recognition of the changing nature of members' engagement in their local communities, specifically the reduction in the number of residents' meetings and the desire to provide more practical assistance for small projects.

An annual Community Engagement budget of £5,000 per ward had been established, to be divided between meeting and project activities according to individual ward requirements. This amount had been reduced to £2,500 in 2011 following a review of actual expenditure levels.

The Head of Democracy and Governance suggested that there were a number of important issues which should be reviewed by the task group:

- funding criteria and guidance
- operation of the Neighbourhood Forums, particularly the uses to which funds were put and the bodies receiving those funds
- historic overview of actual spend
- future uses for the funding
- ensuring value of money.

5 **Next steps**

There followed a wide ranging debate about the issues members of the task group would like to draw into the review. These included establishing:

- the purpose of the funds
- whether the current funding levels were sufficient
- how the funds were advertised and whether current practices optimised local engagement
- changing the application process, specifically requiring recipient bodies to apply for funding to ward councillors.

In addition, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that the task group might consider alternative ways of organising the budget allocation e.g., moving to a single pot of money, or merging individual budgets into a single pot of money after an agreed period of time during the municipal year.

Task group members considered that the views of other councillors should also be sought through the use of a survey. Recognising that there were a number of new councillors, it was proposed that the survey should have both a retrospective and prospective focus to encourage fresh thinking.

The task group agreed that this should be a swift review.

It was proposed that any recommendations should be considered at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 November, to enable the report to be on Cabinet's agenda on 5 December.

It was agreed that the following actions should be taken:

- officers to undertake a historic review of previous spend. This should date from the decrease in ward funds from £5,000 to £2,500 in 2011

- officers to review other funding schemes. Councillors Hastrick and Joynes agreed to assist by providing an overview of their experiences with Hertfordshire County Council funding. They would also speak to other “twin hatted” county councillors to see if they had similar schemes in their wards
- officers to undertake a survey of members’ views on the application for, and use of, Community Engagement budgets. This should be an on-line survey with hard copies available to members on request. Members of the task group agreed that it would be important for them to encourage survey returns from their colleagues.

A draft survey would be sent to task group members on 12 August seeking comments by 19 August. The survey would go live after the August Bank Holiday.

Members should contact the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer with any additional ideas.

6 **Date of next meetings**

Wednesday 7 September at 6pm.

Any further meeting dates would be agreed on 7 September.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.00 pm
and finished at 6.45 pm