

Cabinet (extract)

5 December 2016

Present:

Mayor Dorothy Thornhill	(Strategic partnerships/external relationships and community safety)
Cllr Peter Taylor	(Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Client Services)
Cllr Karen Collett	(Portfolio Holder for Community)
Cllr Stephen Johnson	(Portfolio Holder for Property and Housing)
Cllr Iain Sharpe	(Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development)
Cllr Mark Watkin	(Portfolio Holder for Resources and Customer Service)

Also present:

Councillor Nigel Bell (Labour)
Councillor Steve Cavinder (agenda item 54)
Councillor Kareen Hastrick

Officers:

Managing Director
Shared Director of Finance
Head of Democracy and Governance
Client Manager – Waste and Recycling
Committee and Scrutiny Officer (agenda item 54)
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (IM)

54. Neighbourhood Forum Task Group – Final Report

Cabinet received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer, including the final report and recommendations of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group.

Councillor Cavinder, Chair of the task group, attended the meeting and introduced the

report. Councillor Cavinder explained that the cross-party task group had been asked to review the operation of Neighbourhood Forums, particularly the use of Neighbourhood Forum budgets. During its investigations, the task group had sought information about historic spend since 2011, how other local authorities carried out similar schemes and had canvassed the views of all councillors using a survey.

Welcoming the task group's report, the Mayor questioned the rationale behind the recommendation to increase the funds available to each ward from £2,500 to £3,000 per annum. Councillor Cavinder explained that it had been felt that the amount had not been increased for some time and that the higher amount would be easier to distribute in split wards.

Councillor Watkin welcomed the proposal to introduce a more formal procedure for gaining feedback from funding recipients. In a further clarification from Councillor Cavinder, it was explained that this proposal had received strong support from the task group and could provide greater clarity about the benefits of the funds to local communities.

The meeting considered the proposal to pool funds at a certain point in the year. Councillor Bell commented that there were some reservations amongst councillors about this idea. Councillor Cavinder explained that the recommendation was only to consider the feasibility of the proposal at this stage. The driver had been to prevent funds being lost; under current arrangements, towards the end of the financial year wards sometimes opted to allocate tranches of money to, often larger, charities. Agreeing that it was important that the funds should benefit smaller, grass roots groups, the Mayor queried whether it might be possible for budgets to be carried over to the next financial year.

Councillor Sharpe considered that the task group had addressed a number of fundamental issues, and had agreed some useful recommendations, including the proposal to rename and relaunch Neighbourhood Forums. However, there remained some questions to be resolved, particularly around the information required from councillors in the processing and completion of funding applications. Concurring with this point, Councillor Taylor suggested that councillors should play a central part in deciding how to progress recommendations e, f and g of the officer's report [concerning the review of the guidelines, the feasibility of pooling funds after a certain date and of requiring recipients to apply for funds directly].

Drawing discussions to a close, the Mayor thanked Councillor Cavinder for his chairmanship of the task group. She proposed that a small working group be convened to consider the task group's recommendations in more detail. This should comprise the Mayor, Councillor Collett and the Head of Democracy and Governance, together with the chair of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group, Councillor Cavinder.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet approves the formation of a small working group, comprising the Mayor, Councillor Collett and the Head of Democracy and Governance, together with the chair of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group, Councillor Cavinder, to consider the task group's recommendations.