

**Working Group on the Recommendations of the
Neighbourhood Forum Task Group**

Agreed actions

23 January 2017

Present: Mayor Dorothy Thornhill
Councillor Karen Collett (Portfolio Holder for Community)
Councillor Stephen Cavinder (Chair of the Task Group)

Also present: Head of Democracy and Governance
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (IM)

The working group was convened after the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group's final report was presented to Cabinet on 5 December to consider the proposed recommendations in greater detail.

Looking at the recommendations, the working group agreed the following:

General

- Cabinet would need to approve the proposed increase in the Neighbourhood Forum funds to £3,000 per annum. It was noted that this increase had not been included in the 2017/18 budget which was being considered by Council on 24 January.
- The focus of Neighbourhood Forum funds should be local organisations promoting grass roots groups and activities, rather than larger national charities with other funding streams at their disposal.
- There was strong support for using the council's communications team and publications, for example About Watford, to promote the Neighbourhood Forum budgets. This would enable as wide an audience as possible to learn about, and apply for, funds. Any promotional articles should include contact details for the relevant ward councillors.

Guidelines

- In addition to the review of the guidelines proposed by the Task Group, clarifications should be given on:
 - expenditure during the purdah period (see below)
 - rules regarding donations to groups organising treats and outings
 - retrospective expenditure.
- On the question of proportionality, it was agreed that the funds should not be used to subsidise the activities of formal, large charities. Nor should they be used to fund individuals.

Process

- In future, all three ward councillors should formally agree funding proposals before being submitted to the Head of Democracy and Governance for approval (under current rules, only two signatures are required).
- There was no support for funds to be pooled after a certain date. Instead, officers should investigate the possibility of allowing Neighbourhood Forum funds to be carried over to the next financial year. This would enable viable projects, which could not be arranged within the appropriate timescale, to proceed. However, projects would need to be justified on a case by case basis and wards would be encouraged to spend their funds in the current financial year.

The working group noted that the Head of Democracy and Governance advised ward councillors to spend their Neighbourhood Forum funds prior to purdah commencing. This was to avoid accusations of the inappropriate use of public money during the campaigning period. It was agreed that new guidance on this matter should be provided for councillors.

- Ward councillors should continue to complete, and be the contact point for, Neighbourhood Forum applications, rather than requiring recipients to apply for funds directly.

Value for money

- It was important that wards should seek to minimise administration costs for meetings, utilising the Council's communications team and social media options wherever possible.

- There was strong support for requiring recipients to provide feedback questionnaires on their completed projects. This should include an assessment by ward councillors about whether such events or organisations should be considered again in the future.