

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 6 March 2017
Report of: Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer
Title: Neighbourhood Forums – follow up to Cabinet discussions on 5 December 2016

1.0 **Summary**

- 1.1 Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group at its meeting on 5 December 2016.
- 1.2 At that meeting it was agreed that the Mayor would convene a small working group to consider the task group's recommendations in more detail. The working group comprised the Mayor, Councillor Collett, and the Head of Democracy and Governance, together with the chair of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group, Councillor Cavinder.
- 1.3 The working group met on 23 January 2017. This report outlines the working group's conclusions and seeks Cabinet's agreement to the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group's amended recommendations.

2.0 **Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group's recommendations as amended by the working group:

General

1. Continue Neighbourhood Forum funds and increase the amount to £3,000 per ward with effect from May 2018.
2. Focus future funding on local organisations and charities promoting grass roots groups and activities, rather than larger national charities with other funding streams at their disposal.
3. Rename "Neighbourhood Forums", "Neighbourhood Locality Funds".
4. Relaunch the funds using the Council's communications team, providing links to all relevant information on the Council's website including contact details

for the appropriate ward councillors.

Guidelines

1. To approve the revised guidelines and protocol attached as appendices 3 and 4 clarifying:
 - how often recipients can receive funding (normally not more than once a year, however the type of project, rather than the organisation, should be the guide)
 - proportionality criteria (including guidance stating that funds should not be used to subsidise the activities of larger, formal charities, nor for individuals)
 - declaration of members' interests
 - expenditure during the purdah period
 - rules regarding donations to groups organising treats and outings
 - retrospective expenditure.

Process

1. Require all three ward councillors to formally agree funding proposals before being submitted to the Head of Democracy and Governance for approval (unless one of them has a conflict of interest) when a minimum of two must agree.
2. Officers to investigate the possibility of allowing Neighbourhood Forum funds to be carried over to the next financial year. Projects would need to be justified on a case by case basis.

Value for money

1. Encourage wards to minimise their administration costs for meetings in order to seek the most cost effective means e.g., utilising the Council's communications team and social media options, particularly in regard to advertising meetings.
2. Require recipients to complete a feedback questionnaire on their completed projects. Any funds not used for the specific purpose granted should be returned to Watford Borough Council. Any questionnaire should include an assessment by ward councillors about whether such events or organisations

should be considered again in the future.

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Report approved by: Carol Chen, Head of Democracy and Governance

3.0 Detailed proposal

- 3.1 In February 2016, the Head of Democracy and Governance, in conjunction with the Mayor, submitted a scrutiny proposal requesting a review of the Neighbourhood Forums, including the funding criteria.
- 3.2 A cross-party task group was convened comprising Councillors Cavinder (elected Chair), Hastrick, Joynes, Martins and Mills. It met on three occasions between July and September 2016. As part of the review, the views of all members were canvassed using a survey. Feedback from the survey helped inform the task group's recommendations.
- 3.3 The report and recommendations of the task group were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 5 December 2016.
- 3.4 Cabinet members welcomed the task group's report, which had addressed a number of fundamental issues and concluded some useful recommendations (attached at Appendix 1). However they had reservations about some of the recommendations, particularly the proposal to pool funds at a certain point in the year, and the guidance for councillors concerning information required in the processing and completion of funding applications.
- 3.5 In order to progress discussions, Cabinet agreed that a small working group made up of the Mayor, the Portfolio Holder for Community, Councillor Collett, and the Head of Democracy and Governance, together with the chair of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group, Councillor Cavinder, should meet to consider the task group's recommendations in more detail.
- 3.6 The working group met on 23 January (a note of the discussions is attached at Appendix 2). Looking at the task group's recommendations, the working group made a number of amendments and clarifications. These sought to reflect the views expressed by Cabinet and to ensure that the funds remained focussed on local organisations promoting grass roots groups and activities.
- 3.7 The working group suggested some changes to the task group's proposals:

- additional clarification was required in the guidelines regarding:
 - expenditure during the purdah period
 - rules regarding donations to groups organising treats and outings
 - retrospective expenditure
- Both the guidelines and the protocol have been reviewed and are attached as appendices 3 and 4 for approval
- funds should not be used to subsidise the activities of large, formal charities. Nor should they be used to fund individuals
- 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)
- removal of the proposal to pool funds after a certain date. Instead officers should investigate the possibility of allowing Neighbourhood Forum funds to be carried over to the next financial year. 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
- ward councillors should continue to complete, and be the contact point for, Neighbourhood Forum applications, rather than requiring recipients to apply for funds directly
- feedback questionnaires should include an assessment by ward councillors about whether such events or organisations should be considered again in the future.

3.8 A complete list of the revised recommendations is reproduced in paragraph 2.1 above for Cabinet's approval.

4.0 **Implications**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 The Head of Finance (shared services) comments that the increase in funds proposed in December takes effect from 2018 – this will need to be a growth bid in the 2018/19 budget setting process.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained within the body of the report.

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 Councillors are reminded that any venues used for meetings need to be accessible for all residents.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Recommendations of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group
- Appendix 2 – Working Group on the Recommendation of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group: Agreed Actions
- Appendix 3 – Guidance on Use of Funds
- Appendix 4 – Neighbourhood Locality Fund Protocol
- Appendix A – Project form
- Appendix B – Meeting form
- Appendix C – Feedback questionnaire

Background Papers

No additional papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None.