

Review Update

Review:	Neighbourhood Forum
Committee/Task Group:	Neighbourhood Forum Task Group
Committee/Task Group Chair:	Councillor Stephen Cavinder
Final report published:	24 November 2016
Cabinet response:	5 December 2016 and 6 March 2017
Scrutiny consideration of response:	23 March 2017

General

Recommendation:	Continue Neighbourhood Forum funds and increase the amount to £3,000 per ward.
Cabinet decision/response:	Agreed but amended as follows – Continue Neighbourhood Forum funds and increase the amount to £3,000 per ward with effect from May 2018.
Latest update:	The funds have continued and the budget was increased for 2018/19.

Recommendation:	Focus future funding on local organisations, groups and charities.
Cabinet decision/response:	Agreed but amended as follows – Focus future funding on local organisations, groups and charities promoting grass roots groups and activities, rather than larger national charities with other funding streams at their disposal.
Latest update:	In 2017/18 no wards gave any funds to national / large charities.

Recommendation:	Rename “Neighbourhood Forums” to “Neighbourhood Locality Funds”
Cabinet decision/response:	Agreed
Latest update:	The fund was renamed with effect from 1 April 2017.

Recommendation:	Relaunch the funds using the council’s Communications team, providing links to all relevant forms and information on the council’s website.
Cabinet decision/response:	Agreed but amended as follows – Relaunch the funds using the council’s Communications team, providing links to all relevant forms and information on the council’s website including contact details for the appropriate ward councillors.
Latest update:	<p>An article was placed in the summer 2017 edition of About Watford.</p> <p>A section has been set up on the council’s website which provides information about the Neighbourhood Locality Funds, contact details for ward councillors and up to date information about the expenditure by ward for the current and previous year.</p> <p>A regular update is provided in the Members’ Bulletin including any important deadlines and links to the information on the council’s website.</p>

Guidelines

Recommendation:	<p>The Head of Democracy and Governance to review guidelines to clarify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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• Declaration of members' interests.
Cabinet decision/response:	<p>Agreed the revised guidelines and protocols clarifying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
Latest update:	<p>All councillors were informed about the new guidelines and protocols for the Neighbourhood Locality Funds and provided with the link to the documents on the council's intranet.</p> <p>Through the Members' Bulletin councillors are reminded when purdah is due to start and deadlines for applications near the end of the financial year.</p>

Process

Recommendation:	Officers to investigate the feasibility of allocating money to individual wards to spend by a given date, e.g. mid-December. After this point any remaining funds should be pooled so that all wards can bid for available funds. At the end of the year, any remaining money in this pool should be allocated to the chairman's chosen charities.
Cabinet decision/response:	The original recommendation was not agreed. Cabinet replaced it with the following – 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.
Latest update:	There were no applications to carry funds over to the 2018/19 neighbourhood locality budgets. As indicated each request to carry funding over to the next financial year would be considered on a case by case basis. The guidelines were updated to include reference to potential requests to carry forward funds and the type of circumstance that may apply. Any application to carry over funds, including an explanation why this would be required, has to be submitted to the Director of Finance for approval.

Recommendation:	Officers to look into the feasibility of requiring recipients to apply for funds directly, preferably using online forms.
Cabinet decision/response:	During the working group set up by Cabinet at its first meeting to consider the recommendations, the members present felt that ward councillors should continue to complete and be the contact point for applications, rather than requiring recipients to apply for funds direct.
Latest update:	This has not been taken forward as it was not agreed by Cabinet.

Recommendation:	-
Cabinet decision/response:	Cabinet agreed a decision which was not a task group recommendation. 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).
Latest update:	This took effect from April 2017 and is referred to in the guidelines.

Value for money

Recommendation:	Encourage wards to minimise their administration costs for meetings in order to seek the most cost effective means, particularly in regard to advertising the meetings.
Cabinet decision/response:	Agreed but amended as follows – 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.
Latest update:	During 2017/18 only Central ward arranged some meetings that required some neighbourhood locality funding. The funding was required for the hire of the hall. If a ward wishes to hold a meeting councillors will be reminded to consider contacting the communications team to help with advertising, including through the use of social media.

Recommendation:	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.
Cabinet response:	Agreed but amended as follows – 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.
Latest update:	<p>A questionnaire was developed by Democratic Services and placed on the council's intranet for councillors to access. It includes a section to be completed by the organisation that received the funds.</p> <p>Councillors were reminded throughout the year that the evaluation form needed to be completed. A further reminder was sent to individual wards where the forms had not been received by Democratic Services.</p> <p>At the time of writing the Neighbourhood Locality annual report for Council held on 10 July, Democratic Services had received evaluation forms from five out of 12 wards.</p>