

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 March 2017

Report of Cabinet 6 March 2017

Cabinet met on 6 March 2017. The minutes are published on the Council's website.

The following Members were present at the meeting:

Present: Mayor Dorothy Thornhill
Councillor Peter Taylor
Councillor Karen Collett
Councillor Stephen Johnson
Councillor Iain Sharpe
Councillor Mark Watkin

Also present: Councillor Nigel Bell
Councillor Kareen Hastrick

The following was agreed:

82 Neighbourhood Forums – follow up to Cabinet discussions on 5 December 2016

A report was received from the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer following a meeting of a working group set up by Cabinet which was made up of the Mayor, Councillor Collett and the Head of Democracy and Governance, together with the chair of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group, Councillor Cavinder.

The Mayor introduced the report and commented on the recommendations. She described how the working group had tried to avoid any situation when a councillor in a ward was isolated if they were the only party member in that ward, therefore it was recommended that all three councillors signed off on the funding. The Mayor also commented that it was not a fund for supporting big charities it was meant to help ward councillors to do little things in their ward for small local groups.

Councillor Collett highlighted that currently funding was given to organisations but the council did not get any feedback from the groups. Under the new proposals the councillors would be doing an assessment about how the money was spent and whether it was well received. There would be more advertising on the council's

website to direct residents' enquiries to ward councillors. The original task group had done a good piece of work; the working group had just tightened up on the guidelines and protocols.

Cabinet discussed the issue of members' interests in applications and the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer confirmed that if a councillor had an interest in a group which would receive funding then it would be acceptable for only two councillors within the ward to sign the application.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Cavinder for chairing the original scrutiny task group on neighbourhood forums.

RESOLVED –

Cabinet approves 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:
 - o 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)
 - o proportionality criteria (including guidance stating that funds should not be used to subsidise the activities of larger, formal charities, nor for individuals)

- o declaration of members' interests
- o expenditure during the purdah period
- o rules regarding donations to groups organising treats and outings
- o 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.