

Briefing Note – Ward Budgets

1. A number of Members have stated to think about whether Ward Budgets should be introduced for Members at Christchurch BC and East Dorset DC. Ward Budgets, often referred to as Neighbourhood or Locality Budgets (not to be confused with Community Budgets), are examples of small budget sums being made available to Ward Councillors to spend annually in their ward areas.
2. Typically amounts involved in Ward Budgets vary from as little as £2000 per Councillor per annum, to £10000. Some Councils, for example Westminster City Council, amalgamate the individual amounts and allow a combined sum to be used per Ward area (£46000 in the case of that Council).
3. Why have Ward Budgets? They are intended to help local councillors to demonstrate support to the community within their wards and to contribute to projects or activities that benefit the communities that they represent.
4. Operating Ward Budgets should be made as simple and flexible as possible. However since it involves expenditure of Council Tax payer's money, it is necessary to have some rules in place governing the operation. This means establishing a set of rules or guidelines on how the budget can be used by the Member.
5. What can the Ward Budgets be used for in the local area. Typically such expenditure is targeted at one off small value items of non-recurring expenditure which include:
 - Support community projects
 - Improve services or facilities in a local area
 - Promote better community relations
 - Enhance local open spaces and leisure facilities
 - Improve the local environment or appearance of an area
 - Address community safety issues
 - Provide support to a particular group that assists delivery of the Council's Corporate Objectives
6. In terms of schemes/projects that have been supported by use of Ward Budgets in other Councils areas, they have been used to assist the following, (this is not an exhaustive list):
 - Resurfacing of a playing field car park
 - Providing lighting for a youth club
 - Restoration of a community hall
 - Installing a disabled toilet in a village hall
 - Supporting a local scout group
 - Supporting a dial-a-ride
 - Purchasing cutlery and crockery for a community group
 - Purchasing village entrance signs
 - Renovating a village landmark

The funding available for Ward Budgets will be agreed as part of the budget setting process with a clear allocation of the budget to each ward member. This will be a cash limited sum.

7. Where a Member seeks to make use of the Ward Budget provision, it will be necessary for an application form to be completed by the Member and this will identify the project/scheme seeking to be supported and how much money is intended to be used to finance that activity. The application then needs to be signed off/authorised before the finance can be committed. This is usually actioned by senior officers, an appeal to the Chief Executive appears to be available under schemes already in operation. Members will need to be able to demonstrate compliance with the Code of Conduct, especially any interest declarations, when submitting application forms.
8. Members will need to appreciate that the level of support afforded by the Council into Ward Budgets will be subject to annual review through the normal budget setting process. Any budget remaining unexpended at the end of each financial year is not carried forward. This means that Members would not normally be permitted to commit to expenditure in a future year (there may be exceptional circumstances when this would be allowed).
9. Ward Budgets are not intended to replace significant initiatives which would normally be funded via the Capital Programme or the revenue budget. Aspirations for investments of this kind will still need to be considered against competing priorities.
10. All transactions will be processed through the Council's finance system.
11. A number of Councils have already chosen to operate Ward Budgets. Details of their schemes can be found from their websites and will be brought to the meeting on the 24th October 2013 for information (Councils operating such schemes are Wycombe DC, Shepway DC, Colchester BC, Eastbourne BC, Westminster City Council).

Keith Mallett

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