

Devolved Ward Budgets

Objective:

The devolved budget scheme is designed to provide councillors with a dedicated ward budget to undertake improvement works in their wards identified by, and with, their local communities.

Criteria for Spend:

- The primary use of this funding should be for one-off schemes on material work that has been identified as creating a positive impact within the ward.
- The funding can be used for projects that either enhance community facilities in the ward, work that will improve the accessibility of facilities in the ward, and/or work that will enhance the environment in the ward.

Funding and scheduling:

- Each of the nine wards has a total budget of £10,000 for the year.
- All projects must be considered, approved, implemented and paid for within the financial year 1 April to 31 March.
- When projects require scheduling and delivery by Council departments, a reasonable amount of time should be allowed to enable projects to be completed within the financial year. All internal schemes need to be submitted by no later than the end of the second week in January (for example 13 January 2012) to enable a reasonable chance of this being achieved.
- All schemes involving payment to third party groups must be finalised and submitted by the end of February to enable enough time for the scheme to be processed and payments issued by financial year end.
- The timing of some types of schemes (e.g. tree planting) will be affected by seasonal constraints, and this can be discussed with the officers at the initial planning stage.

Eligibility:

Eligible projects are where the work is to be sourced either:

Internal

- a. From within the Council's service departments or procured via relevant service officers with contractors or other authorities. In these cases, preliminary research needs to establish the full cost of the work, including administrative costs, and the viability of the project to be delivered, by ward councillors with the relevant officers in advance of making and submitting decisions for work to commence and funding to be released.
- b. When completing the request form, councillors should consider and agree a reasonable timescale for delivery of the scheme in conjunction with the relevant officer.

External

For projects that reimburse local community groups/clubs subject to:

- a. The funds being used for the purchase of essential equipment or necessary repairs and refurbishments to premises or costs towards new/improved facilities or services
- b. The onus is on the community group to obtain the owners consent where the proposal involves work to premises or on land owned by another party
- c. The onus is on the community group to demonstrate to ward councillors the community need and worth of the proposal which could include gathering supporting evidence such as letters, emails, testimonials and photographs etc.
- d. An agreement by ward councillors, in advance of purchase in respect of consents, amount, equipment purchase and/or works to be done, with reimbursement only after proof of purchase and/or works done and/or where members are satisfied that the project will and can only go ahead if funds are given in advance
- e. The responsibility for obtaining the equipment or procuring the work rests with the community group
- f. All such projects should be one-off initiatives with no subsequent funding implications for the Council
- g. All projects relating to funds being given directly to community groups for them to deliver are limited to a maximum funding of £4,000 per project.
- h. Again, when completing the request form, councillors should consider and agree a reasonable timescale for delivery of the scheme in conjunction with the community group.

General Rules:

- Where intended work involves any form of construction on land not owned by the Council, the consent of the landowner must be obtained as part of the preliminary research before a decision is made.
- Proposals that could adversely effect the environment or community inclusiveness within the ward cannot be supported.
- Proposals that involve work to be provided by the Council that is already programmed to occur within the current financial year cannot be supported.
- It is accepted that certain projects may need ad hoc follow-up work in future years and this is permissible where such funds could be drawn from future devolved budget allocations. However where a project will require a significant increased obligation for year-in year-out commitments from the Council's general revenue fund for maintenance, the work cannot be supported.
- Proposals that require work that cannot be lawfully undertaken by the Council cannot be supported.

Process Sequence:

- Ward councillors should promote the availability of devolved ward budgets using party literature, ward surgeries, leaflets, posters, etc and encourage individuals and groups to submit suggestions for proposed projects and needed work.
- Ward councillors should then consider project proposals and suggestions and make preliminary investigations with relevant service delivery officers or community groups to establish the cost and viability of projects.
- Ward councillors must consult with any residents likely to be affected by the proposal.
- Based on the scheme criteria and the outcome of preliminary investigations, ward councillors then decide on which projects to support.
- Ward councillors submit a completed decision notice to the officer designated to hold the central budget (Katie Armstrong). Payment arrangements from the ward budgets are as follows:
 - (a) In the case of works to be delivered from within the Council, funds will be coded and released to the relevant service department for the work to be undertaken or procured.

- (b) In the case of grants to community groups, reimbursement of the amount agreed with ward councillors will be paid to the relevant contact person via cheque or bank transfer as appropriate.
- Ward councillors should maintain contact with service officers and/or community group on the delivery of the work and are encouraged to communicate the outcomes of these works within their wards using the same mechanisms as those used for promoting the scheme.
- Members will be asked to update the Scrutiny committee on schemes, both ongoing and completed, within the financial year and dates for reporting will be scheduled into the Scrutiny Annual Programme.

Decision Notices:

- Decision notices are the responsibility of ward councillors to complete and submit electronically to Katie Armstrong.
- Decision notices must not be sent to Katie Armstrong until the cost and details of the proposed project have been fully agreed with the relevant Council officer or community group contact as appropriate.
- In respect of grants to community groups, submission of the decision notice is the ward councillors' guarantee of accountability that the funds will be spent on the project as agreed with them.
- Requests for funding for projects will not be processed or released unless the decision notice contains details of evidence and supporting information, such as minutes of neighbourhood panels, emails, letters and requests from residents and community groups to demonstrate that the project has resulted from community engagement or contact.
- Decision notices will be placed on the Council's website consultation pages for public record.

Decision Making Rules:

- All decisions need the agreement of at least 2 of the 3 ward councillors.
- Where a ward is cross party, the minimum of 2 in favour must come from different political parties unless declarable interests make this impossible.
- Any ongoing disputes in respect of perceived difficulty in obtaining decisions will initially be referred to Cabinet for their consideration.
- Where a member has a personal, prejudicial interest in any proposal, the decision must be made by the other 2 ward councillors

who must both agree. This overrides the need for the decision to be cross-party.