



Doncaster Council

Report

**Date: 6th February
2020**

To the Chair and Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW: EMPOWERED, ENGAGED COMMUNITIES, WITH DEVOLVED LOCALITY BUDGETS

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Mayor Ros Jones	All	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report details the outcomes and recommendations resulting from OSMC's review which considered how Councillors could work effectively with their local communities using a ward budget to deliver positive change through volunteer led actions.
2. The Committee held a number of workshops to engage and seek the views of elected Members to consider the effectiveness of ward budgets as a means of engaging and empowering local communities. Members also, undertook a site visit to Barnsley Council, held a telephone conference with Nottingham City Council and reviewed processes and practices in a number of other authorities.
3. Members supported a grant allocation to each ward Member to be distributed to small groups and organisations to bring about positive change and deliver local priorities and solutions.
4. Full details of the issues considered and the Committee's evidence base is attached in the report at Appendix A. Once agreed the Committee's recommendations will be forwarded to the Mayor and Cabinet for consideration.

EXEMPT REPORT

5. This report is not exempt

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. That the Committee agree the following recommendations and these be forwarded to the Executive for consideration

Recommendation 1: Financial Arrangements:

That the Financial arrangements for ward budgets include the following features:

- a. A flat rate allocated to each Councillor, this may be pooled with other Councillors or wards providing this contributes to agreed priorities.
- b. The ward fund be allocated within the current year, carry forward of funding should only occur if earmarked for specific schemes.
- c. Applications for ward funding should, as far as possible, seek a contribution from applicants e.g. match funding, volunteering, additional community benefit.

Recommendation 2: Grant Funding Application and Decision Making Process

That the process identified below provide the framework for developing the grant application process:

- a) Ward Councillors agree a small number of local priorities through consultation events, data sets and other relevant information.
- b) Ward Budget agreed with a set amount allocated to each Councillor.
- c) Councillors identify groups who would benefit from the ward fund and actively encourage applications.
- d) Application forms are completed. Neighbourhood teams can advise and assist (but not drive the process).
- e) Grant applications could be considered at the monthly Neighbourhood Management meetings (ward meetings).
- f) Elected Members agree the allocation of grants and may take soundings from others present at the meeting including Community representatives invited by the individual Councillor. Successful applications are forwarded to Corporate Resources to ensure the application is recorded, meets governance criteria and a central record is maintained.
- g) Allocation of the individual member budget be reported on the Council's web page, quarterly finance and performance improvement report and within an annual report to OSMC.
- h) The ward meeting be used to check back on activities and impact, ensure priorities remain relevant and up to date and will be used to plan future consultation and feedback on the effectiveness of ward funding.

Recommendation 3: Grant Funding Application Process and Criteria

That consideration be given to incorporating the following elements into the application process:

- a. The grant application form, guidance and protocol be based around existing Doncaster Council forms e.g. Small Grants Form and other best practice models.
- b. That non-constituted groups, who can meet the requirements for the funding application be eligible to apply. A maximum level of funding be allowed for non-constituted groups e.g. up to £250.
- c. That consideration be given to how grass roots groups will be supported to become constituted to support their future sustainability.
- d. That each Councillor identify community representatives to assist and liaise with in respect of grant applications at the ward meeting.
- e. Consideration be given to applications from larger organisations such as Town and Parish Councils and Academies who can match fund and demonstrate this would contribute to meeting ward priorities.
- f. Further consideration be given to the most efficient process of allocating grant funding to applicants e.g. payment into bank account.

Recommendation 4: Supporting Transparency and Openness

That the following arrangements be incorporated into the scheme to support transparency and accountability:

- a. That an officer decision process be determined to authorise grant allocations supported by elected Members.
- b. An initial 6 monthly report to OSMC and the Executive highlighting the progress of the scheme with a subsequent move to an annual report.
- c. That Councillor web pages be updated to identify how each Councillor has allocated their funding.
- d. An annual event to showcase and share good practice and identify lessons learnt.
- e. Development of Key Performance Indicators that assist in measuring the impact of the scheme e.g. impact on local spend, additional volunteer hours, social return on investment.
- f. Give further consideration to developing ward meetings as a forum for identifying how localities can benefit from other grant funding streams. This may include a move to an Area Committee based approach as the ward based model matures.
- g. Development of a Communications Strategy to highlight the new arrangement in the context of locality working.

Recommendation 5: Local Transport Plan Funding

That in respect of the proposal for Area Committees to allocate Local Transport Plan Funding it be noted that OSMC:

- a. Support the current scheme of officers using an expertise based funding allocation and a “worst-first” highway scheme and maintenance programme across the Borough rather than an area based approach.
- b. Support further opportunities to engage locally and put forward suggested local transport/maintenance schemes.
- c. Recommend increased Councillor liaison with Highways to help influence schemes and achieve a joint understanding of local issues for officers, Councillors and communities.

Recommendation 6: Risks Identified During The Review

That the Executive consider measures to mitigate against the following risks identified during the review:

- a. Member engagement, buy in and support for the new arrangements.
- b. Ensuring Councillors engage with training and development associated with the new arrangements so they understand the purpose.
- c. Councillors unable to agree timely and relevant local priorities across wards
- d. Grant funding not allocated in year and left unspent.
- e. Capacity within the Council and partners to assist with the application process particularly supporting non-constituted and grass roots groups.
- f. Balancing effective transparent governance with efficiency and reduced bureaucracy.
- g. Managing complaints or criticism over allocation of grants.
- h. Effectively measuring and demonstrating good governance, including impact and value to the local area.

Recommendation 7: Next Steps

That a project plan be developed to identify key tasks and milestones to ensure the arrangements are introduced from 1st April 2020, including:

- training and development,
- priority setting,
- development of application form
- approval processes, protocols and guidance,
- financial arrangements for grant allocation,
- officer and resource implications etc.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

7. This review identifies recommendations that seek to promote and engage communities to deliver local improvements and priorities.

BACKGROUND

8. At the 25th July 2019 Council the Mayor requested that OSMC undertake a review to consider how local Councillors could work closely with their communities to bring about improvements using a small ward budget. The Terms of Reference for the review were developed over the summer and a number of workshops and activities were undertaken to enable the

Committee to provide feedback and comments to the Mayor on how this process could work in practice.

9. In order to develop its recommendations the Committee;
 - Held three all Member workshops to seek ideas and suggestions from elected Members
 - Undertook a site visit to Barnsley Council to consider how its ward alliance process worked.
 - Held a telephone conference Call with Nottingham City Council in respect of how it administers its Area Committee function to inform its highways programme.
 - Reviewed areas of best practice and the processes undertaken by a number of other Councils on different aspects area governance arrangements.
 - Sought feedback from the Parish Council Joint Consultative Committee.

10. The outcome report attached at Appendix A details the activities undertaken, key findings and supporting evidence for the recommendations.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

11. The Committee reviewed a number of processes operating in a range of local authorities to consider a process for delivering improvements in local areas through a small ward budget. The evidence and reasons identified for the Recommendations are included within Appendix A.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

12. By developing a set of local priorities that meet the ambitions and unique nature of each ward, the recommended process has the potential to impact on all of the Council's key outcomes.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	
	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

13. The recommendations proposed within this review need to be considered by the Executive before they are implemented. Recommendation 6 identifies a number of risks associated with the introduction of the recommended scheme. Consideration would need to be given to addressing these and any other risks that may be identified prior to the development and implementation of any scheme.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...SRF Date 27/1/20]

14. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (the so called “general power of competence”) provides that a Local Authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do.
15. Any scheme introduced by the Council to allocate small grants to organisations and non-constituted groups would need to be undertaken in accordance with the Council’s Financial and Contract Procedure rules and further legal advice should be sought prior to the establishment of any arrangements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: CC Date: 27/01/2020]

16. The Mayor’s Draft 2020/21 Budget has identified £280k (including administration and associated costs) to support Locality Budgets in 2020/21. This is subject to approval by Full Council as part of the wider 2020/21 Budget approval process. The full Locality Budget allocation should be spent within the financial year of allocation – carry forward of funding into future financial years will only be permitted if earmarked for specific schemes. The allocation of Locality Budgets must adhere to the Council’s Financial Procedure Rules.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials RH Date 27.01.2020]

17. There are no specific Human Resource implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...PW Date...23/01/20]

18. There are no specific technology implications at this stage. Where the recommendations are agreed, ICT should be consulted in relation to any technology requirements to support the application and administration processes for devolved locality budgets.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials.....RS.....Date ...28/01/2020]

19. There are no direct health implications. Evidence suggests low level participatory budgeting leads to different types of Community projects that often missed receiving funding under previous investment approaches.

Participatory Budgeting supports the approach of Asset Based Community Development, which is an integral part of the Public Health Community prevention offer.

Evidence also suggests that this approach can raise ward members profiles in their local community, often opening up lines of communication with residents and new groups.

The risk to be mindful of, there are currently a number of small funding pots available within communities such as the SEED fund and the Active Communities grant, which means groups could access several pots of funding for the same project.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials AS Date 23/01/20.]

20. There are no specific equality implications associated with this report. Consideration will need to be given to how any process for engaging communities and agreeing grant applications meets the needs of those with protected characteristics.

CONSULTATION

21. During the review consultation with elected Members and officer was undertaken. The Parish council Joint Consultative Committee was informed of the review and provided an opportunity to give feedback.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

22. None

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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