

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL****COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE****MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 18 November 2015****Time: 18.00 hrs.****Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** Councillors: S Mead (Chair), M Notley (Vice Chair), L Bell, E Connolly, L Harrington, J Mead, C Saunders and P Stuart.

**Also Present** Councillor J Thomas, Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People.

Start Time: 18.00 hrs.

End Time: 19:45 hrs.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

An Apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor G Snell.

The following Councillors declared a personal interest with regards to Item 3-Local Community Budget.

Councillors J Mead and S Mead – Stevenage Food Bank

Councillor M Notley – Symonds Green Community Association

Councillor L Bell – Stevenage Furniture Recycling Scheme & Bragbury Centre

Councillor L Harrington – Bedwell Community Association

Councillor P Stuart – Timebridge Community Centre

Councillor E Connolly – Irish Network & Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities

**2. MINUTES – 2 NOVEMBER 2015**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In response to a request for crimes affecting Older people, such as scams and cyber crimes to be included as a priority in the Community Safer Action Plan, Members were advised that although the priorities for the 2016/17 Municipal Year had already been agreed, this issue would be discussed at the next Responsible Authority Group meeting.

**3. LOCAL COMMUNITY BUDGET – SCOPING DOCUMENT**

The Chair suggested a few amendments to the scoping document, firstly that the quote under the background issues be deleted and to include the following areas of

focus -

- What constitutes value for money on behalf of the taxpayer?
- Scrutiny of what Local Community Budget monies are spent on?
- What checks and balances exist within the application process?
- What safeguards exist to protect Members in decision making?

The Chair informed the meeting that as part of the review applicants would not be invited and neither would there be site visits but indicated that the Committee would be inviting an Officer from the Shared Anti Fraud Service amongst a number of other witnesses.

Councillor M Notley agreed to take a lead on finding example(s) of a good use of LCB funds as it was important that such examples be celebrated.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scoping document with the above amendments be agreed.

#### **4. WITNESS INTERVIEW WITH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER(S) FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY BUDGET REVIEW**

The Chair introduced the interviewees for this meeting, the Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People, Councillor J Thomas and the Community Development Officers.

Councillor Thomas informed the Committee that since the Local Community Scheme went online, the application processing time has reduced from 8 weeks to 4 weeks. She also indicated that the internal review had raised a question on whether the scheme could be an all year process, notwithstanding the requirements for the purdah period.

In response to a question around the criteria in determining which organisations to fund and the sustainability of projects, the Committee were advised that when the scheme was being designed, there was a conscious decision not to make the application process too onerous and bureaucratic. The Officer advised that ultimately the decision as to funding a bid or not lies with the budget holder using their local knowledge of the needs of the area and not the community development officers.

Members were advised that although councillors tend to fund projects which benefit local resident's, organisations such as Credit Union, Age Concern with town wide initiatives or impact tend to seek funds with any councillor, however the decision to fund such organisations is at the discretion of the individual councillors.

In response to a question on whether an individual Councillors concerns with regards to a certain bid could be shared with other councillors, Members were advised that the onus is on each councillor to undertake due diligence as budget holders

Members requested that more detailed questions should be included in the application

process as this would assist Councillors in deciding whether to fund any project especially when applicants fail to contact the Member prior to submitting their bid.

A suggestion to include as a further option a reason for not supporting a bid -'No awareness of Project' in the online application form was noted.

Members acknowledged that presently there is lack of clarity regarding the scheme rules, and requested that Members be reminded annually of the rules and responsibilities of both Members and Officers and also that a copy of the rules be circulated to the Committee.

In response to a request by the Committee, the Head of Service (Chief Executive Unit) suggested that a 'dummy run' of the IT system as a training session could be provided for all Members.

The Community Development Officers agreed to circulate the guidance notes for both the applicants and the councillors as budget holders.

Members enquired about the possibility of allowing LCB funds to be carried over from one financial year to another, as their research had shown that other local authorities appear to do so.

The Community Development Officers informed Members that six months after the completion of a project, all applicants are sent a feedback monitoring form which is published online. Members requested that a notification link of the completed six month monitoring form be sent to the relevant member(s) that funded the bid, as it is important for those Members to be aware of the outcomes.

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

It was **RESOLVED** that the dates of the future meetings and the next stages of the review process be noted.

## **6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

## **7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

## **PART II**

## **8. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

## **Chair**