

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL****COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE****MINUTES****Date: Wednesday 6 January 2016****Time: 18.00 hrs.****Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** Councillors: S Mead (Chair), M Notley (Vice Chair), L Bell, L Harrington, J Mead, C Saunders, G Snell, P Stuart and Y Tiako (Youth Mayor)

**Also Present** The Leader (Councillor S Taylor OBE CC), Alderman D Kissane and S Crudgington (Chief Executive).

Start Time: 18.00 hrs.

End Time: 20.05 hrs.

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

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor E Connolly.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. MINUTES – 18 NOVEMBER 2015**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of 18 November 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3. WITNESS INTERVIEWS FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY BUDGET REVIEW**

The Chair welcomed Alderman D Kissane, the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to the meeting.

The Committee interviewed the witnesses about the Local Community Budget (LCB) process and sought their suggestions for making changes and/or improvements that could make it work even better in the future.

There was a view amongst the witnesses that LCBs were a good fit with the Co-operative Neighbourhood Working Strand of the Council's 'Future Town Future Council' programme and that by offering a flexible approach to help Members meet local priorities at a micro level LCBs would aid Members in developing a stronger connection between townspeople and the Council. However, as a caveat, it was stressed that to make effective use of LCBs monies Councillors should know their wards and enter into a two way dialogue with bidders for funds.

In terms of potential improvements the witnesses considered that there were opportunities for increased spends on ward, rather than town wide initiatives, increased spend on projects specifically targeted at Young People and for communications around the process to be reinforced.

The Committee was advised that in previous years LCBs may have been used to cover shortfalls in SBC budgets. It was noted that steps had been taken to prevent this happening again.

It was noted that the Leader considered that responsibility for spend should rest entirely with individual Members.

Before discussing potential recommendations the Committee identified a requirement for additional information which the Chief Executive undertook to provide through colleagues within the Chief Executive's Unit. The Committee requested:

- An analysis of the underspend in 2013/2014. It was noted that the Chief Executive believed this related to a proposed carry forward but would confirm.
- An analysis of LCB spend split between town wide and local initiatives.
- An analysis of LCB spend on youth orientated projects and bids submitted by young people.

Following on from the witness interviews and information sharing between members of the Committee who had gathered evidence related to particular strands of the review, the following emergent recommendations were identified:

- Improved training for Members on the LCB process, to include updated guidelines as to how LCB monies could be spent.
- Recognition of the need to ensure LCBs were not used to cover shortfalls in SBC budgets.
- Improved liaison between Members (including HCC Members) to determine whether bids should be supported at a ward / area level.
- Consideration to be given to new and innovative methods of promoting LCB awareness to young people.
- The communications leaflet should be updated.
- A summary of LCB spends to be published in the Chronicle (or other SBC publications) on a quarterly / yearly basis.
- Members to share best practice and ideas for LCB spend on an annual basis.
- An assessment of the practicality of officers undertaking 'due diligence' checks on bids before passing to Members for authorisation.
- Officers to examine the potential to allow accruals for committed LCB spend.
- Consideration to be given to the practicality of timescales for LCB approval being made more flexible, especially around the summer and Christmas holiday periods.
- The system to be amended so that Members can only approve or reject bids with a free text box added so that reasons for rejection can be fully explained.

- Consideration to be given to the establishment of a method of determining whether organisations were potentially overbidding for funds in the expectation of receiving a reduced amount that would actually meet their requirements.
- Improved feedback to be garnered from recipients of LCB awards either as a condition of the award or by Members actively seeking their own feedback.
- More flexibility to be designed into the system as it was considered inappropriate that an organisation receiving only a small percentage of the funding that had been bid for should receive an email that read 'Your application for funding has been successful'.

It was **RESOLVED** that the emergent recommendations identified above be noted and incorporated into the final report as appropriate.

#### **4. MEMBER EVIDENCE GATHERING**

This item was dealt with, in part, at item 3 as Members used the evidence they had gathered as the basis for their questions to the witnesses.

Further to the Member evidence gathering shared at item 3 a Member advised the Committee of some examples of LCB funded projects that had celebrated success within the Borough.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

#### **5. NEXT STEPS**

The Committee was advised that the next meeting would take place on Monday 18 January when the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources, the Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council and a representative from the Shared Anti-Fraud Service would be interviewed as witnesses.

It was **RESOLVED** that the date of the next meeting 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**