

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE****MINUTES****Date: Monday 18 January 2016****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, S Hearn, J Mead, C Saunders, P Stuart,

Also Present: Councillors Mrs J Lloyd (Portfolio Holder Resources) and S Speller (Portfolio Holder Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council) and N Jennings (Shared Anti-Fraud Service)

Start Time: 18.00 hrs.

End Time: 19.20 hrs.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations of interest.

2. WITNESS INTERVIEWS FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY BUDGET REVIEW

The Chair welcomed Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd, the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Simon Speller, the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, and Nick Jennings from the Shared Anti-Fraud Service to the meeting as witnesses to the review into Local Community Budgets.

Members asked a number of questions of the witnesses in turn and the following responses were given:

Councillor Mrs J Lloyd

- In the event of a bid being part funded the organisation requesting the funding would receive the amount committed by Members. In some cases the Council would approach the organisation to determine the viability of the scheme going ahead with reduced funding and it was noted that the bidder could also make a second application for more funds.
- No evidence had been produced of Officers approaching Members for funding but it was entirely within the scope of the scheme for Members to propose schemes to Officers for costing and subsequent bids.
- Carry overs from one year to another had not been allowed to both simplify the accounting process and to ensure funding was not allocated during the pre-election period.

- Although the scheme had been streamlined since its inception, consideration should be given to a minimum level of bid per application or per Member to reduce administration costs.

N Jennings

- A number of positive aspects of the scheme were highlighted including the clarity of guidance given to Members and the requirement for applicants to receive funding via BACS payment into an authorised bank account.
- More clarity could be given to declarations of interest and applicants should also declare how they would personally benefit from any award.
- A potential risk was identified concerning how the 10% of monitoring forms were selected for audit. Consideration could be given to prioritising applications of high value or repeat bidders.
- Council may wish to consider refusal to make further awards to organisations if audit conditions were not complied with rather than attempting to recover any payment made.
- Council may wish to review its processes where a bid was part funded.

Councillor S Speller

- Considered LCBs to be a marked improvement on the Area Committee process that it replaced.
- Councillors could make efforts to look for groups and projects in their wards that would benefit funding and encourage them to apply.
- There was concern over the lack of consultation between applicants and Members, with Members possibly missing the opportunity to fund projects that they might wish to support.

Councillor Speller then gave a brief presentation of his aspirations of LCBs as a new way of working as part of Democratic and Community renewal in the Co-operative Neighbourhood Development / Future Town Future Council programme.

In reply to questions concerning the presentation the following points were identified:

- Cllr Speller had an aspiration for the level of LCB funding per Members to be restored to £3300 per Member at least for one year for the Town's seventieth anniversary.
- Repeat bidders should be discouraged although it was not felt necessary to formalise any specific limits around the number of applications an organisation could make in any defined time period.
- Expectations of bidders would need to be managed.
- It was important that Councillors maintained a dialogue with bidders, especially at the pre-application stage.
- Support should be offered to Members who said 'no' to bidders and the Council should consider its relationship with organisations who bullied or 'named and shamed' those Members who chose not to support applications.
- There was a call for an annual all Member review / retraining session / seminar to share best practice and identify developing trends within bids.
- Local schemes were preferred and a ratio of 50%/30%/20% (local/local & townwide/townwide) spend proposed.

- There was a need for improved co-ordination within wards to include cross party agreement on spend where possible.
- Feedback forms to be reviewed and examples of best practice collated and shared with all members.
- LCB process to be simplified and the leaflet amended to reduce the necessity for Officers to support applicants.

The Chair thanked the three witnesses for their contributions to the meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the emergent recommendations identified in the interviews with the witnesses be noted.

3. EMERGENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The following emergent recommendations were identified by the Committee for inclusion into the final report as appropriate:

- A process to be documented detailing the steps to be taken in the event of a bid being undersubscribed.
- Communications between applicant and Members to be reinforced prior to any bid being made.
- More use to be made of Council publications such as the Chronicle to celebrate successes of the LCB scheme.
- Applicants to declare their own interests in the bid.
- Organisations to have a 'plan B' in the event of their bid not being met in full.
- Repeat and high bidders to be targeted in audit process.
- Consideration to be given to a minimum level of bid to reduce the administration costs of the LCB scheme.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Officer be requested to include the above recommendations into the final report.

4. NEXT STEPS

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Officer be requested to produce the final report in time for the next meeting of the Committee on 29 February 2016.

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair