1. Meeting: Cabinet Member for Communities and Involvement

2. Date: 11 February 2008

3. Title: Analysis of the Community Leadership Fund 2006-7 and Review of Members Flexibility to Carry Forward Under-Spend.

4. Directorate: Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

This report provides a summary of spending activity around the Elected Members Community Leadership Fund for the financial year 2006-7.

The report also examines the first 12 months of the Members Flexibility to Carry Forward any Under-Spend from one financial year to the next.

6. Recommendations

- That Cabinet Member note the performance of the Community Leadership Fund for 2006-7.

- That Members ability to carry forward under-spend from one financial year to the next be extended for a further year and consideration given to imposing a maximum carry forward of one years Fund allocation.

- That a Members Seminar be held to give consideration to the implications of the Community Leadership Fund arising from The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Background

The Local Government White Paper, ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’, emphasises the importance of ward councillors as local political and community leaders. The White Paper encourages local authorities to adopt a range of powers and responsibilities to empower ward councillors including new opportunities to act on local issues and be more effective advocates. Through the Community Leadership Fund Rotherham has already put some of these tools in place to strengthen the role of the ward councillor.

During December 2006 a report was presented to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Involvement containing recommendations from the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel regarding the following changes to the Community Leadership Fund:

- That the fund remains as flexible as possible by allowing Individual Members to carry forward any underspend from one financial year to the next.
- That the Community Leadership Fund budget be increased to £1000 for each Member for the 2007/8 financial year.

Following this on the 10th January 2007 Cabinet agreed that approval be given to individual Members carrying forward any unspent Community Leadership Fund allocation from the financial year 2006/7 into 2007/8. Cabinet further recommended that the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel be responsible for monitoring the scheme following one year of operation and a report submitted to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Involvement.

In addition to this an increase in the Community Leadership Fund allocation to £1000 per Member was agreed as part of the budget setting process during March 2007.

All Members received a statement in April 2007 illustrating the amount they had carried over and their current balance to spend. This was supplemented by a six month statement sent out during September 2007 indicating the latest spending activity for each member and outlining any remaining balance half way through the financial year.

7.2 Analysis of Expenditure 2006/7

During the financial year 2006-7 Members committed £20,163.50 representing 64% of the total budget allocation of £31,500. Members chose to carry forward £11,336.50 representing 36% of the budget.

In terms of overall expenditure of the Fund there has been a significant drop this year from 84% during 2004-5, 98.99% during 2005-6 period to 64% for the 2006-7 period. Although clearly the increased flexibility of the ‘carry over’ has had a significant effect on the total amount of the fund allocated to projects during 2006-7.

There remains some concern that if Members continue to carry over their full allocation from one financial year to the next without consideration of a limit, some Members may accrue significant amounts that could be used to relieve budget pressures and priorities in other areas.
Members carrying forward funding

At the turn of the financial year 2007/8:-

22 members did not carry forward any funding.

18 members carried forward between £1 and £250

23 members carried forward between £250 and £500 of which 11 members carried forward their full allocation of £500 from the 2006/7 Fund.

A survey of the 11 Members carrying over their full allocations indicated that they had:-

• Identified projects that were in the early stages of development that would require funding at a later date

or

• Had set aside funding to deal with any pressing or urgent issues that may arise within their Ward.

Spend by Community Strategy Theme

An analysis of spend by Community Strategy theme shows that for the first time the Alive theme has achieved the most support. This indicates an increase in funding for projects around children and young people, sports and social activities and the environment, parks and open spaces.

In contrast to previous years there has been an increase in the number of projects supporting the Safe and Learning themes although no projects contributed towards the Achieving theme of social enterprise, developing business and transport accessibility.

Full Project listing for 2006-7

The spreadsheet attached to this document (appendix 1) details all the projects supported by the Community Leadership Fund during 2006-7.

7.3 Current position with Expenditure 2007/8

The total spent for the current financial year 2007-8 as at the 8th January 2008 stands at £26,355.15 representing 35.4% of the total budget allocation available to Members.

This compares with 44.4% of the budget spent at this time during December 2006 (however at this stage Members had not been offered the option to carry over and the budget take up is traditionally high during the last two months of the final year.)
7.4 The Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities”

The Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” advocates the further devolution of budgets to a local level, with particular reference to Councillor Call for Action.

The White Paper states:

“2.28 Often councillors will be able to solve communities’ problems themselves. Many authorities are developing new ways to support them in doing this. For example several authorities provide their councillors with a small budget to spend on projects in their local communities. This has proved effective as councillors, using their close links to their communities, can identify issues early and take action before they become major problems. As part of developing the CCfA (Councillor Call for Action) we will expect local authorities to consider what powers or budgets it would be appropriate to devolve to their councillor to help them in solving minor problems”

Local authorities such as Oldham delegate £3,000 per year for individual ward members with a further £3,000 per Ward to promote joint working. Preference is given to projects that

- Bring in other resources e.g. match funding
- Contribute to one or more of the Council priority areas
- Meet priorities in the Area Action plans (similar to Rotherham’s Area Plans)

It has been suggested by the Member Development Panel that these proposals are examined in the light of the implementation of the White Paper through The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH Act) and consideration given to the future role of the Community Leadership Fund. It has been proposed that a Members focus group be held in early 2008 to examine the issues.

8. Finance

The increased allocation of £63,000 per annum for the Community Leadership Fund has been secured until the end of the financial year 2009/10. No additional administrative costs have been incurred as a result of the increase in the Fund.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 clearly advocates a continued move towards greater devolution of budgets, the empowerment of local communities and the central role of the local Councillor in this process. It is important that the role of the Community Leadership Fund is considered in light of such developments to ensure that it continues to have a positive impact on the quality of life of Rotherham’s communities.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications
The Community Leadership Fund makes direct links with the Government's agenda for Local Government as detailed in the White paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities”. The paper outlines a vision which includes:

- Giving local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives.
- Local government playing a much stronger role in supporting active citizens and neighbourhoods.
- Extending Ward Members community leadership role at the centre of neighbourhood arrangements.
- Real decision making at a Neighbourhood level by the devolution of small budgets and powers to ward councillors to solve minor problems at a local level

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Ward Councillors and Community Leadership: A Future Perspective JRF December 2007

The Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” October 2006

Minutes of the Member Development Panel 27th September 2007

Contact Names: Paul Griffiths, Community Leadership Manager – Neighbourhoods and Adult Services, Ext 2667
paul.griffiths@rotherham.gov.uk