

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO SCRUTINY

1.	Meeting:	Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel
2.	Date:	16TH September, 2010
3.	Title:	Community Leadership Fund 2009-10
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

This report outlines the expenditure of the Members Community Leadership Fund for the financial year 2009-10 and it's continuing role in enhancing the leadership role of elected members within Rotherham's neighbourhoods.

6. Recommendations

- 1 That the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel notes the expenditure for the financial year 2009-10**
- 2 That no changes are made to the fund at the present time.**

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Background

Over the past few years there has been an emphasis in local government on the importance of elected ward councillors as political and community leaders at the heart of local neighbourhoods.

The Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities, the Councillors Commission and the Empowerment White Paper have all encouraged 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 of local democracy.

In Rotherham the Community Leadership Fund was established in 2003 to enable Members to address local priorities, empower grassroots groups and quickly instigate changes in response to local opinion.

The new coalition government has acknowledged the key leadership role played by local councillors and its support for localism, democratic engagement and decentralisation all of which reflect the principles of the Community Leadership Fund. They have also indicated that legislation will be brought forward in Autumn 2010 to encourage greater use of Ward budgets for councillors.

7.2 Community Leadership Fund - Expenditure 2009/10

- Members spent £67095 during the financial year 2009/10.
- This has resulted in a cumulative carry forward figure of £30000 from 2009/10 into 2010/11 giving a budget for the 2010/11 financial year of £93000.

7.3 Projects Supported during 2009/10

Over 200 projects were supported during 2009/10. This includes match funding projects with Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Area Assemblies, Area Housing Panels, Tenants and Residents Associations and internal RMBC services including Sports Development Teams and Youth Services.

A direct correlation can be made between the types of projects and activities supported by the Community Leadership Fund and the key strategic themes of the Community Strategy. For the year 2009/10 39% of projects focused on 'Alive' related activities, 26% on Proud, 18% on Safe and 17% on Learning. A small selection of projects listed below illustrates links to the key themes:-

Alive (children and young people,
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Proud (active citizenship, diversity,
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<p>environment, sports activities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling Autism • Junior Football Teams • Dance events for young and old • Keep Fit for OAPs • Community Fun days 	<p>supporting vulnerable people)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and role model workshops • Equipment for the new carers centre • Tackling isolation for OAPs • Cohesion events • Community Awards Ceremonies
<p>Safe (preventing crime, community safety)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fawkes night diversionary events • Workbooks to prevent children running away • Setting up youth clubs • Magnetic door alarms for vulnerable households • Hi-viz road safety jackets for youngsters • Support for neighbourhood watch 	<p>Learning (training, skills and education)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School holiday clubs • Community arts festival • Activity groups for toddlers and mums • Tools to grow vegetables for school projects • Horticultural schemes

7.4 Feedback

Feedback is obtained for each project and placed on file with the original application. A small selection of quotes is provided below to underline the significant difference that sometimes minor amounts of funding can make to local groups and projects:-

Maltby Project 400 for people with learning difficulties – purchase of decorating materials (Maltby Ward)

“This has been a fantastic community project for the project 400 learners. It has helped them gain skills in painting and decorating and breakdown social barriers and the learners have been made to feel a valued member of their local community. One our learners has now moved onto a full time job in streetpride. Many thanks for supporting the project.”

D Harper, Addison Day Centre

Swinton Fitzwilliam primary school – purchase of plants to improve Swinton precinct (Swinton Ward)

“A grant from Cllr Neil License’s Community Leadership Fund allowed the children to purchase the colourful plants and Cllr Ken Wyatt came to the school assembly to talk about the history of the precinct and how important it is to look after the shopping area. All the local agencies became involved including the Area Assembly, Rotherham Wardens, SY Police and Rotherham 2010 Ltd”

Jane Flaherty School Business Manager.

St Andrews Centre – support for the school holiday club (Brinsworth and Catcliffe Ward)

“The grant enabled the St Andrews Centre to provide a holiday club for the benefit of children in Brinsworth free of charge.

We provided a safe and stimulating environment with games and activities which helps provide a healthy diversion for children during the summer holidays.

This has encouraged us to look at future provision and making it available for other age groups aswell”

J Lindley

7.5 Carrying Over Funding

One of the founding principles of the Fund was that it was flexible and easy for Members to use. As a consequence since the financial year 2006-7 Members have been able to carry over up to £1000 of their allocation into the next financial year to enable them to support emerging projects, those that may require additional funding or to retain money to deal with urgent issues that may arise within the Ward.

This has proved to be a popular option and the vast majority of Members have chosen to carry some funding forward.

During the last review of the scheme in Autumn 2008 a questionnaire was sent to all Members regarding the Fund. Members were asked if they found the carry over facility useful and all those who responded indicated that they found this helpful when planning where to allocate money within their Ward.

Up to date details of expenditure are available to Members on the internal intranet and a statement is sent out half way during the financial year to all Members. During 2009/10 further reminders went to Members carrying a balance of £1000 or over in the final quarter.

However, as in previous years, during 2009/10 some Members did not meet the criteria for carry over and some funding was ‘lost’ and redirected into general Council budgets. In the last financial year £1180.48 was redirected in this way.

7.6 Options for changes to the carry over

In the current financial climate it is vital that maximum value is achieved from the Fund for the benefit of local communities. A number of options could be considered to ensure that the Fund is fully utilised by Members:-

- Consider ending the ‘carry over’ to provide an incentive for Members to spend their allocation within the financial year. Any unused funds are then directed back into wider budgets to be used elsewhere. However, some Members purposely ‘save’ their allocation to spend on larger projects, for example Councillor Gamble’s commitment of £2,000 for a CCTV project for a local church.
- Alternatively consider a cut off point for expenditure in January with any unspent monies going into a general pot for Members to use via an application process to be facilitated by a Members panel. However this may encourage members to spend on less significant priorities.

- Although Members latest spending position is available on the intranet the frequency of paper based statements could be increased from every six months to every quarter to remind Members of their spending position. However, this would seem to be unnecessarily bureaucratic.

7.7 Approaches taken by other Local Authorities:-

Many local authorities recognise the benefits of operating a devolved budget scheme for their local councillors.

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken during August 2010 looking at schemes operating by local authorities across the country. This research has indicated that three broad approaches have been taken:-

- Large devolved budgets (50k plus) controlled by an 'Area Forum' or similar body.
- Medium budgets (10k) controlled by councillors as a Ward collective.
- Smaller budgets (1-5K) controlled by individual councillors.

It is clear that the Fund as it currently operates in Rotherham is simple and flexible for Members to use and much less bureaucratic than other comparable schemes.

However in terms of monitoring and value for money other local authorities are doing more to publicise the outcomes of projects at a Ward level and consequently promote the key local role the elected member.

Please see **Appendix 1** for three case studies outlining further details.

8. Finance

Members currently have an allowance of £1,000 per year equal to a total budget pot of £63000. The estimated annual cost of administrating the scheme is currently approximately £4000 which includes net salary administration costs and postage.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Community Leadership Fund supports grass roots local organisations and the leadership role of the Ward Member and the Fund is an effective tool available to ward members to directly address local issues and concerns. Any reduction in funding or value for money will have a negative impact on the community leadership role of individual ward councillors and their advocacy of the value of local democracy and active citizenship particularly at a time when national and regional funding to many projects is being reduced or withdrawn.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Community Leadership Fund contributes to NI 4 % people who feel can influence decisions in locality.

The breadth and diversity of projects supported contribute to many of the Stronger Communities Indicators (1,2,3,4 5,6,10 and 11) and indicators in Safer Communities and Children and Young people.

The Community Leadership Fund contributes towards the key Corporate strategic theme of:-

Rotherham Proud

This key theme is reflected within Strategic Objective 4 of the NAS Service Plan 2009-12:-

Strengthen by 2011 neighbourhood leadership through increased opportunities that shape local service delivery in a way that people are involved and increasingly feel that their views make a difference.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- 1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- 2 Ward Councillors and Community Leadership: A Future Perspective JRF December 2007
- 3 The Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" October 2006
- 4 Councillors Commission
- 5 Community Empowerment White Paper
- 6 CLF Members questionnaire
- 7 The Community Strategy
- 8 The Coalition: Our Programme for Government May 2010

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