



WARD PRIORITY FUND 2007-2011

Report by Director of Finance and Corporate Resources

PURPOSE OF REPORT To consider the options for the operation of the Ward Priority Fund, following the introduction of multi-member wards.

COMPETENCE

- 1.1 The Fund may be used for the funding of projects and activities ordinarily provided or supported by the Comhairle or for the purpose of grant aid to a specified organisation. The Comhairle's Monitoring Officer will consider the legality of all proposals.
- 1.2 When recommending projects for funding, Members should ensure that there are no ongoing revenue implications for the Comhairle, for example, any ongoing repair and maintenance costs associated with the project.

SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Ward Priority Fund, in its current format, was introduced in 2003/04. The annual budget of £310k was allocated equally between the Wards, with each Member having £10k available to support local projects. In order to demonstrate that support of particular projects or groups was fair and transparent, the allocation of resources within Wards was done in consultation with Community Councils.
- 2.2 In setting the budgets for 2007/08 the total Ward Fund was reduced to £295k, or effectively £9,500 per Member. In terms of the new Comhairle structure, this equates to £28.5k for three member wards and £38k for four member wards.
- 2.3 A decision is required as to whether the funds should be allocated to Wards or to Members.
- 2.4 Two proposals for the decision making and consultation protocols, based on whether the funds are allocated on a Ward or individual Member basis, are suggested.
- 2.5 This report does not cover the administrative procedures to be followed and these will be developed once the decision making and consultation issues have been resolved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle agree:**
 - a) **whether Ward Priority Funds should be allocated on a Ward or individual Member basis;**
 - b) **the extent of consultation; and**
 - c) **it be delegated to the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources and the Monitoring Officer to develop the administrative procedures.**

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Background Papers: None

DECISION MAKING

- 4.1 In the existing scheme, the decision on allocation of funding was relatively straightforward as agreement was only required between the Member and, if applicable, the Community Council. If allocation is to be on the basis of an allocation to each Member then this will be retained, but it is recommended that the agreement of one of the other Ward Members would also be required.
- 4.2 If allocation is to the new Wards, Members will require to work together to reach agreement. It is suggested that consensus will be required, as a simple majority could result in a perceived bias towards individual localities, depending on the geographical location of the Members.

CONSULTATION

- 5.1 In order to demonstrate fairness and transparency, it has been necessary, up until now, for Members to provide evidence of consultation with relevant bodies, such as Community Councils or Residents Associations. This will continue to be the case if allocation is to individual Members.
- 5.2 As the new Wards cover much larger geographical areas, simply replicating the current procedures is not considered to be practical. For example, there are four Community Councils covering An Taobh Siar agus Nis Ward and consultation with all four, every time funding is being allocated, would be an administrative burden and inevitably result in delays.
- 5.3 Bearing in mind that the Members are accountable to the communities that they represent and are working together on their behalf, it may be appropriate for them, as a group, to decide on the extent of consultation, having considered the circumstances of individual projects.
- 5.4 If the allocation is on a Ward basis, it would however still be considered good practice, where possible and where it would not delay the project, to consult with the relevant Community Councils.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 A significant portion of the previous Ward Fund was used to support small local initiatives and provide grant aid for community activities such as Over 60s Clubs, school trips, youth groups etc. Whilst there would be an expectation for Members to continue supporting these projects, the increased funds available within Wards afford the opportunity for larger projects to be considered.
- 6.2 The practicalities of how this can be achieved will be dependent on the circumstances within Wards. As an example, of the £38k available, £8k could be set aside for smaller projects and £30k allocated to a larger scheme(s). With due consideration and planning, the £30k could be used to facilitate a substantial scheme, through joint working or the attraction of match funding from other bodies.
- 6.3 In view of past experience, it is envisaged that where a large project is being facilitated or part funded by a Comhairle department, the lead department should be responsible for the project, including the validation of costing and value for money aspects.