

Appendices

One



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Item No.

CABINET REPORT

Report Title

Councillor Community Fund

AGENDA STATUS:

PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:

7 March 2012

Key Decision:

NO

Listed on Forward Plan:

YES

Within Policy:

YES

Policy Document:

NO

Directorate:

Resources

Accountable Cabinet Member:

Cllr. Alan Bottwood

Ward(s)

All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report proposes a response to the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee concerning the creation of a Councillor Community Fund.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note recommendation one, the creation of a Councillor Community fund, but with an allocation of £3,000 per Councillor.
- 2.2 Agree in principle recommendation two, but note the simplification of the form and terms and conditions and delegate to the Director of Customers and Communities, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member, the ability to vary the terms and conditions where it is considered appropriate for the smooth running of the fund.
- 2.3 Agree that the management of the fund will lie within the Customers and Communities Directorate in line with recommendation three.

- 2.4 Agree that the use of the fund will be reported to Council annually and be reported on the internet on a regular basis.
- 2.5 Agree recommendations six, seven, nine and eleven as outlined in the body of the report.
- 2.6 Reject recommendations four, five, eight and ten for reasons outlined in the body of the report.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Cabinet received a report from Overview and Scrutiny Committee Panel three regarding the creation of a Councillor Community Fund (originally named "Empowerment" Fund). Cabinet asked for a report back on the implications of Overview and Scrutiny's recommendations.
- 3.1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny work was undertaken between July and November 2011 with the objective to recommend a suitable scheme for a Northampton Councillor Community Fund that enables Councillors to efficiently and effectively allocate money within their ward to make a positive impact on the areas they represent and to empower local residents to be active in their communities.
- 3.1.3 A Councillor Community Fund is a Scheme which grants a set sum per year to each of the Council's elected Councillors to spend within their electoral ward.
- 3.1.4 The Administration, in its Manifesto, gave its commitment to the development of a Councillor Community Fund Scheme for Borough Councillors to allocate money within their ward to make a positive impact on the areas they represent and to empower local residents who are active in their communities.

3.2 Issues – Recommendations

- 3.2.1 The first recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Report was that:
"A Councillor Community Fund for Councillors of Northampton Borough Council with an annual allocation of £1,500 per Councillor is introduced from 1st April 2012. A growth item of £69,000 is considered alongside other priorities of the Council as part of the medium term financial plan and the 2012/13 budget process."
Cabinet considered this as part of the 2012/13 budget process and recommended that a fund was created with an allocation of £3,000 per Councillor. The funding for this initiative comes from the New Homes Bonus and is very much in line with the purpose for which the grant was intended.
- 3.2.2 The second recommendation was that:
"The draft application form is adopted in order to identify the purpose and result of the funding. The application form must be completed prior to the issue of approval and money being granted to ensure that the Council does not breach its responsibilities in this regard. The draft Terms of Conditions and criteria of the Scheme (as contained within the draft application form) are adopted in consultation with the Director of Finance and Support and the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer."

Cabinet agree in principle to the form and terms of conditions but following a review with relevant officers it is proposed that it be simplified. The proposed form is contained in Annex A to this report. Prior to accessing the fund all Councillors will be required to undergo financial regulation training in order that they have the relevant knowledge and understanding to manage the monies. Training will be organised during March 2012.

3.2.3 Recommendation three was that:

“Cabinet is recommended to ask the Chief Executive to decide where in the organisation the Fund should sit and specifically delegate the tasks of providing advice and support in completing applications, reviewing and approving applications, processing and issuing cheques and monitoring outcomes and effectiveness of the scheme.”

The management of the fund will sit within the Customer and Communities Directorate. It is also proposed that the payment of the fund will be by BACs rather than cheque as this is a more economical method of payment.

3.2.4 Recommendation four:

“A Report of the Councillor Community Fund that details expenditure authorised, the originating member, the amount and the purpose authorised is produced and submitted to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.”

It was felt that quarterly report to Cabinet was too frequent. Cabinet propose that an annual report be taken to Council. Additionally the use of the fund will be reported on the internet on a regular basis.

3.2.5 Recommendation five:

“An Annual Survey is issued to all those who received funds. The results of which are provided in a summary within the Council’s Annual Report.”

Cabinet disagrees with this recommendation. There will be sufficient information on the application form to enable a report to be made.

3.2.6 Recommendation six:

“The Corporate Communications Team is asked to assist in generating positive publicity for the Scheme and promote examples of projects the Scheme has funded Political Assistants will also, in collaboration with the Corporate Communications Team, assist Councillors in communicating how they have spent their Funds.”

Cabinet agrees with this recommendation. The communications team will produce a protocol for promoting the scheme.

3.2.7 Recommendation seven:

“Cabinet instructs Officers to make information on the Scheme publically available on the Internet and ensures that the Scheme is promoted by the Corporate Communications Team.”

Cabinet agrees with this recommendation.

3.2.8 Recommendation eight:

“Cabinet instructs Officers to hold an open evening once a year to promote the Councillor Community Fund Scheme to community Groups and Organisations, to which all councillors would also be invited to attend.”

Cabinet does not agree with this recommendation. Information will be on the intranet and it will be promoted where relevant. Councillors will be promoting the fund within their own wards.

3.2.9 Recommendation nine:

“Cabinet asks the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum to promote the Councillor Community Fund within its network.”

Cabinet agrees with this recommendation.

3.2.10 Recommendation ten:

“The Councillor Enabling Fund Advisory Panel (CEFAP) monitors the effectiveness of the Scheme on an annual basis and recommends any changes as appropriate.”

Cabinet does not agree with this recommendation as it is felt that Overview and Scrutiny is the appropriate place to monitor the effectiveness of the Scheme. This scheme does not fall within CEFAP’s remit.

3.2.11 Recommendation eleven:

“The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report after six months.”

Cabinet agrees with this recommendation.

3.3 Choices (Options)

3.3.1 Cabinet can agree to accept all recommendations or in part. They can modify the recommendations or reject them in totality.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 None. This proposal is within existing frameworks.

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 Funding for this scheme is included the Councils three year medium term plan, and was agreed as part of the budget setting at Council on 29th February 2012. The funding was found from the New Homes Bonus Grant, as this proposal falls within the spirit of the grant.

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 gives Councils broader powers to promote the social, economic and environmental well being of its area. This power brings with it benefits for Authorities and local communities through more effective relationships with partners and the public, greater freedoms and flexibilities and the ability to be innovative and creative. It is of particular relevance to promoting Councillors’ community leadership role and the development of Empowering Councillors and Communities Schemes.

4.3 Equality

- 4.3.1 In investigating a Councillor Community Fund Scheme for the Council; the Scrutiny Panel produced an Equality Impact (Screening) for such a Scheme to ensure that the Scheme would provide general standards and processes and ensure that the benefits of such a Scheme allows Community Groups to do things that they might otherwise be able to afford to do so which benefits Councillors of that specific Group and also the wider community either locally or across the district.
- 4.3.2 The Scheme could have a significant effect on most or all of the protected characteristic groups. The effect will be of benefit to these groups if they were able to participate in the process
- 4.3.3 A quality impact assessment will be undertaken on each grant application.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 The Panel received both written and spoken evidence from a wide variety of expert advisors including the Cabinet Members for Community Engagement and Finance, Northampton Borough Council, Officers of Kettering Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council and representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 4.5.2 Further details are contained in the O&S report.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

- 4.6.1 This proposal underpins Priority 6 in the corporate plan – Creating and Empowering communities.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 None

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