

WARD BUDGET INITIATIVE PROGRESS REPORT

Cabinet Member	Councillor Douglas Mills
Cabinet Portfolio	Partnerships, Improvements and Community Safety
Officer Contact	Maggie Allen, Deputy Chief Executive's Office
Papers with report	Appendix A and B

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To inform Cabinet of the progress of the Ward Budget initiative and provide a comprehensive list of projects submitted by Members up to 3 rd March 2010.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	The Ward Budget initiative contributes towards the Council's Civic Pride initiative as well as the 2008-2018 Sustainable Community Strategy and the objective of creating strong and active communities.
Financial Cost	<p>The overall allocation for the Ward Budgets is £550,000, based on a budget of £25k for each of the 22 wards in the borough. The funding for this initiative will run from 1 January 2009 to 31 March 2010. However, it should be noted that any proposals approved up to the 31 March 2010 will be funded from this budget, even though the costs may fall into the 2010/11 financial year.</p> <p>Projects and proposals to-date total £513,448.21 leaving a balance of £36,551.79 still to be allocated.</p>
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Primarily Corporate Services & Partnerships and Residents' & Environmental Services
Ward(s) affected	All wards have benefited from the Initiative.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Cabinet notes the diversity of the projects, the communities and groups supported and the outcomes and achievements resulting from the Council's 2009/10 Ward Budget Initiative.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The report is for information only, but serves to record the success of the Ward Budget initiative and how it has served to deliver proposals and supported community activity in all of the wards in the borough.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The report is for information only.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

None at this stage.

Supporting Information

Background

At Council on 6th November 2008, the Leader of the Council announced the Ward Budget initiative which committed £25,000 to each ward in the borough to support local priorities identified by Ward Councillors.

The Ward Budgets initiative had a number of objectives including:

- enabling Councillors to address specific local priorities
- strengthen Councillors community leadership role
- enhancing Civic Pride
- supporting the 'I like living here' Agenda.

The Ward Budget initiative complemented the concept extolled in The Local Government White Paper *Strong & Prosperous Communities* which outlined the argument for strengthening the role of Ward Councillors.

Protocol and process for Ward Councillors 2009 to 2010

In order to ensure a consistent approach across the 22 wards a protocol for the initiative was devised. This protocol served as a guide to Councillors in terms of delivering the initiative and proved to be useful in terms of the 'do's and don'ts'. Additionally, to ensure consistency across the Council all proposals for Ward Budget initiatives were approved by the Cabinet Member for Partnerships Improvements and Community Safety and for Manor ward by the Leader.

The coordination of proposals by the Community Leadership Team has meant that appropriate alternative sources of funding have been used where possible. For example, the Community Leadership Team also administers the Council's Chrysalis Programme and this has provided additional funding for several Ward Budget proposals.

Extent of the Initiative

Up to 3rd March 2010 proposals to the value of £513,448 out of the budget of £550,000 have been submitted by Members for approval. A small number of additional proposals are expected to be submitted by the 25 March 2010.

Currently 231 proposals have been approved across the 22 wards and a further 41 proposals await approval. They cover the whole sphere of community activity in the borough with 190 of the total relating to community groups and organisations, whilst the remaining 82 relate to environmental, road safety, etc. Environmental proposals such as tree planting and landscaping have proved very popular as have improvements to the physical environment. Such proposals have seen the introduction of new street furniture, benches and litter bins.

Community safety proposals have also proved popular with improved lighting and security fencing proposals to areas being approved. Traffic calming measures and a pedestrian crossing also featured in the range of community safety initiatives.

There are numerous examples of where schools and sports clubs benefited from the Ward Budget initiative. Resident and community associations, churches and a range of youth groups have been assisted with dozens of imaginative proposals being supported. Several community buildings have also benefited with funds being committed for repairs and improvements.

Proposals varied in scope and cost with the largest being a pedestrian crossing in Pinkwell which cost £25,000 and the smallest a mural produced by Newnham Junior School on the Eastcote Bridge which cost £35.

A comprehensive area list of proposals approved and awaiting approval up to 3rd March is attached in Appendix A.

Impact of the Initiative

The scale and range of the Initiative has meant that Ward Budgets have made a considerable impact across the borough. In some cases the benefit has quite literally been seen across town centres, with the boroughs festive lights programme being an example. In other areas the proposals have been more focused with, for example, grants to older people's associations to support local activity. Whilst not impacting wards in the same way as the environmental improvement schemes or the festive lights initiatives have, anecdotal feedback from residents benefiting from the smaller schemes has been overwhelmingly positive.

The Community Leadership Team who have supported community organisations and Councillors in implementing, coordinating and delivering the numerous and varying proposals have reported that the Ward Budget initiative has been exceedingly popular and has assisted the Council to respond and address local issues.

Appendix B lists all the organisations receiving support from Ward Budgets and serves to demonstrate the wide ranging impact the initiative has had in the borough. This list relates to community groups and organisations only.

As the initiative has focused on Councillors working with organisations and communities within their wards, there is little doubt the Ward Budget initiative has served to raise the profile of Councillors locally, and in some cases has seen Councillors cooperating across ward boundaries to support schemes. For example councillors used Ward Budgets to support an Automated Number Plate Recognition device in three wards in the north and to address a longstanding issue in Townfield and Botwell where shoppers had missiles thrown at them by young people and funding was approved to contribute towards fencing to resolve this problem.

Financial Implications

The overall allocation for the Ward Budgets is £550,000, based on a budget of £25k for each of the 22 wards in the borough. The funding for this initiative will run from 1 January 2009 to 31 March 2010. However, it should be noted that any proposals approved up to the 31 March 2010 will be funded from this budget, even though the costs may fall into the 2010/11 financial year.

For the individual proposals, officers are confident they can be met within the cost proposed, or action has been agreed with relevant service departments to fund any additional cost above the £25,000 allocation. In some instances there will be ongoing running costs, where it has been agreed that these will be met from the relevant service department's budgets on an annual basis once the projects are completed.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The Ward Budget initiative has had a positive impact on all sections of our community. It has supported Councillors and enabled them to make a difference in their wards by addressing specific local issues and priorities and delivering projects, which benefit residents and local organisations.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

This report has been compiled using the details and supporting information from the numerous proposals delivered as a result of the Ward Budget initiative. These proposals were developed by Councillors in conjunction with local organisations and the local community in each of the 22 wards.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Comments from Democratic Services

Democratic Services has sought to expedite decision-making for the Initiative through regular monthly Cabinet Member reports / decisions, the use of urgency procedures in exceptional cases and by waiving the scrutiny 'call-in'. This has ensured that Ward Budget proposals have proceeded swiftly to the delivery stage in order to benefit those concerned in the Wards as quickly as possible.

Corporate Finance

The report sets out the current status of expenditure commitments from the Ward Budget Initiative, including the treatment of any ongoing costs to the Council. The agreed allocations are funded from the drawing on reserves for the Ward Budget Initiative approved during the 2008/09 financial year.

Legal

There are no legal implications for this report since it is a summary of Ward Budget initiatives which require separate approval through individual reports.

Corporate Property

The Head of Corporate Property Services supports the recommendations contained within the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.