

Introduction

This Protocol provides useful guidance for ward councillors on how the Newcastle-under-Lyme Community Fund operates.

It aims to be as flexible as possible with so that ward councillors can be very responsive to local priorities and needs.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to have some rules governing the operation of the fund in order to ensure probity in public spending.

Funding is used to make a difference in a local area and give residents a chance to influence how their local priorities are met.

The Protocol sets out what ward councillors can expect from the initiative.

Overview

1. Ward budgets will enable ward councillors to put forward proposals for expenditure against a specific allocation for their Ward, to promote the wellbeing of the community and to respond to local priorities.
2. The scheme is intended to be flexible, responsive and quick to deliver, enabling councillors to determine how their Ward budgets are spent, but processes are transparent and accountable.
3. Proposals must be consistent with the council's objectives and contribute to the aim of putting residents first. They should meet an identified need from within the Ward and deliver value for money.
4. Rather than inviting general applications, which may result in disappointment for some, ward councillors should use their local knowledge and insight to identify proposals.
5. Anyone wishing to access funds should contact their ward Councillor directly to discuss their project and seek their support. If the project is supported an application form will be provided by the Councillor and this will be assessed.
6. Recommendations for projects will be considered by officers from the appropriate Council service for checking and agreement on a monthly basis, with a presumption of approval.
7. Officers will provide assistance and advice so that projects gain approval quickly.
8. Retrospective applications cannot be considered and the costs of these projects cannot be funded from a ward budget.

How Ward Councillor allocations can be used

1. Ward Councillor allocations are primarily intended for one-off spends on material works, events or activities that have a positive impact within the ward. For example:
 - supporting a local scout group for a specific activity
 - repairs or refurbishment of community facilities
 - purchase of street signs or furniture
 - renovating a village/community landmark
 - toys or equipment for a play group or nursery
 - installing a toilet for people with disabilities
 - older people's coach outing
 - a new park bench or memorial
 - specialist books or equipment for schools
 - supporting a community event, e.g. summer fete
 - a ward Christmas tree, lighting and decorations
 - contributions to support County Council initiatives such as the purchasing of a grit bin, but not ongoing filling and refilling costs
2. Ward Councillor allocations do not have to be spent all at once or on one proposal.
3. Ward Councillor allocations should be used for proposals where it can be demonstrated that residents from within the ward(s) can participate in and will benefit from that proposal.
4. Ward Councillor allocations can fund projects already covered by mainstream budgets or identified in future programmes if councillors wish to accelerate delivery.
5. Ward Councillor allocations may be used to provide 'match' funding to enable projects to go ahead that are partly funded from other sources.
6. General grants or donations to voluntary organisations, whether in receipt of council funding or not, are not permitted. However, grants for a specific purpose or activity to assist such organisations are allowed. These organisations must have a bank account and agree to the required terms and conditions before funding can be released.
7. Ward Councillor allocations can be used for capital or revenue expenditure but projects should not give rise to new revenue expenditure pressures for the council.
8. Ward Councillors must ensure that provision for maintenance costs is made within the agreed budget for a project, and in particular watering costs for trees or flowers.

With external organisations, agreement is needed so that ongoing costs are met e.g. maintenance of IT equipment.

9. Consideration should be given to the sustainability of projects and the effects locally when funding is exhausted. An exit strategy may be required to identify how a project can continue once funding ceases.
10. Funding can be allocated to projects in individual wards, or if an agreement can be reached it is possible for neighbouring wards to pool budgets to fund a project that benefits residents across the wards in this single project proposal.
11. Where projects involve works on land not owned by the council, written consent from the landowner is required, as part of the initial funding application before a decision can be made.

How Ward Councillor allocations should NOT be used

1. Ward Councillor allocations should not directly benefit an individual or a very small group of people. They are aimed at the wider community, or community organisations.
2. Ward Councillor allocations should not be made available to support the mainstream activities of commercial or voluntary sector organisations, such as meeting room hire, the running costs of a building or other overheads.
3. Ward Councillor allocations should not be used for party political purposes, including events organised by political parties or affiliated organisations.
4. Publicity at ward level will be delivered by councillors and ward budgets are not to be used for this purpose. General publicity on the scheme will be delivered by the council.
5. Ward budgets should not be used for proposals put forward by council officers acting in an official capacity. Funding is intended for projects identified by ward councillors from local residents and organisations in their ward.
6. Expenditure cannot be used that conflicts with any Council policy or budget decision (for example, as a result of an agreed budget saving).
7. Retrospective applications for expenditure cannot be considered.
8. Projects for which the council normally would have no clear legal mandate to incur expenditure cannot be considered.

9. Projects where the Monitoring Officer has advised that the proposal is unlawful or improper cannot be considered.
10. Proposals that could adversely affect the environment or community cannot be considered.

Budget Information

1. Each of the Borough's 44 Councillors will be allocated £2,500 (£110,000 in total) to spend on local projects and initiatives to benefit the community within their ward.
2. Unspent balances at the year-end cannot be carried forward.
3. The Finance section records the grants to be allocated as they are approved and reports on uncommitted balances available for distribution.
4. All allocations made to external organisations should be spent within six months from the date of issue.
5. Proofs of purchase or receipts must be supplied by the recipient to the Finance section for audit purposes. This is to ensure that that funding is used in accordance with the original approval, in a timely manner.
6. Grant terms and conditions will be agreed before payment is released, to ensure that recipients fully understand what is expected of them.
7. To achieve value for money for the council and to ensure groups/organisations receive their funding as quickly as possible, all ward budget grants will be made via BACs transfer only.

Conflicts of Interest

1. Councillors should abide by the Members Code of Conduct when submitting a proposal. It is possible that some councillors may have a non-pecuniary interest in a proposal, as they, along with many other residents, may use, visit or support a particular organisation or activity that may benefit from the initiative. It will be up to the councillor concerned as to whether they determine this as non-pecuniary interest (in which they may still submit a proposal) or a pecuniary interest.
2. Councillors should not submit any proposal in their ward where they have an actual or perceived pecuniary interest.
3. Further advice on interests can be sought from the Monitoring Officer, if required.