

Ward Funding Scrutiny Review

Progress Update on Implementation of New Approach to Ward Funding

1. Under the Council's new approach to ward committees additional budgets were devolved to wards in 2015/16 to create a single pot that wards can use flexibly to help address their priorities and to develop community initiatives which benefit local residents and reduce reliance on Council services. A total of £925k was devolved.
2. For 2016/17 a further £100k was added specifically to assist wards with local environmental schemes. The ward pots are made up of:
 - The general 'Ward Budget'.
 - The 'Pride in York Fund' - made up of both one-off and recurring elements, for the purpose of supporting environmental initiatives.
 - The 'Community Care Fund'- aimed at supporting the prevention or delay of people needing to access formal care packages and statutory support.
3. The ward pot can be spent as wards see fit within Council policies and procedures. The budgets may be used to give grants or to buy services.
4. In addition, a Ward Highways Programme was instituted partly localising the process for allocating highway improvements through the ward committees, and grounds maintenance and cleansing activities in each ward were devolved to the ward.
5. Spend to Date
In 2015/16 only £90k was spent from a budget of £475k, i.e. 19%. £385k was carried forward. As of 10 June 2016, only £61k had been committed from the 2016/17 budget of £910k (which included the carry forward), i.e. 6.7%. Subsequently a further carry forward was agreed of £100k unspent Pride in York money from 2015/16, bringing the total available ward funding budget for 2016/17 to £1010k (£1009,980).
6. An updated breakdown as of 18 January 2017 detailing actual spends, projected spend and planned schemes not yet on FMS at that time, showed a total commitment of £672,307 (67%) as detailed in the table below.

7. Feedback from ward councillors has suggested that they are finding aspects of spending ward funding challenging despite early changes to make it easier, e.g. dropping the grounds maintenance spreadsheet.
8. Publicising Available Budgets
Wards have been made aware of the budgets available and how people can get involved in discussions via a number of routes i.e. social media, residents' email distribution lists, parish council websites, posters in the community, presentations at parish council meetings, and ward web pages. In addition, information was provided to residents via an insert in 'Our City' and the budget commitments to date have been listed on the council website at: <https://www.york.gov.uk/wardfundingdecisions>;
9. Effective Use of Ward Budgets
To date targeted preventative projects have been undertaken for older and vulnerable residents, events and activities for children and young people, and grants to locally based community groups to make improvements to community facilities and the local environment. However, the majority of these have focussed on capital purchases, things where the expenditure is clearly visible. Commissioning projects e.g. a service for a particular group has been much less common.
10. Evidence of Impact (Outcomes & Benefits)
As yet there is insufficient evidence to suggest whether or not value for money through ward spending is being achieved or whether it is making a difference and addressing ward priorities. However in the future, grant recipients will be expected to provide grant monitoring reports to help ward councillors to assess the impact and outcomes, and a annual review sheet has been developed which can be offered to wards.
11. Devolved Grounds Maintenance & Cleansing Activities
Wards have now submitted their recommendations for Grounds maintenance budget for 2016/17, which show that a variety of approaches have been taken to meeting the savings targets. For example, community groups have taken on planting schemes. However there is still a question over whether wards are able to commission sufficient local schemes to meet their maintenance needs.
12. It is planned that maps will be provided at forthcoming ward meetings to show current cleansing arrangements in the ward. Using these, Ward members will be able to re-prioritise activity based on their local knowledge or priorities, or supplement cleansing activity from their ward budgets where they wish to (subject to deliverability).

13. Ward Highways Programme

Originally, each ward received the highways priority list for footways and carriageway works in 2016/17, in order to assist them in identifying locations for potential schemes subject to feasibility, legality and budget availability. To further assist them, improved information is now to be provided to wards to show the schemes in the main highways programme proposed for their wards. Further information will also be developed to assist wards in having an idea about the likely scale of cost for various types of maintenance initiatives and a further member briefing will be arranged. The list of schemes for 17/18 will be available in late summer.