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**Decision Session – Executive Member for  
Culture, Leisure and Communities**

2 February 2021

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities & Culture)

## **Ward Funding**

### **Summary**

1. This report sets out a review of the use of ward funding during 2020/21 and identifies issues and opportunities for 2021/22.

### **Recommendation**

2. The Executive Member is asked to consider the analysis of ward funding set out and:
  - Note the success of ward budgets in responding to Covid-19
  - Note the diverse range of effective ways in which ward funding is being used to support local communities
  - Recommend to ward members the potential priority areas set out in paragraphs 17 and following in order to focus support for residents deemed vulnerable, isolated, or in need of other essential help and to combat the worst effects of Covid-19
  - Consider the effectiveness of ward funding to meet community needs, hearing the voice of the community and charitable groups that have utilised ward funding

Reason: So that ward funding will be used effectively to:

- Engage residents in making better local use of resources
- Enable ward members to deliver on local priorities

### **Background**

3. Council on 29 October requested the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities to:
  - a) instigate a review of the use of devolved ward budgets, in the context of unprecedented financial pressures, so as to

maximise their efficiency, value for money, and impact for residents across the whole city; and

- b) as part of this review and within the next month, prioritise the flexible use of ward budgets with each councillor allocating £2,000 within their ward budgets over the next 6 months, to utilise a focused resource of almost £100,000. This resource will focus on supporting residents deemed vulnerable, isolated, or in need of other essential help through the funding of community, voluntary and other organisations working to combat the worst effects of Covid-19.

4. Ward revenue budgets are currently made up of:

- A core budget of £150k
- A “Pride in York” budget of £200k
- A “Safer Communities Fund” of £250k

(The Safer Communities Fund was introduced as part of the council’s Supplementary Budget Proposals agreed in July 2019 with criteria set out in the “Refreshing Ward Committees” paper agreed by Executive in August 2019 Executive. This fund was originally introduced as a one-off allocation to cover the 4 years of the administration; however, an additional £250k allocation was made in 20/21.)

5. The Ward Highways Capital Scheme is a four-year programme which allows wards to aggregate their allocations in order to undertake more substantial schemes. It consists of:

- £250k p.a. set aside from the Highways capital programme
- A one-off £500k to be used for highways improvements in respect of Roads and Footways
- A one-off £500k to be used for walking and cycling improvements

6. Revenue and capital budgets are devolved to wards in proportion to the number of members that each ward has.

7. In addition, the Housing Environment Improvement Programme (HEIP) is a four-year programme which funds physical improvements to council housing land and property. The £170k p.a. is allocated to wards in proportion to the number of council housing properties in the ward.

## Spending Ward Budgets

### Revenue budgets:

8. In 19/20, a total of £443k was allocated to schemes by wards from their revenue budgets (of which £392k was spent in year) with the balance of this included in the total carried forward into 20/21. Given that there were many new ward members in that first year of the new administration who needed to establish their ward priorities prior to developing spending plans, this represents a healthy level of expenditure.
9. Funds are allocated to wards on the basis of a single integrated pot. Nonetheless, by looking at the nature of the expenditure, it is possible to make some analysis of the nature of expenditure. In 2019/20:
  - £258k was spent on “core” budget activity
  - £82k has been spent on “Pride in York” related activity
  - £102k was spent on “Safer Communities” related activity
10. Looking at the current year’s spend we can see that to date:
  - £336k has already been spent/committed on “core” budget activity
  - £45k has been spent/committed on “Pride in York” related activity
  - £99k has been spent/committed on “Safer Communities” related activity
11. Analysis of spend in 2019/20 shows that the spend can also be broken down by category:

• Grants to community organisations	77%
• Works commissioned from CYC depts.	19%
• Externally purchased services	4%
12. This analysis demonstrates that wards are:
  - by and large on track to manage their spend to target, utilising the previous year’s underspend over time in a managed way
  - using their budgets in an integrated way in pursuit of their identified priorities
  - supporting the local community and voluntary sector by investing in its capacity as a source of expertise and as service provider

13. Ward grants are used to support local community groups and initiatives to deliver projects and improvements within their local area. This allows members to build resilience within their communities and add value in ways that are of most benefit locally. One very timely example of this is the provision of salt bins around the city, where wards have funded the installation and filling of 48 new salt bins over the past 4 years.
14. Ward grants have been used extensively to meet the identified city priority of reducing loneliness and social isolation as well as expanding opportunities for young people and improving health and wellbeing. Some example schemes meeting these priorities are set out in Appendix 2.
15. Ward grants have been well utilised throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, with over 40 grants totalling more than £55,000 distributed to community groups so far. The support they have offered has been wide ranging, from food deliveries to online learning and initiatives to reduce the social isolation caused by lockdown. Appendix 3 shows a table of Covid-19 grants given out by wards.
16. It is proposed to continue to develop use of the Social Value Engine (an online calculator-style tool created by Rose Regeneration and East Riding of Yorkshire Council which aims to provide a universal measure of outcome) to evaluate the impact of ward schemes. The tool can also help ward members in predicting where a project or service has most social value and in prioritising where an intervention can have the most positive impact. It is helpful in evidencing the value of seed- and match-funding, which is particularly helpful in the context of ward funding.

### **Future Priority Areas**

17. Included in the council's budget proposals for 21/22 is a ward Covid-19 recovery fund. If approved by Budget Council, this fund will enable wards to deliver a community-based approach to post-Covid-19 recovery supporting their communities to build resilient support networks in order to deal with current issues and to prevent crises recurring.
18. Wards will be able to respond to particular local need, for example in the areas of: food poverty, child poverty, support for families / early help, health and wellbeing, enterprise and access to work, skills development, equality of access to services.

19. Wards may work through existing community groups with the aim of establishing a network of trusted community groups that will provide support to residents, both in the recovery phase and during any future crisis periods.
20. Wards should also consider using part of their funding to work through their local hubs. The council's virtual hubs are currently being maintained to continue to provide support to those who need it, a mix of those who have previously been shielding, those currently self-isolating, those experiencing financial difficulties due to furlough/redundancy, and families who may previously have accessed drop-in sessions during school holidays. As times goes on we are increasingly working with individuals and communities to look at longer-term solutions, both for those directly affected by the virus and for those affected by its wider impacts. Taking a person-centred approach this model supports individuals through a crisis and helps build resilience to prevent future crises. Ward funding could be used to develop services through hubs that meet local need, complementing the work of the council by commission community and third sector organisations working through those hubs.

### **Ward Highways Capital Scheme**

21. With the capital program approaching the half way point, we have over 320 scheme suggestions. Common themes identified include: preventing anti-social parking and protecting grass verges, improving cycling infrastructure and undertaking road repair to residential roads that are unlikely to be repaired under the main capital programme.
22. In December the highways and communities teams undertook another round of 'walkabouts' with Ward Members with very positive feedback form those wards that took up the opportunity. It is generally appreciated that walkabouts, assisted by highways engineers, are the best way for Members to mobilise their ward capital allocations effectively to resolve local highways concerns and progress ideas and suggestions from local communities.

### **HEIP**

23. The Housing Environment Improvement Programme is an opportunity for Members to deliver positive changes for housing tenants in their wards. HEIP Is currently delivering 45 schemes across the city, mainly around themes of open space improvement, improvements to parking and community safety schemes. Though

delivery has been impacted by the pandemic, teams are confident they can increase the pace of the delivery once restrictions ease. The Communities Team continue to work closely with colleagues in housing to ensure the success of the program.

### **Ward Funding Process**

24. Covid-19 restrictions and continued lockdowns impacted on the traditional Ward Committee format with no face to face meetings held for much of the year. However, wards have adapted to the challenge, moving their engagement work to online platforms such as Zoom. Examples of meetings held this way include Holgate Ward holding a successful community discussion on cycling provision and Rawcliffe and Clifton Without Ward holding a well-attended consultation meeting on the proposed changes to Hurricane Way traffic lights.
25. Ward spends are closely monitored and reported on, with all ward spending published as an online 'Officer Decision Log' and a regularly updated spreadsheet uploaded to the open data platform. All grant recipients are required to complete a monitoring form that not only evidences how they spent the grant, but asks them to provide details on the impact of the grant along with feedback and learning we can pass on to support similar initiatives in the future.
26. Those ward projects which represent innovation or excellent working practices will be shared amongst wards in the form of a monthly ward update, which will also include reminders of ward meeting schedules and ward budget updates. The sharing of ward ideas and practice has traditionally been done organically within the normal working day, but with the move to more permanent remote working, steps will need to be taken to make sure that this process still occurs in a scheduled manner.

### **Options and Analysis**

27. It is open to the Executive Member to accept the analysis and the future priorities suggested or to suggest alternative priorities.
28. The benefits of continuing to develop neighbourhood working are evident locally and have been demonstrated through national research. For example, a 2018 report by the National Association of Neighbourhood Management showed how successful those authorities have been that declined to cut neighbourhood budgets in response in response to austerity but instead invested strategically in locality working, with a wide geographical coverage of the local

authority area and a high level of ambition in terms of the range of issues it seeks to address. These authorities are seeing strategic locality working delivering a transformative effect for local communities, addressing some of the most challenging issues nationally, such as mental health and wellbeing, adult social care, and skills and employability. Those authorities that have operated locality working in this way were reported to expect to continue to invest in it over the next few years.

### **Implications**

29. **Finance:** The allocation of ward budgets is shown at Appendix 1.
30. **Equalities:** The equality impact assessment points to the need for a wide variety of methods being required to enable the engagement of all residents in ward priorities and action planning. It also suggests the need for multiple channels of communication.
31. There are no additional Legal, HR, IT, Crime and Disorder or other implications arising directly from this report.

### **Council Plan**

32. Ward Funding can support many of the aims of the Council Plan and especially:
  - A Greener and Cleaner City
  - Good Health and Wellbeing
  - A Better Start for Children and Young People
  - An inclusive economy
  - Safe Communities and culture for all

### **Risk Management**

33. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations, which could in turn damage the Council's image and reputation. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score has been assessed at "Low". This means that the risk level is acceptable but that regular monitoring of progress against delivery of ward schemes will be required.

## Contact Details

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Liam Dennis Ward Schemes Project Manager	<b>Report Approved</b>	√	<b>Date</b>	22/1/20
<b>Wards Affected:</b>			<b>All</b>	✓
<b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b>				

### Annexes:

Appendix 1	Allocation of ward budgets
Appendix 2	Example schemes
Appendix 3	Covid-19 related grants