

WARD DISCRETIONARY BUDGET**Report of the Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Governance****1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 At the Budget Council Meeting on 23 February 2023, approval was given to the allocation of £0.260m to fund the creation and administration of a Ward Discretionary Budget to provide each ward with an additional discretionary sum of £10,000 to spend on ward priorities.
- 1.2 This report details the proposed governance arrangements for the making of allocations from the Ward Discretionary Budget and the delegation arrangements for the making of decisions with regard to those proposed allocations.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As part of its proposals to the Budget Council Meeting, the Cabinet noted that there was £2.523m of available one-off resources for consideration as part of its proposed revenue budget. Following discussion with the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, the Cabinet recommended using £0.685m of these resources to balance the budget. This left £1.838m of available one-off resources to support positive investments aligned to the Cabinet's priorities.
- 2.2 The Cabinet proposed to allocate £1.875m, including £1.578m of the available one-off resources and £0.297m from the Household Support Fund Phase 4, to widen Free School Meal eligibility for one year to support the prevention of child hunger.
- 2.3 The Cabinet then recommended that the remaining £0.260m be allocated to support the creation of a Ward Discretionary Budget (in addition to the existing 'Ward Flexibility' and 'Delegated' Budgets, to spend on Ward priorities acknowledging that ward councillors are best placed to make these decisions.
- 2.4 As a consequence of the Council Meeting's decision to approve the Cabinet's recommendations, the Leader of the Council has now agreed to put in place the necessary arrangements for the administration and delegation of the Fund. This report details the agreed mechanism for approval of ward priority investments using this discretionary sum.

3. WARD DISCRETIONARY BUDGET

- 3.1 Under these arrangements, each ward will be allocated £10,000 for the 2023/24 municipal year to spend on priorities as determined by the members elected to represent that ward.
- 3.2 The Ward Discretionary Budget is distinct and separate to the Ward Flexibility and Ward Delegated Budgets, however it is acknowledged that it may be

appropriate to use the Ward Discretionary Budget to fund schemes that could also fall within the scope of these budgets.

- 3.3 Each ward is now requested to identify its priorities (or funding allocations) for the forthcoming year for the use of its allocation. Wards may choose to defer the identification of spending priorities to a later date.
- 3.4 Following the identification of these priorities, the relevant officers will then be asked to draw up formal proposals for submission to a future meeting of the area committee. All proposed priorities from the fund shall be supported by a written report which must be submitted to the relevant area committee.
- 3.5 Wards may identify a single or multiple projects, schemes or initiatives that can be funded from within their allocation as they deem appropriate. Any proposed allocations from this budget must support the environmental, economic or social wellbeing of residents within the ward.
- 3.6 The area committee's progress reports will include a further appendix providing a budget update position in the same way that the ward flexibility and ward delegated budgets are currently reported on.
- 3.7 The fund is a single one-off allocation and it is expected that all allocations and/or spend will be made within the 2023/24 municipal year.

4. DELEGATION ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 The Leader of the Council has given approval to the delegation to area committees of the identification of ward priorities for the municipal year and for them to work with officers to draw up formal proposals for approval.
- 4.2 It is anticipated that all relevant ward councillors would be in full support of any proposed allocations from the Ward Discretionary Fund, and it is expected that unanimity will be secured in advance of the meeting.
- 4.3 Formal proposals will then be considered by the relevant area committee which can then make a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources who has been authorised to give final approval for the release of funding allocations in the light of the recommendations from the area committees and the expectation that it will be accompanied with the full support of all members in the ward.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The Area Committee is recommended to:-
 - (1) Note that each ward has been allocated an additional discretionary sum of £10,000 to spend on ward priorities.
 - (2) Give approval to the identification of those priorities, or proposed allocations, on a ward-by-ward basis.

- (3) Work with officers to draw up formal costed proposals that have the full support of all Members of the ward for submission to a future meeting of the area committee for recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Vicki Bates on Tel: 0161 474 3219 or by email on vicki.bates@stockport.gov.uk