

## Area West Committee – 19th December 2007

### 7. Funding Local Improvements through Area Forums (Executive Decision)

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#### Purpose of the Report

To support arrangements for funding Local Improvements through Area Forums.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the Area West Community Forum Sub-Committees be authorised to spend up to £34,999 to accommodate a community priority scheme or schemes that would otherwise take the forum over their £30,000 budget.

#### Background

As members will recall from earlier reports, the District Executive has asked each Area Committee to build on current community engagement models and draw together an Area Forum or Forums, in each of the areas, with a specific remit to:

- (a) continue the place-shaping dialogue leading to agreed area priorities;
- (b) improve ways in which stakeholders hold services to account for service delivery;
- (c) explore innovative ways of designing services around community aspirations.

To support the development of a process of better aligning service need with service delivery, all area committees have been allocated £40,000 per area, to be drawn down between October 1st 2007 and September 30th 2008.

#### Opportunity Events

Area West Committee adopted their pilot proposals for Area (Community) Forums in June 2007, subsequently branded as “Opportunity” events.

Our key aim has been to enhance community involvement in local decision-making. For each Opportunity event, residents are being invited to put forward ideas for local improvements, including improvements to services, from which the best proposals can be chosen and carried out. A report on the first of these – Opportunity Ilminster – is included in the agenda (item 8).

It is intended to use the £40,000 area allocation (above) to fund the community supported schemes from the first round of Opportunity Events.

#### Supporting Community Involvement

Members have agreed that the budget should be the same for each Opportunity Event and set a £30,000 budget per forum from the Area Reserves to fund local improvement schemes.

For each event local residents are told that a financial contribution of up to £5,000 can be sought towards the cost of each proposal and community decisions are made through a

system of voting. Area Sub-Committees take note of the votes cast when deciding which proposals to support.

The £30,000 funding “pot” is used to promote involvement in the event and let residents know that there will be real resources to turn their decision into reality.

A management issue can arise when the community votes for two or more schemes are tied and the cost of those particular schemes exceeds the £30,000 advertised budget. Local residents have expectations that they will see £30,000 allocated, and we must do all we can to meet those expectations.

The area allocation of £40,000 will allow some flexibility here and it is recommended that the Area Sub-Committees be allowed to spend up to £34,999 to accommodate a community priority scheme or schemes that would otherwise take the forum over budget.

However, where more than two schemes have equal votes and funding them would exceed £34,999, the cut off point should be below the £30,000 budget. The Sub-Committee will be required to re-convene to consider what funding arrangements can be made to ensure that their full £30,000 budget is allocated to local schemes.

## Fair shares

In line with member expectations, the Head of Area Development (West) will ensure that any such additional expenditure is equal as possible across all three forums. This will require a review of variations in spending once the first three events are complete.

## Financial Implications

Making use of the area allocation of £40,000 as indicated above will;

- Give Area West Sub-Committees greater flexibility to commit their full budget at each opportunity event.
- Allow an additional amount to be kept in the Area reserve that could be used to support future Opportunity events.

## Implications for Corporate Priorities

- Objective 8 “ work in partnership with the public and private sector in developing and delivery of the Market Towns Vision”
- Objective 9 “Identify and address the particular issues affecting rural areas”
- Objective 15 “ Increase to 65% by 2010 the people who feel engaged in and can influence decisions that affect their communities”

**Background Papers:** *Arrangements for Future Community Forum Events, Report to Area West Committee 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007*  
*Area Working – Building on our Success; Report to District Executive 7<sup>th</sup> December 2006.*