

Area West Committee – 19th December 2007

8. Report on Opportunity Ilminster held on Thursday 15th November

Head of Service: Andrew Gillespie - Head of Area Development (West)
Lead Officer: Zoë Harris – Community Regeneration Officer
Contact Details: zoe.harris@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01460) 260423

Purpose of the Report

To update the Committee on the outcome of Opportunity Ilminster, the community forum which took place at the Shrubbery Hotel on Thursday 15th November 2007.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members note the contents of the report and suggest any changes they would like to see implemented in future 'Opportunity' events.

Background

Following the Chard Community Forum event in February 2007, members agreed to hold further events in Ilminster, Crewkerne and Chard. Opportunity Ilminster was the first event to take place.

Report

People from Ilminster, Ashill, Broadway, Chillington, Cudworth, Donyatt, Dowlish Wake, Horton, Kingstone and Whitelackington with a good idea that would improve their community were invited to apply for up to £5000.

Prior to the event

Opportunity Ilminster was promoted to groups and people wishing to apply for money in the following ways:

- Press articles appeared in View from Ilminster, Chard & Ilminster News & the Western Gazette.
- A letter and flyer was sent to each parish council within the Ilminster Community Planning Area
- Article on SSDC website along with form and guidance notes.

32 applications were received and 31 applicants were invited to the Shrubbery Hotel on the 15th November to put their case to the public vote. All applicants were contacted with details of the evening and asked to submit one image that could be used on a PowerPoint slide during their presentation. Applicants were invited to put up a display of information giving additional details about their organisation.

Publicity of the event

The public were made aware of the event through the following news media:

- Interview on Orchard FM broadcast several times on 15th November
- Interview on Ivel FM broadcast several times on 15th November
- Article inside Chard & Ilminster News on 14th November
- Front page of Western Gazette on 8th November

- Front page news Chard & Ilminster News on 7th November
- Interview on BBC Somerset Sound on 26th October
- Article on SSDC website

The night itself

Over 200 people attended the event, this included 192 people who were eligible to vote plus a number of children. On arrival those people eligible to vote were issued with a voting pack which contained the following information:

- List of the projects with the amount of money requested.
- An agenda
- Voting guidelines
- 5 numbered sticky dots

The Area Chairman opened Opportunity Ilminster and the Mayor of Ilminster, chaired the event. It was also attended by the local County and District Councillors. Each applicant had three minutes to briefly describe their project, say how much money they required and how their project would benefit the local community. To ensure each applicant spoke for a maximum of three minutes a digital countdown clock was projected onto a screen for everyone to see.

After the presentations the public were given 30 minutes to view the displays and place their votes.

Voting

Next to the displays each project had an A3 sized voting sheet. Each voting sheet contained the name of the project, the project number and the amount of money they were requesting.

The public voted by placing their sticky dots onto the voting sheets. The public were allowed to vote for up to five different projects but they could only use one sticky dot per project. To ensure people abided by this rule the sticky dots were numbered, so each voter had five dots with the same number.

After the 30 minutes the voting sheets were collected in and five officers were involved in counting the votes. The votes were then input onto a computer spreadsheet (attached at page 10). There was a draw for tenth place with Horton Parish Council and the Ilminster Midsummer Experience each receiving 40 votes, this brought the total cost of the projects to £32,204.

The Area West Community Forum (Ilminster) Sub-Committee agreed the award of funding en bloc in accordance with the community vote. With regard to the 2 organisations who had received 40 votes, the Sub-Committee agreed to award the full amount applied for to both the projects concerned and asked the Head of Area Development (West) to look into funding the additional sum of £2,204 from an alternative budget. The minutes of the Sub-Committee have been circulated to members previously.

After the event

Each successful applicant has been sent a letter along with a Funding Offer Form and a Monitoring Form. The unsuccessful applicants have been sent a letter thanking them for participating in the event; this also included details of relevant grants that they could apply to.

Feedback

Media coverage of the event has been positive and complimentary. Feedback forms completed at the event have also been largely positive.

- Sixty nine people (36% of the voters) completed a feedback form
- 86% of those people felt the event was a good way to decide how grants should be given out.
- 94% of those people would attend a similar event to Opportunity Ilminster
- 62% of those people had never attended a District Council meeting before.

People were asked how they felt future events could be improved. Many of the comments suggested a larger venue and less heating. There were also some comments on the voting system.

In addition to the feedback forms I have received comments via email asking whether it would be possible to give people the opportunity to vote outside of the meeting times as not everyone is able to attend the meeting.

Financial Implications

The combined cost of the successful projects exceeded the £30,000 allocated to Opportunity Ilminster. Please refer to the separate report on this agenda (item 7).

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The forum addressed the corporate aim to “Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities” and in particular corporate objectives fifteen and sixteen namely:

- Increase to 65% by 2010 the people who feel engaged in and can influence decisions that affect their communities – (Objective 15).
- Maintain above 80% the people satisfied with their neighbourhoods as a place to live – (Objective 16).

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