

Area West Committee – 19th March 2008

7. Report on Opportunity Crewkerne held on Wednesday 13th February 2008

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Purpose of the Report

To update the Committee on the outcome of Opportunity Crewkerne, the community forum which took place at Wadham School, Crewkerne on Wednesday 13th February 2008.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members note the contents of the report.

Background

Following the Chard Community Forum event in February 2007, members agreed to hold further events in Ilminster, Crewkerne and Chard. Opportunity Crewkerne followed on from the success of Opportunity Ilminster, which took place in November 2007.

Report

In November 2007, people from Crewkerne, Chiselborough, Dinnington, Merriott, Misterton, East Chinnock, Haselbury Plucknett, Hinton St George, Wayford, West Chinnock, North Perrott and West Crewkerne with a good idea that would improve their community were invited to apply for up to £5000.

Prior to the event

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

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

28 applicants were invited to Wadham School on the 13th February 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 BBC Somerset Sound – Tuesday 12th February
- Articles inside Chard & Ilminster News on 6th & 13th February
- Article inside View from Crewkerne on 8th February
- Article in Crewkerne Advertiser
- Article inside Western Gazette on 7th February
- Posters distributed around Crewkerne and sent to applicants in the villages taking part.
- Article on SSDC website

The night itself

After the Opportunity Ilminster event it was decided that voting could be open for 1 hour prior to the presentations at Opportunity Crewkerne to allow voting by those people unable to make the meeting.

Many people took the opportunity to vote prior to the presentations. Between 6pm and 7pm votes were cast on a large voting sheet located in the school hall. At 7pm voting was stopped so that the meeting and presentations could commence.

Councillor Kim Turner, Chair of Area West, opened Opportunity Crewkerne and Councillor Mike Best, the Mayor of Crewkerne, chaired the event. 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.

After the presentations the public were given 30 minutes to view the displays and place their votes on the A3 voting sheets located next to the displays of each project. 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.

Altogether 1392 votes were cast, which averages out at approximately 4 votes per person.

After the 30 minutes the voting sheets were collected in and six officers were involved in counting the votes. These votes were then added to those that had already been cast on the larger voting sheet. The votes were then input onto a computer spreadsheet (attached at pages 4-5). Altogether 8 projects were awarded funds and this brought the total cost of the projects to £32,101.

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 other sources 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.

Altogether 365 voting packs with feedback forms were handed out and 121 (33%) were completed and handed in.

Of the 121 feedback forms, we have received the following responses:

- 72% of those people felt the event was a good way to decide how grants should be given out.
- 87% of those people would attend a similar event to Opportunity Crewkerne.
- 53% of those people had never attended a District Council meeting before.

People were asked why they had attended

- 54% were actively involved with one of the participating projects
- 40% wanted to take part in deciding which projects received funding
- 12% were asked to come and vote by a participating project
- 3% felt it sounded an interesting event

People were asked how they felt future events could be improved; many of the comments suggested a larger venue providing more space for the displays.

There were a number of comments suggesting that the time for voting should be extended to allow more people to participate. However, there were also a number of comments requesting that voting should only be allowed once all the presentations had taken place.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Opportunity Crewkerne 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: *Funding Local Improvements through Area Forums – Report to Area West Committee - 19th December 2007.*
Community Forums and the need to create new Sub-Committees – Report to Area West Committee – 19th September 2007.
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.