

7. Report on Opportunity Chard held on Wednesday 12th March 2008

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Purpose of the Report

To update the Committee on the outcome of Opportunity Chard, the community forum which took place at The Guildhall, Chard on Wednesday 12 March 2008.

Recommendation

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 Chard is the last in the series of such events.

Report

In March 2008, people from Chard and the surrounding villages of Buckland St Mary, Combe St Nicholas, Whitestaunton, Tatworth, South Chard, Cricket St Thomas, Chaffcombe, Knowle St Giles, Perry Street, Forton, Winsham, Wambrook and Wadeford were invited to apply for up to £5,000 towards a project that would improve their community in some way.

Prior to the event

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

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

32 applicants were invited to the Guildhall to put their case to the public vote. All applicants were contacted with details of the evening and asked to submit a photograph or image that would best represent their application. This was to be projected on a screen behind them during their presentation. Applicants were invited to put up a display in the entrance of the Guildhall giving additional details about their organisation.

Publicity for the event

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

- 2 Interviews on BBC Somerset Sound – 22nd February and 14th March
- Article inside View from Chard on 13th December 2007
- Articles inside Chard & Ilminster News on 27th Feb & 12th and 19th March

- Article in Chard Advertiser on 19th March
- Article inside Western Gazette on 20th March
- Posters distributed around Chard and sent to applicants in the villages taking part.
- Article on SSDC website

The night itself

As a result of the previous Opportunity Event in Crewkerne it was decided that voting would only take place after the presentations had finished. This was to stop people just turning up, voting and leaving without really taking part in the community event.

Councillor Kim Turner, Chair of Area West Committee, opened Opportunity Chard and Councillor Martin Wale, the Mayor of Chard, 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. There were a wide variety of projects and a wide variety of presentation delivery, which added to the evening's entertainment.

After the presentations the public were given 30 minutes to view the displays and place their votes (indicated by a sticky dot) 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.

The capacity of the main hall was reached soon after 7pm, at which point the decision was taken, for health and safety reasons to close the doors to the public. There was a large number of people still queuing outside, they were originally told that they would not be able to come in to place their votes until after all the presentations had taken place. Some went away, but many opted to stay outside in the queue. After some time senior members of SSDC staff took the decision to let 10 people in at a time to vote, providing they left straight afterwards. A 10 in, 10 out situation. Although these people were not able to see the presentations they could at least support their chosen projects.

Altogether 1,745 votes were cast, which averages out at approximately 4.2 votes per person.

At close of voting the voting sheets were collected in and officers were involved in counting the votes. The votes were then input onto a computer spreadsheet ready to be projected on the big screen for the public to see (see appendix at pages 18-19). Altogether 10 projects were awarded funds and this brought the total cost of the projects to £31,535.

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 415 voting packs with feedback forms were handed out and 136 (33%) were completed and handed in.

Of the 136 feedback forms, we have received the following responses:

- 64% of those people felt the event was a good way to decide how grants should be given out.
- 86% of those people would attend a similar event to Opportunity Chard.
- 67% of those people had never attended a District Council meeting before.

People were asked why they had attended

- 71% were actively involved with one of the participating projects
- 10% wanted to take part in deciding which projects received funding
- 18% were asked to come and vote by a participating project
- 1% 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, these were similar to the comments received after the Opportunity Crewkerne event.

There were a number of comments suggesting that the time for voting should be extended to allow more people to participate, some also suggested a Saturday, however 82% of those who responded to the feedback form said the time of the event was convenient.

Officers and members will now look at all the opportunity events at a members' workshop to discuss the successes and those parts of the events that could be improved.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Opportunity Chard 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.