

Area West Committee – 17th November 2010

## 8. Area West Opportunity Event (Executive Decision)

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### Purpose of the Report

To recommend the future format and arrangements, for 'Opportunity', the Community Forum in Area West.

### Public Interest

This report recommends the adoption of arrangements for the new style Opportunity event in Area West. This will give residents the chance to choose how money will be spent in their local area on community projects and mainstream SSDC services, such as street cleaning or play services.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- (1) give in principle approval for the Community Regeneration Officer to plan and make arrangements for 'Opportunity' the Area West Community Forum;
- (2) allocate a budget of £50,000 to fund local improvement schemes, as detailed below;
- (3) agree that the budget should be split 50:50 between mainstream SSDC service delivery and community projects.

### Background

In 2007/8 each Area was allocated a Service Enhancement budget and asked to experiment with new models of decision making and community engagement to establish how that budget should be spent in the locality. The result was Community Forums, which were used to deliver participatory budgeting style events where the public got involved in decision making in relation to a local budget. The success of the 'Opportunity' events model in Area West has been widely reported.

Participatory Budgeting involves local people directly in deciding how part of a public budget is spent. This helps tailor services closer to local needs, giving people more ownership of their community. Residents and community groups representative of all parts of the community are engaged in debating the merits of various spending proposals. Local people can vote on these proposals, and can have a role in scrutinising and monitoring the process.

Participatory Budgeting can help:

- achieve decisions better tailored to local needs

- engender greater understanding of the complexities of public budgeting and increase transparency and accountability of public budgets
- develop participants' skills, experience and confidence
- bring people together from different backgrounds within an area
- local councillors and council officials to work better with residents
- galvanize further involvement in activities in the local neighbourhood.

The Area West Development team have been looking at ways to develop the participatory budgeting model used in Opportunity events to encourage residents to become involved in decisions over mainstream budgets and services as well as community grants. This work fits in with the growing interest both locally and nationally in Participatory Budgeting and concepts such as 'Total Place' where budgets from a variety of agencies can be used more effectively to deliver services within a community. With the increasing need for all public agencies to deliver services with less money there is a need to look at using local knowledge to inform better service delivery. Such a way of working is attracting a lot of interest at local, regional and national level and is likely to be adopted through the forthcoming Localism Bill.

A model of voting that has been used with great success elsewhere in other participatory budgeting events has been deliberative voting. This is where people are encouraged to discuss proposals and consider them in relation to particular criteria e.g. does it offer value for money or does it meet the needs of the community.

### **Stage One – Inviting Project Proposals**

#### SSDC Service Proposals

The SSDC Heads of Service will be invited to put forward suggestions on how they could spend up to £3,000 within their service on a proposal that is specific to Area West. This maybe a package of measures that benefits a particular sector or theme across Area West or it could be a specific proposal that focuses on one particular geographical area.

Members can also put forward proposals for how they would like to see up to £3,000 spent within their ward. Suggestions put forward by members and Heads of Service will need to be submitted in writing with appropriate costs, need to relate to SSDC services, will have to be deliverable within 12 months and should meet one or more of the targets identified in the Corporate Plan.

#### Community Groups

The remaining 50% of the budget will be allocated to external organisations. Local community groups will be invited to submit proposals for projects that benefit their local community, they will be able to apply for up to £3,000. Applications will need to be in writing and deliverable within one year. Groups that have received funding via Opportunity on more than one occasion will not be eligible to apply.

### **Stage 2 - Shortlisting Projects**

Once all the applications are in they will be assessed by a small panel made up of officers and members, the details of this panel will be worked up with the Area West Community Regeneration Officer in consultation with the Area West Committee Chair. Those applications that meet the eligibility criteria will go through to the second stage for the public vote.

As there is only one event and to ensure that more people are involved in the democratic process, rather than put all the project proposals forward to a public event, residents will be asked to use consensus voting to decide which proposals go through to the final stage.

This voting stage will take place through the media and via the SSDC community offices. To ensure a fair geographic distribution of projects gets through to the final event the projects will be split into 3 geographical areas

- Chard & hinterland
- Crewkerne & hinterland
- Ilminster & hinterland

There will then be a list of project proposals, both service and community, put forward for each area. The lists will contain the following information about each proposal: how the money will be spent, the benefits, geographical area of benefit, cost of project.

Residents will be asked to pick their three favourite service projects and their three favourite community projects, scoring them 1 – 3 with 3 being the top mark.

The highest scoring service projects and the highest scoring community projects from each area will go through. To ensure that the villages stand a good chance of being involved the top scoring village community project and the top scoring service proposal from each area will go through.

It is envisaged that approximately 10 to 15 service proposals and 10 - 15 community projects will go through to the final event.

A list giving brief details of those proposals that make it through to the final stage will be published.

### **Stage 3 – The Event**

This will be the main event where all the projects that have made it through will be invited to a public meeting. The format for this event will differ slightly from previous Opportunity events. Like previous events all applicants will be expected to attend and give a three minute presentation and provide a display with additional information on their proposal.

Unlike previous events the audience will engage in a deliberative voting procedure and there will be an opportunity to ask applicants questions about their proposals.

#### *Format and timing of the event*

Because of the need to allow questions after each presentation and because the deliberative voting can take longer it may be necessary to hold the event on a Saturday.

The SSDC Service proposals will be heard first. Each service representative or member will give their three minute presentation and after each one there will be up to five minutes for the audience to ask questions. Once all the Service proposals have been heard the audience will vote using the deliberative voting model.

Once the votes have been cast there will be a break. After the break the community groups will then take their turn at presenting and again the audience will have the opportunity to ask questions before using deliberative voting.

Voting

Instead of using the first past the post sticky dot system that has been part of previous Opportunity events, this arrangement will make use of the 'Deliberative Voting' model. This is when the audience are seated in small groups and as a group they will discuss each proposal in relation to three criteria:

- Does it offer value for money?
- How well does this proposal address the needs of the community?
- How widely beneficial is it?

Each person will then complete a voting sheet for each project where they will then score each proposal from 1 to 5 on each of those criteria. The proposals with the highest scores then receive funding.

This voting system has been used successfully elsewhere in the country, for example Dulverton and Newcastle (please see [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk) for case studies and more information).

Attendance at event

Based on previous experience with Opportunity events it is envisaged that there will be a greater number of people wishing to attend than will be able to be accommodated, therefore it is proposed that again this is a ticket only event. Part of the audience will be made up of community groups and their representatives and the other half will be members of the public who can apply for a free ticket in advance. Tickets will be allocated to ensure an even geographical spread so that one community does not greatly outnumber another community.

**Financial Implications**

It is recommended that a budget of £50,000 to fund local improvement schemes is agreed, comprising £40,000 (2010/11 Service Enhancement Budget.) and £10,000 from the community grants budget.

Given the complexity involved, it is anticipated that the 'Opportunity' event takes place in early March 2011 and that the Area West Committee then be asked to approve the recommendations made at their meeting to be held on March 16th 2011.

It is therefore likely that the majority of spend will take place in 2011/12 rather than 2010/11. The Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services) has confirmed that money allocated to specific schemes before the end of March 2011 can be carried forward.

**Corporate Priority Implications**

The 'Opportunity' event will address the corporate theme four 'Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities', and in particular the following target areas:

- 4.16 Outcome: An empowered community where all people take part in shaping their neighbourhood
- 4.19 Increase civic participation in the local area
- 4.20 Increase % of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality

**Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)**

There are no implications.

**Equality and Diversity Implications**

The event will be held in a fully accessible building, I will liaise with Portuguese and Polish Link Workers to help promote the event.

**Background papers and information:** [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk)  
AW Committee June 2009 – Opportunity Review  
AW Committee June 2008 – Future arrangements for  
Opportunity events