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| <b>*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b> | <b>AGENDA ITEM No.</b> |
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**TITLE OF REPORT: CHAMPION NEWS AND FINANCE REPORT**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR TRICIA COWLEY

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise the Committee on the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee delegated budgets.
- 1.2 To bring to the Committee's attention details of recent requests received for Area Committee Development Discretionary Grant Funding made by community groups and local organisations.
- 1.3 To advise the Committee of the activities and schemes with which the Community Development Officer has been involved.
- 1.4 To bring to the Committee's attention some important community based activities that will be taking place during the next few months.

**2. FORWARD PLAN**

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

**3. PROJECT/ACTIVITY/SCHEME DETAILS**

**3.1 Community Reassurance Event**

On Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2011, the Fire & Rescue Service, Police, North Herts Crime Prevention Panel, North Herts Homes and North Herts District Council delivered a Community Reassurance Event for Hitchin residents and shoppers.

A wide range of information was available as well as a number of demonstrations including 'CC' the fire dog sniffing out flammable materials.

**3.2 Member School Surgeries**

These took place in all three Senior Schools in December, 2011. A number of issues were raised including dark alleys which had also been raised at the Town Talk in November, 2011. At The Priory School a young person said that Butts Close was a lovely area of Hitchin but there were not enough benches for people to sit and enjoy it. All of the issues raised, that were not resolved at the time, will be investigated and any actions fed back to the schools.

Peter Saville, previous Chair of the Voice of Hitchin Youth, attended all surgeries to discuss the UK Youth Parliament and introduced himself as one of the North Herts UK Youth Parliament Candidates in elections that will take place in 2012.

**3.3 Scouts Democracy Evening**

Twenty six Scouts plus their leaders attended a Democracy Evening in the Council Chamber in November, 2011. They attended the public presentation part of the

Southern Rural Area Committee meeting before adjourning to the Council Chamber for an activity. After refreshments The Democratic Services Manager gave a short presentation followed by a short question and answer session. This was followed by excellent questions to the two Councillors present about their civic role.

#### 3.4 **Hitchin Floral Club**

The Floral Club are celebrating an anniversary in 2012 and have decided to run workshops and activities to publicise their Club and attract more members. To enable them to do this they have completed, with the help of the Community Development Officer, an application to Awards for All. If successful it would mean that the Floral Club will be engaging with a wide range of people in Hitchin including the young, disabled and ethnic minorities.

#### 3.5 **Smithsons Recreation Ground**

A meeting was arranged with a user of the playground and the resident who raised concerns at November's Town Talk. The Community Development Officer, the Service Manager Grounds Maintenance and the Hitchin Area Monitoring Officer met. One of the Ward Members also attended.

Two issues raised, the first was from the resident who had attended the Town Talk and wished for a hand rail to be installed to enable the elderly to walk up the steep incline in frosty weather. It was agreed that the local County Councillor's locality budget would be requested for this.

The second issue was how to improve the play area. There were a number of solutions discussed including whether they wished to form a Friends of Smithsons group and raise money or whether to be informal and liaise with the Maintenance team re improvements. Discussion will take place with users and how to progress.

#### 3.6 **Friends of Walsworth Common**

A meeting took place with a representative from the Friends of Walsworth Common, an informal group that litter pick the Common every month, the Community Development Officer and the Hitchin Area Monitoring Officer. The Friends had suggested a litter bin survey to look at maximising the availability of bins on the Common. A number of suggestions were made at the meeting and these will be addressed.

#### 3.7 **Voice of Hitchin Youth**

The Voice of Hitchin Youth held their Annual General Meeting at the YOR Radio Station in Bancroft Youth Centre. A Chair, Secretary and Treasurers were elected and then the young people went on the radio telling listeners about the Voice and their achievements in 2010/2011.

A Voice questionnaire has been available for young people to complete and results from the returned forms, so far, has shown that improvements to the Skate park at King Georges are high on the list. The Skate park users will be attending this Area Committee to present their proposals.

#### 3.8 **Hitchin Area Work Programme**

The updated Hitchin Area Committee Work programme is attached as Appendix D.

#### 3.9 **Highways Work Programme**

The updated Highways Work Programme is attached as Appendix E.

### 4. **FINANCE REPORT & FUNDING DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development Budgets and the Visioning Budgets

- 4.2 The Committee's updated Annual Grant and Development Discretionary Budget spreadsheet is attached as Appendix A.
- 4.3 Members are requested to consider the application from Toque Tambor Brazilian Carnival Band to support their Carnival Parade, planned in Hitchin in July, 2012, as part of the Olympics celebrations in conjunction with Hitchin Rotary Club.
- 4.4 Members are requested to consider future commitments under the MoU process and note that any further award of MoU grants remain subject to a 7.1% annual reduction each year of the three year term. Members may wish to explore and discuss options to reduce or remove some grants in favour of others.

Details of funding currently provided to the organisations under the MoU, as well as indicative funding for future years is shown on Appendix B.

A précis of the current MoUs is shown at 4.5. and all of the organisations receiving MOUs have presented to the Committee.

#### 4.5 **Memorandum of Understanding**

There are currently five Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) within the Hitchin Area Committee budget as outlined below.

##### 4.5.1 **Apni Duniya Holiday Playschemes**

Apni Duniya provide play schemes during school half terms, Easter and Summer holidays for young people in Hitchin aged 4 – 12 years.

Up to 30 young people attend the schemes which run daily from 8.30am – 6pm at Wilshere Dacre School.

The young people bring a packed lunch and receive breakfast and afternoon snack. Activities are heavily subsidised in order to support young people who may not otherwise be able to attend. Costs are also kept low for this reason.

##### 4.5.2 **Hitchin Initiative**

The funding the Initiative receives contributes towards the Christmas lights and hanging baskets which make the town a more attractive place for residents and visitors.

The money also contributes to maintaining the office as an information point for the residents of Hitchin and visitors to the town.

##### 4.5.3 **Hitchin Town Twinning**

The aims of the Town Twinning Association are to provide for the promotion of the three towns both in Hitchin and Bingen in Germany and Nuits-St.Georges in France. Hitchin has been twinned with Bingen and Rhein since 1958 and with Nuits St Georges since 1976.

It is the host town that organises and pays for special events, dinners, outings for the guests. In Hitchin this usually involves a Wine Evening, BBQ and a Soirée.

The

Association have also assisted other Hitchin organisations to twin with their counterparts in France and Germany through music, sport, schools and church.

Membership of the Association is free and members who have hosted and visited, all comment on the experience, the enjoyment and the excellent hospitality they have received.

##### 4.5.4 **Hitchin Senior Citizens**

The aims of the Hitchin Senior Citizens are:

- to provide meals entertainment and social interaction for senior citizens who reside within Hitchin, Holwell, Ickleford and Pirton.
- to provide transport to enable many of these participants to attend functions.

Senior Citizens continue to enjoy the social interaction provided for them but in recent years senior citizens are more active and are looking for different entertainment. Hitchin Senior Citizens have recently taken under their 'umbrella', a group providing sit down exercises to senior citizens and these have proved very popular. Hitchin Senior Citizens make a contribution to this in order for it to continue. They also now support the Tea Dances to enable that activity to continue.

As senior citizens look for a wider variety of interesting and active activities, the Hitchin Senior Citizens group will continue to support them in finding and continuing these new ventures.

The organisation have recently altered their Constitution to reflect this in agreement with the Charities Commission.

#### 4.5.5 **Hitchin Festival**

The aim of the Festival is to organise and co-ordinate an annual programme of events which reflects the diverse interests, abilities and skills of the local community. The Festival promotes arts and culture events in Hitchin over the month of July and assists in encouraging local groups and organisations to participate in and get exposure from the free publicity and it also enables these organisations to fund raise.

In 2011 the Festival had over 100 events ranging from ghost walks, lectures, films, art, comedy and a wide variety of musical styles to suit all ages and tastes.

The Festival also brings visitors from far and wide to Hitchin.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Terms of Reference in relation to Area Committees confirm that they may establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations which includes discretionary grant aid/financial support. However, this does not include grants for district wide activities.
- 5.2 Section 2 Local Government Act 2000 provides that the Council has power to do anything which it considers likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area. This would apply on the basis that financial assistance to voluntary and community organisations improves the economic, social or environmental well-being of the District or part of it.
- 5.3 Section 137 Local Government Act 1972 provides specific authority for the Council to incur expenditure on anything which is in the interests of and will bring direct benefit to its area. This includes a charity or other body operating for public service.
- 5.4 The Committee has delegated powers to administer funds from the budgets described.

## **6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for the current financial year 2011/12.

- 6.2 The spreadsheet also details the pre-allocations carried forward from the previous financial year 2010/11 to the current financial year 2011/12.

## **7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The local MoUs are managed by the Community Development Officer as part of the regular work programme.
- 7.2 The great majority of the voluntary and community projects that are funded by the Council have equality and social inclusion as a key objective of their purpose. Such projects work very closely with and for the more disadvantaged and potentially socially excluded within our communities.
- 7.3 All activities undertaken by the Council, its committees, Community Development Officers or agencies working on its behalf are to be conducted in accordance with the NHDC Corporate Equality Strategy and relevant Equalities legislation.

## **8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 8.1 Consultation with Members has occurred in connection with the allocation of funds for Community Projects.
- 8.2 Consultation with the respective officers and external agencies/groups has taken place with regard to funding proposals for Area Committee Discretionary Development Funds.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being.
- 9.2 That the Committee is asked to note the budgetary expenditure and balances carried forward from the Visioning, Development and Ward budgets.
- 9.3 That the Committee consider the level of funding to be awarded to Toque Tambor Brazilian Carnival Band – Appendix C
- 9.4 That the Committee note the current MOUs as set out in 4.4. & 4.5 of this report and consider if appropriate, the level of funding to be awarded in future years.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer.
- 10.2 This report is intended simply to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation, assists in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget and ensures actions are performed within the Authority's Financial Regulations and the guidance in the Grants procedure.
- 10.3 The allocation of funds will improve the services provided by the local organisations and groups that are available and accessed by various members of the community.
- 10.4 The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of

discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and Strategic Priorities of the Council.

## **11. APPENDICES**

- 11.1 Appendix A - Annual Grant and Development Discretionary Budget Update
- 11.2 Appendix B - Memorandum of Understanding
- 11.3 Appendix C - Toque Tambor Brazilian Band grant application
- 11.4 Appendix D - Hitchin Area Committee Work Plan 2011/2012
- 11.5 Appendix E - Highways Work Programme 2011/2012

## **12. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 12.1 Margaret Bracey, Community Development Officer. Ext: 4830.  
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- 12.2 Lois Stewart, Group Accountant. Ext: 4566.  
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## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 13.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.
- 13.2 Community Governance Reviews – Full Council Meeting 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010.