

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 7
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TITLE: CHAMPION NEWS AND FINANCE REPORT

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY & COMMUNITY SERVICES

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 North Herts DC – Rural Grants Fund Programme 2011/12

The closing date for applications to this year's Rural Grants Fund was Friday 28th October.

Please see Appendix 4 attached which is a summary listing all those who applied, and a short description of their project(s). Officers have assessed all the submitted grant material the Rural Grants Panel is to convene on 26th January, Chaired by Cllr Ian Knighton.

Award announcements are likely to be made shortly after the Panel's decisions and formal sign off by the Head of Service and Cllr Mrs Tricia Cowley.

3.2 **Parish Council Support - Planning Contribution Funding**

Community Development Officers are assisting Parish Councils with potential projects that may be eligible for funds via received Planning section 106 / Unilateral Undertakings payments.

Current Southern Rural Parish projects seeking s106 funds

Graveley – Bus Shelter & Information Board

Reed – Play Area and Sports Equipment Installation

Ickleford – Allotments Project

Wymondley – Village Green Bench

3.3 **Other Support to Parish Councils / Rural based groups & initiatives**

Pirton – Community Development Officers are assisting the Parish Council in revisiting the development of a Parish Plan for the Village.

Pirton – Assistance and advice has been requested in highlighting potential funding sources to refurbish the old Sunday School building behind the Methodist Church, with a view to developing it into a venue for young people.

Wymondley – Assistance and advice has been requested by the Parish Council in revisiting the development of a Parish Plan for the Village.

3.4 **British Red Cross**

Community Development Officers are working with Development Officers from the British Red Cross, regarding the possibility of offering free first aid learning and awareness sessions to rural communities and existing groups based in North Hertfordshire.

The aim is to try and ensure a greater number of those living and taking part in activities within rurally isolated areas are trained in simple first aid techniques, so that they are more equipped to deal with a crisis / save life.

3.5 **Bluebell Children's Centre**

The Centre is based next to Highbury Infant School, Hitchin, but it also covers a number of rural locations including Gosmore, St Ippolyts, Whitwell, Preston, Wymondley and Breachwood Green. Numbers of registered children have increased substantially in all areas except St Ippolyts, which has only had a 5% increase over the past year.

The centre's staff had a busy summer activity programme, which included exploring outdoors workshops, fun with music and fun with paint, and they visited all the villages alongside the Authority's Play Rangers. Welly Walks were also introduced for the first time this year, with families completing an outdoor treasure hunt.

A toy library session is planned at St Ippolyts Village Hall and the overall objective is to attract families who are not currently accessing the Children's Centre.

3.6 Oughton Children's Centre

The Centre had an Ofsted Inspection earlier this year and received a Good but also an Outstanding assessment in the quality of care, guidance and support offered to the wider community.

The Children's Centre not only covers north of Hitchin but also the villages of Ickleford, Holwell, Offley, Pirton, Hexton, Cockernhoe and Lilley. At present the villages receive visits from the yellow Double Decker bus once a week. The bus has been converted to a mobile Children's Centre.

With the reduction in Children's Centre funding consideration is being given as to whether the bus can continue. The bus currently visits Offley (Salisbury Lane), Ickleford (outside Plume of Feathers) and Holwell (Rands Meadow) on Mondays and Cockernhoe (On the green) and Pirton (The Fox) on Fridays.

The bus contains everything required to deliver their services to the villages including the Toy Library. Members will receive further information regarding the continuation of this service once more information is available from Herts County Council.

3.7 Area Committee Work Programme

The proposed Area Committee Work Programme is attached as Appendix 3.

The programme details updates of on-going projects and it can itemise any projects proposed for future discussion at Committee.

3.8 JMP Highways SRAC Work Programme

The latest JMP Highways Work Programme detailing the joint funded projects agreed by the Committee is attached as Appendix 2.

3.9 Match Funding Offer from County Cllr Richard Thake's Highways Discretionary Fund 2012/13

Members are aware that County Council Members have been allocated Highways funding for local schemes in their respective areas to the sum of £90k a year. These budgets have been broken down with various headings, one of which being a Discretionary Budget.

The County Member for the Southern Rural area of North Herts Cllr Richard Thake has kindly offered his discretionary budget of £15k to the Southern Rural Committee with a proviso that any scheme using the budget will be match funded and in his County Ward area.

Community Development Officers have been asked to bring this offer to the attention of the Southern Rural Committee and to let Ron Jack, Assistant District Manager at Highways know if the Committee would like to take up Cllr Thake's offer for the funding which will be made available next financial year.

4. FINANCE REPORT

4.1 BACKGROUND

4.2 A spreadsheet detailing the total spends to date of the Area Development Budgets is attached as Appendix 1.

4.3 The Committee agreed its programme of awards to community organisations on a meeting by meeting basis. All Parish Councils & Parish Meetings, Community & Voluntary Groups and Organisations have been advised on this process.

4.4 Members are asked to note the Area Committee Discretionary Budget for 2011/12 is £24,310.

Having agreed four Memorandum Of Understandings (MOU) totalling £6,230 and the approval of other grants this financial year, the current unallocated Discretionary Budget is £12,540.

4.5 The Committee is asked to note that the Ward Members Discretionary Budget for 2010/11 of £700 per Member, should be allocated by March 31st 2012.

4.6 Where there are multi member wards, members are advise to consult with their fellow ward Councillors on any forthcoming community grant requests, to try and avoid any potential application conflicts or multiple requests.

5. PROPOSALS FOR 2009-12

Council priorities

5.1 All current SLA's & MoU's and subsequent grant awards should support the North Hertfordshire's district-wide Vision, and the Council's three priorities.

Town Centres
Green Issues
Sustainable Development

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 The Committee has delegated powers to administer funds from the budgets described.

7. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

7.1 In the past few years, given the significant carry forward for Area Committee Development budgets, there has been no inflationary allowance other than for MoU's, and the baseline for 2011/12 was the same as 2010/11.

8. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The local MoUs are managed by the Community Development Officer as part of the regular work programme.

8.2 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.

8.3 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.

8.4 In line with the requirements placed on local authorities following the 2010 Equality Act coming into place, the Council is required to conduct a full equality analysis of the impact of funding being granted, or withdrawn, where that award exceeds £50k for a single project, comprises a significant change in delivery/restructure, or which affects more than two wards. None of the projects proposed in the appendices to this report fulfil these requirements so a separate analysis report is not required.

9. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

9.1 Consultation with Members has occurred in connection with the allocation of funds for Community Projects.

9.2 Consultation with the respective officers and external agencies/groups has taken place with regard to funding proposals for Area Committee Discretionary Development Funds.

10. ISSUES & FUNDING DECISIONS TO BE MADE

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

- 10.2 The spreadsheet also details the pre-allocations carried forward from the previous financial year 2010/11 including balances and past expenditure relating to the allocated and un-allocated Area Capital Visioning Budgets available to the Committee.
- 10.3 The total budget for the Committee for 2011/12 is £30,240 including a Ward Members budget of £7,000.
- 10.4 The current unallocated Discretionary Budget is £12,540
- 10.5 The current unallocated Ward Members Discretionary Budget is £5,295
- 10.6 Cassel Hall, Lilley – Replacement of Boiler

Members will recall this matter being raised as an emergency item at the last meeting and subsequently Members agreed that an in principle grant award up to a maximum of £1,750 should be assigned to part fund the costs of replacing the boiler at Cassel Hall.

A full grant application with supporting documentation has now been received indicating that the Hall's Management Committee is seeking 50% of the overall replacement costs which total £3,260.

The Management Committee have indicated that they have managed to secure £250 from Lilley Parish Council, £250 from the County Councillor's Discretionary Fund and also have £1,130 of their own funds to go towards the replacement costs. They therefore seek a grant award from the Committee of £1,630.

10.7 Codicote Local History Society

The Society has recently taken on the old Play Group building to the rear of the Peace Memorial Hall in Codicote primarily as a venue for holding regular meetings, but with the long view of staging local exhibitions and the development of a local museum.

A structural survey of the facility has highlighted refurbishment works totalling £25k and the Society is embarking on an external funding programme in seeking funds to address such work.

The Society has been advised that the Parish Council will commit some funds to the project from April 2012 and Community Development Officers are to assist with an application for a small Lottery award of up to £10k in addition to other potential sources of funding.

In the interim the Society wishes to address the heat retention and security of the building as part of a number of immediate rectifications required. They are seeking a grant award of £1,000 from the Area Committee to add to £200 of their own funds to carry out these initial works.

10.8 Ring Fencing of unallocated Committee Development Funds for Community Events Celebrating the Olympics & The Queen's Diamond Jubilee

Members will recall a brief discussion at the last meeting around the possibility of setting aside an amount of funds currently available to the Committee, to help support future community events that are primarily in Celebration of the Olympic Games and or the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

It would be hard to predict at this stage the number of events that are likely to be planned throughout the Southern Rural area celebrating both events, however Members in their discussions may wish to consider allocating appropriate levels of funding using the recognised parish areas and based on the population totals for each.

Appendix 7 – to be distributed at the meeting.

For any such events where area committee funding is approved, Council officers will direct organisers to the events organisation information on the NHDC website, advising whether road closure notices, land or temporary events licences are required.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Committee is asked to note the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Committee's Discretionary Budget, Ward Member Discretionary Budgets and Visioning Budgets as set out in Appendix 1.
- 11.2 That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well being for rural communities.
- 11.3 That the Committee ratifies the in principle grant award to a total of £1,630 to the Cassel Hall Trust as outlined in section 10.6 of this report and detailed in Appendix 5.
- 11.4 That the Committee considers a grant award to the Codicote Local History Society as outlined in section 10.7 of this report and detailed in Appendix 6.
- 11.5 That the Committee considers setting aside an amount of funds in support of future community events celebrating the Olympic Games and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer.
- 12.2 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.

- 12.3 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.
- 12.4 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.

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Budget expenditure, balances, and carry forwards from the Ward Development Budgets and allocated Visioning Budgets.
- 13.2 Appendix 2 – Highways Work Programme.
- 13.3 Appendix 3 – Area Committee Work Programme.
- 13.4 Appendix 4 – NHDC Rural Grant Fund 2011 – Summary of Applications Received.
- 13.5 Appendix 5 – Grant Form - Cassel Village Hall - Boiler Replacement.
- 13.6 Appendix 6 – Grant Form – Codicote Local History Society – Building Renovations.
- 13.7 Appendix 7 – Population tables for the Southern Rural Area, to be tabled at the meeting.

14. CONTACT OFFICERS

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15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.
- 15.2 Community Governance Reviews – Full Council Meeting 25th February 2010.