

**Report To:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 16 July 2012

**Lead Officer:** Head of Business Planning and Performance

**Report Author:** Community Engagement Manager

**Title:** Allocation of the Member Area Fund

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**1. What is the report about?**

To provide an overview on the funding allocated to enable Member Area Groups to support priority projects in their areas and review its success.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

Scrutiny received a report in its March meeting on the allocation of £50,000 to each of the six Member Area Groups (MAGs) with a reminder of the criteria under which the money was allocated and how the money was utilised for the benefit of the communities.

As many of the projects had not yet been completed when the report was discussed it was agreed a further report would be submitted with an analysis of the benefits accrued.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

Members consider the recommendations made in 6.1.

**4. Report details**

**4.1 Background to the allocation**

4.1.1 At the end of each financial year the final budget position is reported to Cabinet and then full Council who approve all allocations of under or over spends and transfers to/from reserves and provisions.

4.1.2 At the end of 2010/11 the Council had an under spend. An option was proposed of using £300k of this to support the Council's priority of getting closer to the community. This was supported at Cabinet on 21 June and approved at Council on 5 July. It was proposed that this could be done through the recently reconvened Member Area Groups (MAGs). This would allow the MAGs to have direct access to funds to address issues in their area and allow the Council to address local issues.

4.1.3 All Elected Members were notified of the MAG allocation with a guidance note explaining the principles behind the allocation, how the process would be

managed and the likely timetable for its distribution. Accompanying the guidance was a project proposal form for use by Members. (Appendix 1)

4.1.4 Further guidance was given at each subsequent MAG meeting and it remained a standard agenda item.

## **4.2 Distribution of the funds**

4.2.1 All six MAGs discussed how they would approach the distribution of funds and although Officers highlighted the guidelines stipulating a minimum expenditure of £10,000 per project some MAGs had difficulty agreeing large projects which would equally benefit all wards / geographic areas. The six MAGs subsequently decided their allocation in the following manner:

### **Dee Valley**

The £50,000 would be distributed equally between Llangollen and Corwen (including Cynwyd / Llandrillo).

### **Denbigh**

Allocated the funds on a ward basis.

### **Elwy**

Allocated the funds on an individual Member basis

### **Prestatyn**

Allocated the funds on several large projects which would benefit the town as a whole.

### **Rhyl**

Allocated the funds on a ward basis

### **Ruthin**

Allocation on one or two large projects which would benefit the town and its hinterland.

4.2.2 Members used the Project Proposal Form which was presented to Corporate Executive Team (CET) for its approval with the appropriate costing and approval of Services.

## **5. Review of the process**

5.1 All of the £50k has now been spent or is in a holding account ready for release (some projects are awaiting external match funding and the sums will not be released until these are in place).

- 5.2 As outlined in 4.2.1 it was envisaged the distribution of the Funds would be a relatively straightforward allocation to one of two large projects per MAGs.

Due to the geographic makeup of some of the MAG the guidance given to concentrating on two or three large projects has not been adopted resulting in smaller projects which will obviously have less impact on the community. As different MAGs decided on adopting different criteria the number of schemes eventually mushroomed to over 70 individual projects.

- 5.3 Although the benefits to some of the submitted schemes i.e. computers to schools is self explanatory others such as the reduced town centre car parking charges entails further analysis over a significant period. Reports are being presented to the Ruthin MAG specifically on the subsidised car parking. Furthermore some of the schemes are very small contributions to community organisations for amounts less than £200.

- 5.4 From an administrative perspective the process has been time consuming for Officers particularly when several projects may have been submitted just in one ward.

5.5 **Benefits accrued from the process:**

a) Members have been able to resolve local issues which would not have been funded from other sources e.g. lower car park charges, new signage etc.

b) Members who have used the funds creatively have attracted substantial match funding ensuring that maximum benefit has resulted from the initial contribution.

Rhyl Wards in particular attracted significant amounts of external funding such as:

- the East Parade improvements have attracted match funding in excess of £9000 through the SRA fund
- South West Rhyl Marsh Tracks / Glan Morfa / Botanical Gardens attracted over £11k from other sources
- the Rhyl High School re-engagement project attracted ESF funding of £30k.

Rural areas have also benefited from Members accessing Cadwyn Clwyd funds such as the Corwen scheme attracting a total of £16,600 from an allocation of £6k from the Members Fund.

Many of the other projects throughout the County also attracted perhaps more modest contributions particularly schemes in partnership with Community Councils and Not For Profit Organisations such as the Scala.

c) Some funds allocated have been instrumental in allowing Members to engage with their community. The allocation of £14k to Henllan for a new play area attracted a further £18k through the Participatory Budgeting process which gave the residents control over which play equipment should be purchased.

d) many of the contributions to small local voluntary organisations have been particularly important to them in delivering projects which would have been beyond their financial resources e.g. the purchase of a trailer for Scouts across the county to benefit from kayak canoeing and the ongoing financial support for a parish lengthsman.

#### **5.6 Lessons learnt from the process**

Reference has already been made to the number of schemes that were eventually submitted which caused lengthy administrative procedures particularly in making a large number of small payments to external groups. Some Members allocated in excess of 12 individual payments to different community organisations in their Ward and although they no doubt made a significant difference to each organisation they did not meet the requirements of the guiding 'terms of reference'.

The funding to each MAG became available in September 2011 with each subsequent MAG meeting being reminded to submit projects. Many Members, however, did not submit projects until February / March 2012 prolonging the process well beyond the timescale envisaged.

Members have broadly welcomed the allocation of funds and the benefits they have derived to their Wards and have indicated support for a similar initiative in the future should funds be available

### **6. Recommendations for future distribution of funds**

6.1 Members were made aware that the £50k was a one-off allocation of funds with no commitment that the process would be repeated. No decision has yet been made for a similar exercise and it would be dependent on the availability of funds in future years. If however, a similar funding initiative was to become available Officers recommend the following guidance in its distribution.

- Any suggested scheme must be submitted to a MAG meeting and fully endorsed at the meeting rather than devolved to individual Ward Members.
- All schemes in future should be aligned to and support the delivery of the Town Plans / Rhyl Going Forward or rural projects agreed by the MAG.

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