



Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Thursday 8 April 2021
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Reform of the Ward Budget Programme
Report of:	Lucy Glover, Head of Governance and Councillor Liaison (Acting)
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Communities and Regeneration
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All
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1. Executive Summary

This report summaries a recent review of the Ward Budget Programme and asks the Committee to provide a view on the proposed action plan for the future of ward budgets.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- What is the Committee's view on the proposed short-term and long-term actions?
- Does the Committee have any other suggestions for how the Ward Budget Programme could be improved from their experience as members?

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Matt Gaskin on 07966 164556 or mgaskin@westminster.gov.uk

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Full Ward Budget Programme Review Report – The Case for Change
Appendix B – Data Graphs and Analysis
Appendix C – Local Authority Case Studies

Background

The Ward Budget Programme was established in November 2007 under the council's Neighbourhood Programme. Since then, Councillors have had a pot to spend on community projects that benefit residents in Westminster and address local issues and priorities. The amount available to Councillors currently sits at £46,000 per annum.

To date, almost £12 million has been spent on over 2,000 projects. However, the programme was last scrutinised in 2014 and there is a case to be made about how this programme now meets Councillors' expectations and Westminster's voluntary and community sector needs. As a result, a full review of the Ward Budget Programme has taken place – please see Appendix A for the full report and Appendices B and C for supporting evidence.

It is clear from the evidence that stakeholders value the programme to improve the lives of Westminster residents. However, the research has highlighted issues and areas for improvement. This paper provides a draft action plan for reform in the short-term and the long-term, for consideration by the Committee. The full list of actions can be found in Appendix A.

Suggested short-term (pre-May 2022) actions

Promotion and Celebration

It is clear from the research that there is an issue with awareness of the programme and overall spend is on a negative trajectory. As a result, it is suggested that officers implement a wide-reaching strategy to promote and celebrate the programme to schools, charities, residents, amenity societies and community organisations. This will encourage a wider pool of applicants and, as a result, more Westminster residents will benefit from the scheme. Organisations will also be required to credit and acknowledge support from the ward budget programme when delivering their projects. Further, Councillors will receive updates in the form of case studies and opportunities to directly engage with organisations and their projects.

Streamlining the process

To ensure Councillors and applicants have the guidance they require to make the programme a success, it is suggested that officers devise a guidance note for Councillors covering common issues such as conflict of interest, repeat requests for funding from the same organisation and for-profit organisations. Officers will proactively offer thoughts to Councillors on applications, draft detailed 'step-by-step' application FAQs and ensure a clearer timeline for applicants to ensure accountability. Councillors will be encouraged to get involved with the quality

assurance of project delivery through the sharing of monitoring information which will be closely scrutinised by officers.

Suggested long-term (post-May 2022) reform

- **Paying 50% of funds upfront** to organisations rather than the current system of paying in arrears subject to suitable monitoring, which can prevent smaller organisations from applying.
- **Reducing the size of the budget pot** - Evidence clearly shows that there has been a gradual decline in the amount of money spent and the numbers of projects supported through the programme.
- **Changing the name of the programme to 'Ward Community Fund'** as part of a re-branding exercise to clarify the purpose of the pot.
- **Introducing an online portal for stakeholders to review applications.** This interactive approach would empower Councillors to plan, increase transparency and reduce office administration.
- **Encouraging, but not limiting, applications based on 'themes'** such as improving air quality or greening. These would be decided by Councillors in each ward and would be advertised to applicants on the ward budget webpages and be adapted to meet the Council's priorities.