

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

10 April 2014

Report by Deputy Chief Executive

RULES FOR AREA FORUM EXPENDITURE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To seek approval for new rules for area forum expenditure.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Cabinet approve the new rules for area forum expenditure.

BACKGROUND

3. As part of the Council's decentralisation arrangements each of the three area forums is allocated an annual budget. Subject to Cabinet approval, this allows them to identify and carry out local projects in their area. Until recently this funding comprised a General Services element and a Roads element. A set of guidelines provides details of the types of projects that can be carried out by the forums.

4. The Council's challenging financial position has seen a reduction in the amount of funding provided to area forums and at the budget meeting last year, the Roads element of area forum funding was discontinued, leaving only a General Services budget.

The amount of funding made available to each of the 3 forums for 2014/15 is as follows:-

| | |
|--|---------|
| Giffnock & Thornliebank, Netherlee Stamperland and Williamwood Area Forum | £9,760 |
| Neilston, Uplawmoor, Newton Mearns North & Barrhead Area Forum | £15,360 |
| Newton Mearns South, Busby Clarkston & Eaglesham Area Forum | £9,280 |

REPORT

5. In view of the reducing amount of funding made available to area forums, and also to clarify the types of projects it would be appropriate for the forums to support, a review of the guidelines has been carried out.

6. As the name suggests, the current guidelines set out in general terms the types of projects it is appropriate for area forums to consider, and provide some examples. The guidelines also provide information on the types of projects that should be excluded from consideration by area forums.

7. The fact that forum expenditure has been governed by guidelines has made it difficult in some cases for a clear decision to be made on the appropriateness of some projects, where the argument has been made that as they are only guidelines it is not an absolute requirement for them to be followed.

8. Whilst the levels of funding in the past meant that this uncertainty could be accommodated, and a liberal interpretation of the guidelines was used to allow projects to be put forward for consideration, reducing resources has led to a proportionately increased demand on area forum resources. Furthermore with the continuing pressure on Council budgets in the future there may be a need for area forum funding levels to again be reviewed. This makes it more important than ever for there to be clear procedures in place and for there to be clarity on the type of projects that can be considered by the forums.

Changes

9. A copy of the new proposals is attached (Appendix 1). Firstly, the status of the guidelines has been strengthened and they are now designated as rules rather than guidelines. The purpose of this change is to introduce a greater degree of clarity; whereas in the past a liberal interpretation of the guidelines was applied to allow projects to be put forward, if a project does not comply with the rules, it will not be put forward for consideration.

10. Secondly, it has been made clear the types of project that it would, and more importantly would not, be appropriate to be considered for area forum funding. In summary only "public realm" projects which can be accessed by and are of benefit to the general public, can be considered. Any costs for potential projects will be obtained from relevant Council departments, and any projects once approved will also be carried out by the Council. All other types of project, for example, applications by groups for project funding, should in future be directed to the Council's Community Grants scheme.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

12. There are no additional financial implications associated with the proposals.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

13. The more stringent application of the new rules with regards to applications for grant funding will result in more applications for financial assistance being directed to other grants schemes, particularly the Community Grants Scheme. This fund was underspent in the last financial year, and it is possible that there will be scope to accommodate any increase in applications to that fund due to the change in area forum spending rules.

CONCLUSIONS

14. In the past, levels of area forum funding meant it was possible for area forums to consider some projects where a liberal interpretation of the guidelines was applied in order that they could be approved. With reducing resources the ability for all proposals to be given favourable consideration becomes more of a challenge. In view of this, and with the discontinuation of Roads funding, the guidelines have been reviewed and strengthened. The new rules provide greater clarity and remove the ambiguity that existed in the past. This will assist community groups who will be clearer on whether or not their project is likely to be considered; Elected Members who will be able to give clearer advice to groups that approach them regarding area forum funding; and officers who have to advise groups on the suitability or otherwise of their projects.

RECOMMENDATION

15. That the Cabinet approve the new rules for area forum expenditure.

Local Government (Access to information) Act 1985

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KEYWORDS

Area Forum

RULES FOR AREA FORUM EXPENDITURE

INTRODUCTION

East Renfrewshire Council allocates an annual budget to each of its 3 area forums to allow the forums to make recommendations to the Cabinet on financial support for proposed local projects and initiatives. These projects and initiatives can be identified by local groups, individuals, Elected Members or Council departments. The budgets are allocated for a specific financial year and cannot be carried over to the following year.

The purpose of these rules is to clarify the types of projects that can and cannot be supported by the area forums.

Projects for which area forum funding is sought must be “public realm” projects to the advantage of the community as a whole rather than for the benefit of individuals, households, or smaller community groups. They must be “stand-alone” and not be a regular commitment to particular programmes. In all cases, any projects proposed will be costed by the relevant Council department and any projects once approved will be carried out by the Council.

Some examples of the types of projects that could attract area forum funding are:-

- Public Playgrounds (resurfacing and/or equipment)
- Provision of additional litter bins in public areas (subject to agreement on any potential revenue costs)
- Provision of seats or benches in public areas
- Signage in public areas
- Resurfacing of public roads/pavements
- Traffic calming
- Installation of dropped kerbs
- Provision of community noticeboards

Exclusions

There are a number of types of project that cannot be supported by area forums.

- Projects on private property or ground **cannot be supported.**
- Projects with ongoing revenue costs **cannot be supported** unless agreement is obtained from the relevant department that would be liable for the ongoing costs.
- Projects which are identified as being a regular commitment to particular programmes **cannot be supported.**
- Projects that duplicate or conflict with any works intended by the Council or its partners for capital or revenue spends as part of a normal operational programme **cannot be supported.**

Applications for financial assistance (Grant funding)

Applications from local groups or organisations for financial assistance to fund or contribute towards the cost of projects being carried out by them, which may include the purchase of goods, equipment or services, **cannot be supported.**

Applications relating to projects of this nature should be directed to the Council's various grant schemes and/or Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire to establish if they can be supported.

For example:

- the forum cannot provide grant funding to a school's Parent Council to allow it to buy equipment for a school.
- the forum cannot provide grant funding to a group to enable it to undertake internal and/or external repairs or improvements to their premises.
- the forum cannot provide grant funding to a group to allow it to purchase equipment used in the running of the group or the operation of its activities (e.g. computer equipment, printers, play equipment, kitchen equipment, etc).

This list is not exhaustive.