

## **The Highland Council**

### **Ward Discretionary Budget – scheme guidance and criteria for use**

The criteria for use have been developed to ensure appropriate governance arrangements are in place for use of funds, while giving maximum discretion and flexibility of use at a local level.

The following broad criteria have been developed:-

- The budget can be used to grant aid an external body, or for the Council to meet expenditure directly.
- The budget can be used to complement existing Council expenditure, or for new priorities not currently met through mainstream budgets.
- No upper limit for individual awards has been set other than the maximum budget allocated to the Ward.
- It will be for each Ward to consider when they wish to commit funds. E.g. to fully allocate at the start of the financial year, or to take decisions throughout the year to maintain flexibility for any demands emerging during the course of the year. It will be for Ward Managers, in consultations with local members collectively, to identify local priorities.

The governance arrangements relating to the funds are as follows:-

- Ward budgets cannot be delegated to individual members or informal groupings of members, nor can individual members or informal groupings award funds from the budget. Section 56 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 states that only a Committee, Sub-Committee or Officer has authority to discharge any function of a local authority. Therefore, Ward discretionary budgets will be delegated to the Ward Manager as budget holder.
- Due to the nature of the budget, it should normally only be used to fund commitments for a single year. Any forward commitments will reduce the budget available in subsequent years.
- Projects which run contrary to existing Council policy cannot be agreed.
- Any commitments made, and expenditure incurred, must be in accordance with the Council's financial regulations
- Appropriate records must be kept of all funding approved for audit purposes and reporting of expenditure incurred.
- Projects capable of attracting substantial external leverage should be given priority.
- Grant aid to external organisations must be in line with the 'Following the Public Pound' guidance.
- In order to ensure a sound audit trail, each project should be accompanied by a completed Ward Discretionary Budget application form.
- Application forms must be completed and signed by a representative of the applying organisation, and all details of the project clearly described.
- Elected members must not complete forms on behalf of others.
- All funding applications which are approved will be done so on the basis that the successful applicant forward to the awarding body copies of all receipts

and invoices related to project which has been funded at the time of completion of the project.

- Further applications from the same applicant shall not be entertained until this condition has been met. Where no such information is provided within a reasonable timescale, the Highland Council will reserve the right to seek repayment of any grant made.
- Payment shall only be made where the relevant application has been signed off by the appropriate Ward Manager, having consulted with the Ward members collectively.
- Regular reports should be considered by the Ward Forums setting out details of funding approvals agreed and the uncommitted balance on the budget.
- Each year, a report will be prepared for the Resources Committee on the actual use of funds in the preceding financial year.

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