

**MINUTE EXTRACT
CABINET
26 NOVEMBER 2018**

41 WIRRAL TOGETHER: GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT – A NEW MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Councillor Phil Davies, Leader of the Council, said:

“Working alongside communities to jointly tackle issues, solve problems and improve facilities leads to a better quality of life for residents.

Almost every time, the people who know how to best improve a community, how to solve a local problem, are the people who live there. Our job, as a Council and as local Councillors, is to make sure they get the support to make that happen.

The proposals we’re putting forward are about making this easier. This is about removing bureaucracy and red tape, and about taking community funding and bringing it closer to the community.

If we are to achieve our priorities then it is vital we are able to work effectively with local citizens as well as establishing an ongoing relationship which promotes coproduction, mutuality and informed decision making. We call this approach Wirral Together. Wirral is fortunate in that it is home to many vibrant, engaged communities who work together to get things done.

This report provides Cabinet with a proposed new approach to working with citizens which is intended to strengthen the relationship between public services and citizens, enabling our communities to deliver their part and support each other, in an ongoing partnership between residents and public services. It will also support us in getting the basics right as promised in our Council Plan for 2018/19”.

Councillor Phil Davies introduced a report of the Director of Governance and Assurance that recommended that the existing community budgets be designated as the Wirral Together Fund, and that it be distributed on a Ward Member basis. It also recommended that the current funding be increased by £50,000 and the amount

allocated to each Ward Member be weighted for population, deprivation and age (populations aged 0-4 and 75 and over). Staff resources were recommended to be redirected to directly supporting Councillors in this approach instead of the current focus on Constituency Committees.

The report also recommended that the Cabinet agreed the process and criteria as set out in the appendices attached to the report as follows:

- Appendix A – Ward Member Budget Allocations;
- Appendix B – Draft Guidance on Ward Member Budgets (subject to amendment as required);
- Appendix C – Draft Ward Member Budget Application Form (subject to amendment as required); and
- Appendix D – Equalities Impact Assessment.

These appendices set out guidance on how these Budgets would operate.

The Cabinet was also asked to agree the necessary officer delegations to administer the Ward Member budgets.

This matter affected all wards within the borough and was therefore a Key Decision.

The Cabinet was informed that a review had taken place during 2017/18 led by the then Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement. As part of that review, the effectiveness of existing Constituency Committees had been raised as an issue. After consideration of this the proposal in that report was that those arrangements should be brought to an end and, instead, a more focussed approach should be put in place to directly support Members in effective ways of engaging and working with Wirral's residents, businesses and partners – and by giving local people a greater stake in community projects. Ward Member budgets should be flexible enough to enable different approaches to community leadership to take place in different wards. The budgets would be just one tool that would enable Councillors to take this approach.

The Cabinet noted that alongside this, greater focus would be placed on Member support arrangements to aid ward Councillors directly with casework and local projects.

The Cabinet also considered the alternative options as follows:

- Continuing with Constituency Committees; or
- Abolishing Constituency Committees and not establishing any equivalent grant funding or resources in their place.

These had not been recommended because

- There was a clear commitment in the Council's Plan to work and engage with more of the local community in a meaningful way to make Wirral an even better place to live; and

- With that in mind, it was not appropriate to abolish existing arrangements without considering alternatives, nor was it appropriate to continue Constituency (area) Committees in the knowledge that this mechanism had only partially achieved its objectives.

Councillor Phil Davies reported that the experience of Constituency Committees had been mixed and patchy. They had not engaged the public in all areas. The new model was worth trying as it put the power in the hands of the ward Members and the funding had been increased by £50,000. Ward Members could come up with proposals and projects. They knew the needs of their local area and of the local community groups etc. Needs were not the same everywhere so the one size fits all formula did not work. The new model would provide maximum flexibility for Members to work in their wards, across wards and at Constituency level, with support from Council officers. Proper procedures and accounts would be put in place so that the new model would be operative from the beginning of the next Municipal Year and it would be the subject of an annual review and evaluation.

Councillors Stuart Whittingham, Paul Stuart and Angela Davies all welcomed the new model for community engagement, spoke in support of it and informed that they were looking forward to playing their part.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet agrees:

- (1) that a budget of £250,000 be distributed across the 22 wards, according to a weighting based upon 75% per head of population, 15% deprivation, 5% under 5 years population and 5% over 75 years population (as set out in Appendix A to the report), and allocated in respect of each Ward Member;**
- (2) to delegate authority to the Director for Governance and Assurance to determine applications for Ward Member budget funding;**
- (3) to delegate to the s151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader, authority to make any necessary changes to the process for awarding money from ward budgets, including changes to the officer responsible for determining applications for ward budget funding;**
- (4) that there be an annual review and evaluation;**
- (5) to recommend to the Council the deletion of the provisions of the Constitution relating to Constituency Committees as part of the Council's executive arrangements; and**
- (6) that the new Ward Member budget model should be implemented in the new Municipal year.**