



Council	Tuesday, 05 September 2017	Matter for Information and Decision
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Title: **Review of the Oadby, Wigston and South
Wigston Residents' Forums**

Author(s): **Martin Hone (Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer)**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. In order to give local residents a greater say in Council affairs, it has appointed a Residents' Forum for each of the town centres within the Borough: Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston.
- 1.2. At its meeting on 28 March 2017, the Council's Policy, Finance and Development Committee requested that a review of the regulations governing grant allocations, including the funding of voluntary organisations and 'on the night' grants allocation at Forum meetings without supporting paperwork, be undertaken. This supports the wider commitments of the Council's transformation agenda.
- 1.3. The purpose of this report is to seek Members' views to inform any additional changes to the purposes of the Forums.

2. Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to provide policy guidance on the proposals contained in this report, which will then be sent to the three Residents' Forums for consultation.

3. Information

The Council's constitution includes three Residents' Forums. The purpose of each of these is included in their general terms of reference:

- 1.** To increase public involvement in public services;
- 2.** To help shape the Council's policies for public services;
- 3.** To challenge and give feedback on the performance of public services;
- 4.** To promote community cohesion; and
- 5.** To report to the relevant Committees.

Residents' Forums have budgets delegated by Council to enable local groups, organisations and individuals to apply to their local forum for funding of projects that seek to improve the quality of life for people who live or work in the Borough. Prior approval for the spending of each Resident Forum budget is subject to the approval of the Policy Finance and Development Committee.

The review has examined the following areas:

4. Grants to Local Organisations

At present, there appears to be a lack of clarity about the types of grants that Forums can consider. Going forwards the following guidance is proposed:

- (i) The grants must only be for one-off, non-recurrent expenditure. This could be for the purchase, say, of a piece of street furniture (provided any ongoing maintenance would be de minimis) or for a one-off event, such as a street party.
- (ii) The grant must only be spent within the geographical boundaries covered by the relevant Forum. Where an organisation seeks funds for activities that go outside the boundaries covered by the Forum, they should instead apply for a Council 'Grant to Voluntary Organisations', which is administered centrally and not as part of the Forums' remit.
- (iii) Applications for grants must only be submitted by local residents. Elected Members should not submit applications to Forums.
- (iv) All applications for grants must be submitted at least ten working days before the meeting of the Forum at which the matter is to be considered. This will provide sufficient time for the application to be included with the agenda papers that are made available ahead of each Forum meeting.
- (v) Applications must be submitted using the pro forma attached as **Appendix 1** to this report and available on the Council's website.¹
- (vi) If, at its meeting, the relevant Forum is minded to support the grant application, this must be minuted so that Officers can make arrangements for the Forum's recommendation to be included in a report to the next meeting of Policy, Finance and Development Committee.
- (vii) Funds will not be released to the organisation applying for the grant until and unless the Forum's recommendation has been agreed by Policy, Finance and Development Committee. If the Forum considers the funding to be too urgent to delay until the next meeting of Policy, Finance and Development Committee, the Chair of the Forum must submit a request to the Council's Director of Finance & Transformation, who will liaise with the Chair of Policy, Finance and Development Committee to agree what action to take.
- (viii) Any organisation that receives a grant from the Forum must complete a brief report on how the funds were spent, using the pro forma attached at **Appendix 2**. This should be sent to the relevant Forum no later than three months after the expenditure has been incurred and included on the agenda for the next meeting of the forum.

5. Chairing the Forums

The Council's Constitution does not specify how the Resident Forum meetings should be chaired, although it has always been the case that all three are chaired by elected Members. The review has considered the following options:

- (i) Allowing the Forums to be chaired by any local resident. The usual process of election of chairman would be required: nomination of candidates, seconding by another resident (or elected Member) and then a vote in open session. The election of the chairman should take place annually at the first meeting of the relevant Forum after the start of the municipal year. Any resident undertaking this role would receive the standard remuneration for chairing which at the date of writing is £1,000 per municipal year.
- (ii) Allowing the Forums to be chaired by any Councillor (i.e. not necessarily a ward Councillor for the area).
- (iii) Given the specific issues at South Wigston Residents' Forum (where there are only three ward Members), to consider merging this Forum with Wigston Town Forum to provide additional resilience in terms of input from elected Members. This would also have the advantage of reducing the costs of administering the Forums which is funded by the Council. Any saving would be a contribution to balancing the Council's budget over the medium term.

- (iv) To consider the potential for administrative support (e.g., taking minutes, coordinating agendas, distributing reports, etc.) to be undertaken by local residents instead of the Council.
- (v) That at the option of the chairman the meeting may be recorded to ensure the accuracy of minutes and agreed actions

6. Constitution and Funding the Residents' Forums

The review has considered the current constitution of the Forums and also the way in which they are funded. As stated above, the costs of administering the Forums is met by the Council's General Fund Revenue Account (and ultimately local Council Tax). The grants allocated by the Forums to local organisations are provided from one-off funding from the Council undertaken periodically and making use of Council reserves. The current levels of funds held by the Forums is as follows:

Oadby	£49,561
Wigston	£53,203
South Wigston	£23,081
Total	£125,845

It would be possible to provide more certainty about the funds available for local organisations by including an allocation to the Forums as part of the Council's annual budget setting exercise which is agreed in February ahead of the start of each financial year. This would also be consistent with the overall review of other reserves and balances which is conducted by the Council as part of the budget setting process.

7. Setting the Agenda for Meetings of the Residents' Forums

In the future, it is proposed that the management of Forum agendas is brought into line with the ways these are managed for other Council Committees:

- (i) The agenda and supporting papers for meetings will be circulated electronically at least five clear days before the date of the meeting. In addition, hard copies of the papers will be made available in local libraries, at Customer Services at Bell Street and at the Council's leisure centres.
- (ii) The agenda and supporting papers will be accessible via modern.gov through the Council's website.
- (iii) The minutes of the meeting will be provided to the chairman of the Resident Forum in a timely manner.
- (iv) An action list will be drawn up following the meeting and provided to the chairman with the minutes.
- (v) Suggestions for the agenda for the next meeting of each Forum can be put forward by any resident of the relevant Forum, either at a meeting of the Forum, or by written request (including email) to the Council's Community Engagement Officer. The agenda will be decided by the chairman of the relevant Forum. Where a requested item is agreed for the agenda, the resident who has proposed the item will be contacted and invited to attend to speak on the particular point. Where the chairman decides that a requested item will not be included on the agenda, the resident who has proposed the item will be contacted to explain the reasons why the decision was made.

8. Next Steps

Subject to the outcome of discussions at Council tonight, the proposals contained in this report will be sent to the next cycle of Residents' Forum meetings in September. The outcome of the consultation will be reported to Policy, Finance and Development Committee on 31 October.

Background Documents:

None.

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Implications Review of the Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston Residents' Forums	
Finance	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Martin Hone (Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer)	
Legal	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Anne Court (Director of Services / Monitoring Officer)	
Corporate Risk(s) (CR)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political Dynamics (CR3)
Martin Hone (Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Organisational/Transformational Change (CR8)
Corporate Priorities (CP)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An Inclusive and Engaged Borough (CP1)
Martin Hone (Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Effective Service Provision (CP2)
Vision & Values (V)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> "A Strong Borough Together" (Vision)
Martin Hone (Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accountability (V1)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teamwork (V3)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer Focus (V5)
Equalities & Equality Assessment(s) (EA)	An EA will be completed once policy guidance has been sought from Members.
Martin Hone (Interim Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full EA Assessment