



**Scope for WASP Funding
by the Value for Money Scrutiny Committee**

**Final Report as Approved by an Extraordinary Meeting of the Value for Money
Scrutiny Committee - 1st February 2016**

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1. Introduction

1.1. Following the discussion at the Value for Money Scrutiny Committee on the 17th June 2015, Members agreed to undertake a review of the Ward Action Service Plans (WASP) funding. The Ward Councillor is the lead responsibility for the WASP funding in their area. The aim of the funding is to provide an opportunity for the Ward Councillors to:

- Identify and, if possible, address local concerns and aspirations;
- Improve communications between the Council and its citizens;
- Inform and influence the Council's planning of its service delivery and budgets.

1.2. Questions in the scoping paper were suggested in order to provide a focus for this review. This report outlines the initial findings in relation to these questions, and the proposed recommendations from the Committee meeting in September 2015. Please note that the list of questions is not exhaustive, and the Committee is not limited to answering only the questions contained within the scoping paper.

2. The procedure relating to WASP funding

2.1. Each month Julie Byrne who administers WASP funding emails all Councillors a blank WASP funding application form for them to complete (Appendix A). In order to apply for the funding Councillors are required to submit the application together with two (or more) quotes and any additional supporting information which supports their application. This information is returned to Julie and forwarded on to the WASP Panel Members one week prior to the scheduled panel meeting.

2.2. The day after the panel meeting Councillors who submitted an application are informed if they were successful or not. On occasions more information is requested by the Panel and a decision is made mid-month to save the Councillor having to wait until the next scheduled meeting. Councillors have until the next financial year to complete their project(s) and to provide 'business' receipts that show proof of payment - i.e. a cheque number. Once this information has been received arrangements are made for the money to be reimbursed via the Council's Agresso system. The relevant Head of Service checks and authorises each payment processed.

3. What are the present arrangements?

3.1. Budgets

3.1.1. Each Councillor has an allocated amount of £1,000 from the Revenue Budget to cover consultation costs and to fund, in part or in whole, local small-scale schemes to help benefit their community. For the financial year 2015/16, the total budget for the WASP fund is £39,000. The budget starts at the beginning of a financial year and by December most of the WASP funding is spent, although any unspent funds are merged together to form a “communal pot”. This is announced in January (the New Year) and Councillors are allowed to apply for this money without obtaining support from same Ward Members (if applicable). The first communal pot meeting takes place in February and if there are any funds left a second/final communal pot meeting will be held in March. If there are any funds remaining (usually it has all been spent) any unspent funds are returned back to the Council. Anything over £500 is mentioned on the intranet (under our Transparency Code 2014) and anything under £499 does not get published here.

3.2. Panel’s Role

3.2.1. The WASP Panel consists of 6 people including 5 Councillors and 1 external representative. The Panel meets on a monthly basis to discuss the applications submitted and together they decide whether to approve or reject the application. The decision is based on a majority vote. There have been occasions where rather than a meeting; Members have communicated their views/votes on applications to officers by email or telephone.

4. What other review work has been undertaken relating to WASP funding?

4.1. As part of the Internal Audit plan for 2015/16, CW Audit Services carried out a review regarding the WASP funding process, which was completed in August 2015.

4.2. Scope / focus of the review

4.2.1. In accordance with an engagement letter agreed with the Council’s management in June 2015, the review aimed to provide assurance in relation to the risk that the Council fails, or is perceived to fail, to follow a proper, transparent, unbiased and fair process to award WASP funding. The main themes highlighted by the review can be found in the Auditor’s briefing paper within Appendix B, and summarised below.

4.3. Outcomes and recommendations

4.3.1. The following are the main themes highlighted by the review:

Guidance document - The only specific guidance currently available is the “Description of WASPS - 2015” which is a one page document which lists the aims and mechanisms

of WASP funding (Appendix C). The funding is not advertised on the Council's website. The Audit identified that it would be beneficial for the document to be amended to provide guidance on the following:

- Suitable and unsuitable uses for WASP funding;
- Matters such as declarations of conflicts of interest, objectivity and fairness which may be relevant to bids under the WASPs scheme;
- A clear process which members and officers should follow in relation to making, processing and deciding upon bids or payments relating to applications or completion of funded projects;
- The use of WASP funds relating to other wards i.e. the "Communal Pot" in relation to deadlines, approval and when this can be varied;
- The requirement for invoices and confirmation of project start/progress/completion to support and evidence the need for payment and delivery of the expected outcome;
- Evidence to show that funded projects have been completed as planned i.e. photographs.

Quotes - The application form requires two quotes to be submitted which is not in line with the Council's Contract Procedure rules which require one oral quote up to £500 and one written quote for between £500 and £3,000. Additionally the Audit found that greater clarity is required regarding best value quotes to accept, and how such quotes are evidenced.

The WASP Panel - Panel meetings which comprise a mixture of Councillors and an external representative are held monthly to consider and approve applications for funding. These meetings are not minuted and although it is expected that Councillors on the Panel should declare any interest in applications for funding and therefore do not vote on areas of declared interests, it cannot currently be confirmed that such declarations are made. The Audit identified that it will be beneficial to clarify the following:

- What constitutes a majority for the approval of grants i.e. through the production of a formal Terms of Reference;
- The level of importance of external representation;
- Acceptance of communicating views/votes on applications to officers by email or telephone when unable to attend the scheduled meetings.

5. Consultation with Members

5.1.A SNAP Survey comprising five questions was sent out to Members to complete on the 3rd September and redistributed later on in the month. By 2pm on the 12th January 2016 a total of 21 responses had been received, comprising 15 from returning Councillors and 6 from newly elected Councillors. A detailed summary of the findings can be found attached in Appendix D.

6. Benchmarking

Below are a handful of examples of local authorities who operate a similar fund.

6.1. Amber Valley Borough Council - Councillors Community Fund

The Fund has been set up to support the 11 most deprived wards in the Borough, and can be used for any purpose which will reduce the level of deprivation in the local area and enable the improvement of the quality of life for local residents. The fund only supports one-off projects and cannot be used to replace any withdrawn public sector funding or provide/imply any ongoing financial support. Applications for funding can only be received from not-for-profit groups/organisations and not individuals.

Each local Ward Councillor has £1,000 to allocate to projects within the financial year. There is no lower limit and applications for over £1,000 can be supported by Councillors wishing to combine resources for those projects that benefit larger communities. There are no set timescales or deadlines. Ward Councillors consider projects throughout the year (as long as funding is still available) and make appropriate recommendations to the Leader of the Council in conjunction with the Council's Cabinet. The final approval of an application is made by the Cabinet.

6.2. St Edmundsbury Borough Council - Locality Budget Scheme

The objective of the scheme is for the funding to be used in building capacity and resilience in local communities, helping residents to take ownership of and make a difference to the issues they care most about locally. Each Councillor is allocated £2,500 for each financial year with the exception of an election year. Funding can be used for new or existing small scale community-based projects or activities carried out by community groups working in the Councillor's own ward that support the delivery of the Families and Communities Strategy. In special cases, as well as using the locality budget to support a project in the Councillor's ward area, it is possible for more than one Councillor to club together to support a project that crosses ward boundaries, or for a Councillor to work together with a County Councillor using funding from his/her county locality budget. However, projects covering the whole borough or district are not considered suitable for this funding.

6.3. Wyre Forest District Council - Community Leadership Fund

Each Councillor is allocated £1,000 to support worthwhile initiatives, projects and activities that will benefit their wards. The accountability for decisions rests with individual Councillors, but there are a number of simple conditions to follow. The minimum allocation for any organisation is £200, thus each Councillor can support up to five initiatives, projects or activities. Councillors can work with other Councillors to pool their grants. Allocations do not have to be to an organisation located in the Councillor's ward but the organisation does have to be located in Wyre Forest. They do not require any evidence of the nature of the organisation if it is a registered charity or statutory

body. In the case of organisations which are not charities or statutory bodies, evidence of incorporation will be required, such as registration as a company or articles of association / constitution for an unincorporated body (such as a community group). It is the Councillor's responsibility to ensure that the Council is provided with a copy of these documents where relevant as no payment of grant will be made without them. Payments are made by BACS.

7. Types of projects that the funding has been used for

7.1. Below provides a selection of the types of projects that were funded in 2014/15:

Summary of Grant Purpose	Amount Awarded
Bowling green mower	£600.00
Bretby Rotary Kids Out Event	£500.00
Bowling green mower	£600.00
Recreating Christmas Truce / Paget	£1,000.00
League equipment / crown barriers	£451.93
Fence panels / posts	£309.00
New folding tables	£300.00
Notice boards	£1,000.00
Pre-school play equipment	£300.00
Replacement chairs	£1,472.40
Essential electrical inspections	£485.00
Christmas tree lights	£461.32
Curtain tracks for a Village Hall	£499.00
Resurfacing a car park	£2,000.00
Inflatables for Youth Club	£500.00
Directional / finger sign	£1,000.00
Bulky waste collection	£950.00
Loneliness event - room hire / adverts	£350.00
Flood Aqua Sacks	£400.00
Replacement bollards	£610.00
Printing and web support	£983.00
Maintenance works - roof / guttering	£1,089.00
Preserve and conserve war memorial	£1,000.00
Group sporting activities on Princess St	£2,000.00
Ageing population awareness event	£192.00
Benches	£479.97
Two ewes for Paget School	£350.00

7.2. At the Value for Money Scrutiny Committee meeting which took place on the 22nd December 2015, the Committee requested details of:

- What money has been spent, by which Councillor and in what ward, over the past 5 years.

- Details of which applications have been rejected by the Panel.

This information can be found within Appendix E of the report.

8. Proposed Recommendations

Below is a list of proposed recommendations taken from the Value for Money Scrutiny Committee meetings which took place on the 16th September and the 22nd December 2015:

- 8.1.** The Scrutiny Committee supports all of the main findings/themes contained within the Internal Audit Review (and notwithstanding the recommendations) would expect the necessary actions be taken to address all of the issues raised;
- 8.2.** The Scrutiny Committee recommends changing the quotation process by replacing the need for two quotes to one quote in writing for bids between £1 and £1,000. Where applications are made to the 'communal pot' and could exceed £1,000 one quotation in writing should be provided;
- 8.3.** The Scrutiny Committee recommends a rebranding of the WASP fund which should include better communication of the WASP funding process to the public via the Council's website and also to rename the funding to something is more identifiable to members of the public;
- 8.4.** The Scrutiny Committee recommends that greater discretion should be given to Elected Members on how they spend their allocated £1,000;
- 8.5.** The Scrutiny Committee recommends that applications be submitted to an individual officer for approval, therefore removing the need for the WASP funding committee;
- 8.6.** The Scrutiny Committee recommends that the WASP funding committee should provide clarification on what applications are exempt from funding i.e. clothing; and
- 8.7.** The Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Council should provide training to Members on additional sources of funding or signpost them to additional sources of funding for community groups.