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**YOUTH OPPORTUNITY FUND**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Chris McEwan, Children's Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. This report outlines the means of delivering and administering the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds as agreed by Cabinet and seeks approval from Council for the Director of Community Services to be given delegated powers to approve applications for grant funding based on recommendations from the Head of Youth Service and from the Youth Board.

**Background and Introduction**

2. The Government released the document Youth Matters: Next Steps on 8 March 2006. This was a follow-up document to the Green Paper (Youth Matters) released the previous year. Next Steps confirmed Government intent following consultation on the Green Paper, which generated in excess of 19,000 responses.
3. A key element of Next Steps is the creation of the two funds (Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital) which are designed to give young people more choice and influence over provision at local level. The focus is on young people aged 13-19.
4. Coinciding with the release of Youth Matters: Next Steps the Government released specific guidance on the operation of the Opportunity and Capital Funds. The Funds come in the form of a grant to the local authority and conditions of the grant and further guidance are set out in Local Authority Circular SC06\_2. For Darlington, the grant amounts to £155,000 for each of the two financial years 2006-07 and 2007-08. Within the guidance the Council must spend the funds within the given proportions as follows:

Revenue Opportunity Fund	£75K
Capital Opportunity Fund	£65K
Support Costs	£15K

## **Information and Analysis**

5. The objectives for the Funds are clearly set out and include:
  - (a) To give a choice and influence to young people, particularly disadvantaged young people, in relation to things to do and places to go and to convey a powerful message to young people that their needs and aspirations are important.
  - (b) Change the way local authorities and their partners provide activities and facilities for young people, especially in deprived neighbourhoods, and to increase the responsiveness of providers to what young people want.
  - (c) Improve things to do and places to go in line with what young people want in their neighbourhood.
  - (d) Provide opportunities for young people to develop their confidence, knowledge, skills and abilities and gain recognition and/or accreditation for them.
  - (e) Increasing the well being of young people by contributing to the achievement of the ECM outcomes.
  - (f) Increase young people's engagement with services and with the democratic process at a local level.
  - (g) Involve young people, especially hard to reach young people, in identifying positive activities and things to do, and to support their role as decision makers, grant givers and project leaders.

## **Proposals**

6. The Youth Service has assumed the lead for development of an Operational Plan for the Funds within the Borough. There is no previous example of a grant fund for young people on this scale and a model has been developed from scratch.
7. The Service proposes to utilise two voluntary (regional) organisations – KEYFUND and CHANGEMAKERS. Both organisations are experienced and skilled in the development of youth grant-giving and are prepared to work in partnership with the Youth Service to develop a localised model and plan which best fits the Borough and which will leave a sustainable legacy for future projects.
8. The specific role of CHANGEMAKERS will be to recruit and train young people who will be members of the Youth Board. This will also include facilitating the operation of the Board in relation to the assessing and processing of applications from young people.
9. KEYFUND will be responsible for recruitment and training of adult facilitators who will be central to supporting and developing young people's bids. KEYFUND will also administer smaller applications received from young people.

10. The Funds are subject to monitoring by GONE and the Head of Youth Service sits on a regional steering group facilitated by GONE. Appropriate recording and reporting mechanisms have been incorporated into the Operational Plan with both KEYFUND and CHANGEMAKERS.
11. A proposed Service Level Agreement has been developed with both CHANGEMAKERS and KEYFUND outlining the roles and responsibilities of all parties. The annual cost of engaging the organisations is £17,437 in year 1 and £19,734 in year 2. This has been funded from the youth opportunity support costs referred to in paragraph 4 and a contribution from the Youth Service training revenue budget. The costs are above the £15K ceiling to enable us to provide training to adults free of charge.

## **Operational Plan**

12. The developed Operational Plan to administer the Funds is attached in **Appendix 1**. There are a number of core elements:
  - (a) This plan combines the ‘grass roots’ approach offered by the KEYFUND complemented by the experience of CHANGEMAKERS in developing young people as decision makers and as grant givers in Youth Boards. It offers capacity building with those young people coming through the KEYFUND process and local provision, providing additional learning, accreditation, and progression routes.
  - (b) The grass-roots approach works through networks of trained facilitators from Youth Workers, to Teachers, Police Officers and parents. Training will be offered for new facilitators in this process and additional access points developed for those young people not currently engaged with any organisation/service to enable them to apply for funds for self designed youth led projects. Facilitators will promote the funds, engage young people and provide direct support and encouragement to their ideas and proposals maximising the potential for success.
  - (c) Larger scale projects from young people (£2000+) will be subject to application to a Youth Board. Funding for these projects will be assessed and allocated by the Board who will be trained and recruited by CHANGEMAKERS and the Youth Service. As a result there is an increasing involvement of young people in decision making, grant making and influencing services that affect them. Given the timescales involved recruitment to the Youth Board will be through expression of interest by a young person although a wide of networks have been used to ensure that information has got to as many young people as possible. Over the life of the Funds further recruitment work will take place to ensure that the Board itself is as representative of Darlington as possible and that there is scope for the involvement of more marginalised groups of young people.
  - (d) Both CHANGEMAKERS and KEYFUND will work with staff from the Youth Service and develop and build capacity for delivery of youth led grant making, increased involvement in decision making by young people, and wider participation by young people in local democracy. The Opportunity Fund will link very closely to the Youth Participation Strategy as it develops.

13. Criteria for applications to the funds has been provisionally set but may be amended on review and evaluation following rollout and through negotiation with the Youth Board when recruited. Some of the core criteria include how the proposed project supports the Every Child Matters outcomes, how the project addresses priorities within the Children and Young People's Plan, that a sponsor agency underpins the application, that there is a priority to support projects from disadvantaged groups of young people and that there is learning and benefit accruing both to young people and to the wider community. The initial criteria are set out in **Appendix 2**.
14. The Funds have been designed to support projects involving both revenue and capital costs and Government were interested in both elements working in tandem. National guidance covers definitions of revenue and capital and this has been factored into the application process. Additionally the application process asks groups to outline how ongoing costs arising from capital projects will be met by the group/organisation to ensure the projects are sustainable.
15. The Youth Service is working to identify a thematic Council support team, which can assist in advising groups of young people depending on the nature of the project or initiative. For example this may include Procurement, Environmental Health, Planning, Building Services, IT etc.
16. The Funds have already been subject to positive press coverage and were launched in late 2006 to allow for immediate development and funding of small-scale projects and for two funding rounds in this financial year for larger scale projects. There will be four formal funding rounds in 2007-08. A promotional DVD and information materials are currently being prepared.
17. As a four star Council, Government guidance indicates that any underspend on the Opportunity Fund and up to 40% of the Capital Fund, can be carried forward to the following financial year. This alleviates some of the pressure to spend quickly.

## **Governance**

18. The grant funding is awarded on the basis of Local Authority Circular SC06\_02 which requires that local authorities 'involve young people in identifying positive activities and things to do, supporting their involvement in decision-making and grant-giving and as project leaders'. However the Council is responsible for ultimately making the funding decisions. To ensure the funding does involve young people in the way required, a Youth Board of a minimum of 8 to 10 young people will be established to consider larger applications for funding and to carry out detailed evaluation of those applications. Should a greater number of young people wish to be Board Members, this number will be increased to accommodate them. The Youth Board will then decide what recommendations for funding should be made. The Council must put in place appropriate decision-making arrangements to consider those recommendations. For smaller sums, recommendations will be put forward by adult facilitators/KEYFUND to the Head of Youth Service and for these decisions the Council must also make the final decision. We are using locality based workers and the existing network of youth groups to ensure that the message is being relayed to all parts of the Borough and to encourage membership of the Youth Board so that it is representative of Darlington's young people.

19. In terms of these processes to approve the funding applications, it is proposed that:-
- (a) For supported projects under £2000 - Council delegate power to the Director of Community Services to award funding having regard to recommendations from the Head of Youth Service.
  - (b) For supported projects in excess of £2000 - Council delegates powers to the Director of Community Services who will consider recommendations made by the Youth Board and make decisions in the light of those recommendations.
20. Additionally, through the Making a Positive Contribution sub-group of the Children's Trust, members of the Youth Board will have the opportunity to report periodically to the Trust on how the Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds are being utilised by young people throughout the Borough. The Trust can then utilize received information in determining how services to young people might be shaped in the future, particularly in line with the emerging Government guidance on 'Positive Activities' (Local Authority Circular SCYPG06\_16). Additionally the Trust will have a key role in contributing to the evaluation of the impact of the Funds in both years of operation.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

21. There has been no formal consultation on the development of the operational plan. Young people were consulted as part of the national consultation on the concept of the Funds generally and subsequent Governmental guidance has informed the development of the local operational plan.

### **Legal Implications**

22. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

23. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is considered that the contents of this report will have a positive impact as it will provide additional scope for activities for young people.

### **Council Policy Framework**

24. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

## **Conclusion**

25. There has been a significant challenge to develop an appropriate delivery model for the Funds within the context of Government time scales and guidance.
26. The potential for a sustainable legacy to the two-year funding programme has been built in to the model in the form for recruitment and training of adult facilitators and Youth Board members and in the terms of how the projects are identified and approved on the basis of sustainability.
27. The model retains flexibility for on-going development as the Funds are promoted and we begin to see exactly what ideas, needs and wants exist for young people in Darlington.

## **Recommendation**

28. It is recommended that:
  - (a) Delegated powers are provided to the Director of Community Services, to approve applications for grant funding based on recommendations from the Head of Youth Service and from the Youth Board.

## **Reasons**

29. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
  - (a) Being able to release funding to support young people's ideas and initiatives gives the opportunity to extend the breadth and scope of youth provision and to ensure that service provision is being shaped and determined by young people. This in turn will inform key products within the Local Area Agreement.
  - (b) Appropriate procedures and mechanisms are put in place to ensure that young people do have an active role in decision-making but that the Council is also able to ensure that projects and initiatives are relevant and have strategic fit.

**Cliff Brown**  
**Director of Community Services**

## **Background Papers**

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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