

Housing Development Briefing Note

To: WDTRO Committee
Person to Contact: John Kerr, Housing Development and Homelessness Manager
Date: May 2018
Subject: Proposal for Tenant Priority Budget

Background

In a letter to the WDTRO chairperson on 2 Nov 2017, the Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability, suggested that as investment in our stock has increased, less of the tenant priority budget has been spent by initiatives proposed via the WDTRO. Many of the previous proposals are now part of planned cyclical maintenance programmes (e.g. close painting) and so this gives us an opportunity to consider how this Budget is spent and to ensure that tenants can have direct influence over the full amount.

Discussions with the WDTRO and the wider rent setting consultation highlighted continued support for the Tenant Priority Budget and it remains part of the HRA budget for 2018/19 and within the 30 year HRA Business Plan.

Key principles of the budget are that there should be tenant influence around how it is spent, it should be transparent and that any spend should adhere to wider HRA published spending guidance.

Various options were outlined to ensure that tenants continue to have a direct influence over the full amount of the tenant priority budget. One of these options was to consider a tenant participatory budgeting scheme in which tenants and local TROs could identify various initiatives as part of a participatory budgeting exercise, similar to the events facilitated by the Council's Communities Team.

Prior to a recent meeting on 9 March 2018, a briefing note was provided which recommended that a process was put in place to take this option forward and it was agreed at that meeting to further develop the proposal as a basis for further discussion.

Main proposal

There is an understanding that the Tenant Priority Budget should be used to benefit as wide a range of tenants as possible, that activities should be housing led and that there should be a clear link to existing spending guidance.

The process is guided by the following key principles:

- Empowerment – to enable tenants to decide how the budget should be spent in their local communities; and
- Transparency – the process and decision making process should be as open as possible.

Process

The process will be facilitated by the Tenant Participation team and builds on what is currently in place while also aiming to increase participation and transparency.

A proposal form has been developed to invite proposal ideas.. This form will provide brief details around the type of projects that would be eligible in terms of spending guidance and will ask for some key details around the project being proposed.

We will publicise the opportunity of getting involved to as many tenants as possible. Proposed ideas will be invited (using various methods) and these can be sent directly to the Tenant Participation team or emailed to tenants.priority@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Following the application deadline, the Housing Development team will assess all project bids in terms of eligibility, i.e. meets criteria and won't be covered by planned maintenance or on a Capital programme. Feedback will be provided to those submitting proposals not deemed to be eligible. Projects that are deemed eligible will be fully costed.

A public meeting will then be held to discuss the eligible, costed projects. If all costed bids do not exceed the budget then the meeting can discuss and approve that these be taken forward. A further bidding process can then be undertaken based on the budget that remains.

If the costed projects exceed the available budget then the meeting will vote on which proposals are approved (taking into account the aim of being a benefit to as wide a range of tenants as possible and also the desire to ensure an equitable spend across all areas of West Dunbartonshire). This vote will be recorded to ensure transparency.

Regular updates in terms of works being carried out and budget spend will be provided to the WDTR0 and via other appropriate mechanisms.

It is hoped that both participation and transparency will increase and that the process will continue to be reviewed and improved. If successful, this participatory budgeting exercise could evolve to be similar to the events currently facilitated by the Council's Communities Team (with for example, an allocation of funding to local areas, with a local exercise being carried out in terms of agree what projects are taken forward).

What it means for West Dunbartonshire

These proposals will make the current process more transparent and hopefully increase participation.

Recommendations:-

1. The changes outlined above are supported and taken forward by the Housing Development team; and
2. A public meeting is arranged to provide an update on 2017/18 spend – date set as Wed 23 May 2018