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Councillor M Mackrory
Chairman
Executive Scrutiny Committee

Our Ref JJ/jg
Your Ref
Date 27/03/2013

Dear Michael,

Executive Scrutiny Committee: 26th March 2013 - Localism

Further to my attendance at the Executive Scrutiny meeting yesterday to present on localism, I wanted to take the opportunity, through you, to thank members for the helpful contributions made and to advise them of the actions that I have or intend to take in relation to the key concerns raised. For ease of reference, I have categorised the issues raised under key themes as follows.

Devolution

- ***Explore the devolution agenda further to consider engagement and influence of local communities in the decision making process.***

I have noted the comments made and will be exploring this issue further.

Community Asset Transfer

- ***Reflect on timescales for declaring assets surplus to requirements as it may not offer communities enough opportunity to explore funding streams to sustain the operations within the community facility for future use***

Whilst the concern raised was well made, as the committee was advised, the authority would rightly need to continue to explore VFM considerations in declaring assets surplus to requirements.

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Big Society Fund (Community Initiatives Fund)

- ***Need for more targeted promotion of the fund in 2013/2014 in district areas with lower take-up.***

The BSF Team will undertake work with colleagues from and communications teams and with partners in identified areas where take-up of this fund is lower to put in place a series of targeted promotions.

In addition to this, all elected Members will receive a briefing pack that details the application process and encloses the Guidance Notes and Expression of interest Form. I would kindly request that Members of the Executive Scrutiny Committee to use this briefing material within their respective Divisions not only to promote the availability of the fund, but to also actively encourage applications to be submitted.

- ***Request to share applications submitted with the Divisional Member for their information only prior to them going to the Judging Panels for consideration.***

This request will be actioned as part of the 2013/2014 CIF process.

Members will receive a summary sheet detailing applications that have been made in their Division and a contact number will be provided should they wish to discuss any of the applications made further with one of the CIF Team.

In addition to this, the application form has also been amended and the applicant is now required to seek support for their application from their local Essex County Council Member.

- ***Ensure Divisional Members are invited to launch of schemes within their areas.***

The process for this will be strengthened as part of the process for 2013/2014.

On the submission of the last invoice for payment, the recipient will be contacted personally to discuss planned press coverage and launch events. Based on discussion the Chairman and Cabinet Member will be invited to attend planned events and a personal call will be made by a member of the CIF Team to respective Divisional Members to invite them also.

Making the Links

- **Concern was expressed about the development of any proposed extension to small businesses of the partnership with Cambridge Open Systems (essexinfo.net) to provide free website hosting, training and technical support as it might but the authority in direct in competition with small businesses already providing this service.**

In the light of the comments made, I will be reviewing this position.

Voluntary Sector

- **Concern was raised about the capacity of the voluntary sector to offer more within a climate of reducing funding.**

I do acknowledge that in a climate of reduced available funding, not just within ECC but also within other public sector organisations, it is a difficult time for the sector.

To reassert the response I provided at the meeting, the funding provided by ECC to support the sector has remained relatively consistent, with the intention to further invest in the sector going forward; the community resilience fund is an example of this.

Locality Boards

- **There was disappointment expressed by some Members in areas that did not have a Locality Board, with a plea for consistent application within the new structure.**

As I explained Locality Boards continue to be a 'work-in-progress' and we cannot impose these on district areas. I do, however, acknowledge that further consideration does need to be given to keeping Divisional Members informed about what is happening in their respective areas; I will take this forward for further consideration.

I hope you find this update helpful and again, I would like to thank you and Members of the Committee for their helpful contributions.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor John Jowers
Cabinet Member for Communities & Planning
Essex County Council**

