

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive 11th March 2025

Member Ward Budget Scheme

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Ian Woodall, Finance Portfolio Holder
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Debra Goodall
Report Author	Job Title: Head of Finance & Customer Services email: Debra.Goodall@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 0152764252
Wards Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	All
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. SUMMARY

Funding was approved in the 2025/26 Budget for purpose of the implementation of a Member Ward Budget Scheme. This report sets out the operating principals for that Scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive are asked to RESOLVE that:

- **The Ward Budget Scheme be Agreed:**

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Redditch Borough Council is proposing that an allocation of funding will be distributed to individual ward members to work within the Borough to improve facilities and outcomes for their communities. The scheme is set out in **Appendix A**, and the Individual Member Application Forms at **Appendix B**.
- 3.2 In this proposal each Councillor will receive £2,000 for the 2025/26 financial year, and the following two financial years which they can recommend allocating to projects and/or services within their ward. These allocations must comply with policy as set out in the Redditch Councillor Grant Facility (RCGF). This Pilot Scheme has been agreed as part of the 2025/6 Medium Term Financial Plan Process. The initial funds for the 3 year pilot for all 27 Members at £2,000 a year will cost £162,000 and then to this an administration cost of circa £6,000 a year will be required at a total cost of £180,000.

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Application Process

- 3.3 Any application to spend funds in the members ward must be made on the form provided and submitted to the Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive via the email address via his Directorate Support Officer Sarah Carroll – sarah.carroll@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk. Based on the information provided a decision will be made on whether the proposal is reasonable and lawful.
- 3.4 Forms can be submitted electronically via the Council's e-mail account only, or in paper with the necessary signature/s.
- 3.5 Applications direct from organisations will not be considered.
- 3.6 Funds will not be paid to Councillors but direct to the project/organisation nominated on the form.
- 3.7 Do not include account details on the submission form. If the payee's details are not contained within the Council's financial system they will be contacted directly in order that they provide us with their account details.
- 3.8 Payment will be made by BACS Transfer as it is a secure method of making payment and is cost effective to the Council. **Payments will not be made by Cheque or Cash.**

Be clear about how the money will be spent

- 3.9 A clear statement will be required as to how the money will be spent and how the economic, social or environmental well-being of their Ward may be promoted or improved by its use. It is anticipated that there will be evidence that the service/ project is required by the community / residents and that once implemented there is a clear benefit that can also be evidenced.
- 3.10 The application will only be cleared for payment if this is clear and officers can see that it is appropriate and legal.
- 3.11 Once an application has been agreed it will be held for public inspection (on request) at the Council House for 6 years and a summary will be published as part of the quarterly Finance and Performance Monitoring Report as well as being held on the Council Website.
- 3.12 A quarterly update will be made available to Councillors on the spend / balance of their fund.

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Declarations of Interest

- 3.13 You need to declare that you have no disclosable pecuniary interest in the proposal (this includes the interests of spouse/partner as well as you) – and/or, if another disclosable interest exists, make a clear statement as to the type and nature of the interest.
- 3.14 No organisation will be able to benefit from the funding if you hold a disclosable pecuniary interest.
- 3.15 Being appointed to a particular body by the Borough Council should not normally create a disclosable interest. However, each case must be considered individually and early advice should be sought on the nature of any potential interest.
- 3.16 Members can join with other Members to “pool” their Ward Funds for specific Council wide projects and initiatives to make the overall sums greater. However, members should note that they should not support such initiatives if they are linked to managing boards as this would be a conflict of interest. Members can also allocate their funds outside their specific Wards for specific initiatives as long as there is no conflict of interest.

Publicity

- 3.17 Any publicity arising from use of the Fund should not be party political and should refer to the Borough Council’s contribution. The Ward Councillor/s is responsible for ensuring that any publicity complies with this.
- 3.18 Be clear that the payment is from the Borough Council and not you individually.
- 3.19 The scheme will be suspended during any periods of purdah relating to the Borough Council elections.

Audit

- 3.20 The Ward Members Fund can be subject to review by the Council’s Internal Audit service to ensure financial probity and value for money in how public money is spent. Appropriate records should be kept by all applicants in case their application is audited.
- 3.21 Appropriate records will be kept by officers of the funding approved and expenditure incurred by the Council. Every project (both approved and rejected) must have a completed application form and a record of the decision taken.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 No Legal implications have been identified.

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5. Strategic Purpose Implications

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 5.1 The Strategic purposes are included in the Council's corporate plan and guides the Council's approach to budget making ensuring we focus on the issues and what are most important for the borough and our communities. Our Financial monitoring and strategies are integrated within all of our Strategic Purposes.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 The green thread runs through the Council plan. Every report has potential financial implications and these in term can have implications on climate change. These will be addressed and reviewed through individual reports when relevant by climate change officers will ensure the correct procedures have been followed to ensure any impacts on climate change are fully understood.

6. Other Implications

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 None as a direct result of this report.

Operational Implications

- 6.2 Managers meet with finance officers to consider the current financial position and to ensure actions are in place to mitigate any overspends.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The financial monitoring is included in the corporate risk register for the authority

8. APPENDENCES

Appendix A – Draft Scheme
Appendix B – Individual Proposal Form

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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Appendix A

Redditch Councillor Grant Facility

The Redditch Councillor Grant Facility empowers ward councillors to help their local communities. Other Councils have this approach, including Worcestershire County Council, Worcester City Council and Bromsgrove District Council. These have been used as a basis for the principles of this scheme.

In this draft scheme each of Redditch's 27 members will have an allocation of £2,000 (per financial year), to spend on locally determined initiatives within their Ward. They have reasonable discretion as to how to spend their allocation, as long as they are lawful for the Council, rational and are properly recorded.

The Redditch Councillor Grant Facility (RCGF) is aimed at one-off items of expenditure or supporting community activity, local and national charities or voluntary organisations within the local Division.

Formal applications for bids to the RCGF can only be submitted by the Ward Councillor; however, individuals or organisations can contact their local Councillor and seek support from the Fund. The public will be encouraged to contact their Ward Councillors for support, in order to provide them with information on how support from the RCGF would promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of the local area, or those people within it.

The proposed Pilot Scheme will run for three years with a review after year 2 to evaluate its effectiveness and suitability for ongoing funding.

The cost of the scheme is £54,000 a year, which over the three year period would be a cost of £162,000. There is the requirement to administer the scheme which is estimated to cost circa £13k a year (25% of expenditure) linking to finance, procurement, legal and service specific support. This is £201,000 in total.

The scheme could be funded in 2 different ways:

- 1) Including a Budget for the Redditch Councillor Grant Facility of £67k a year for the next 3 years and have this approved as part of the budget process.
- 2) As part of the budget process, approve the setting up of an earmarked reserve of £201k in order to fund the scheme.

1. Guiding Principles

1.1 The purpose of the Redditch Councillor Grant Facility (RCGF) is to enable Councillors to allocate funds to facilitate 'good works' in and for the benefit of their respective Wards and thereby become more closely involved in their communities.

1.2 Members have considerable discretion in how they allocate funds.

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1.3 Allocations of public money from the Fund must be done lawfully and transparently ie within the Council's legal powers, on a rational basis, and a formal public record made of the spending decision. The Fund must not be used in a way contrary to Council policy.

1.4 The RCGF is intended to be, as much as possible, a self-regulating scheme. If Members are unsure about the propriety of their intended allocation or whether it adheres to guidelines they should seek guidance from the Council's Section 151 Officer or Monitoring Officer or their staff. If still unsure: don't!

1.5 Members should ensure that their use of the RCGF adheres to legislation and Borough Council guidelines (either set out within this Scheme or as given from time to time) and that it is made very clear that any funding which is provided originates from Borough Council public resources.

2. Scheme principles

2.1 The Scheme operated for a trial period from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2028. The Scheme will be reviewed at the end of the second year for it's ongoing support.

2.2 The Scheme is established under s236 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which allows local Members to discharge the Council's well-being functions in relation to their local electoral Division (now included within s1 of the Localism Act 2011) and has been agreed by the Leader of the Council in respect of executive functions and full Council in respect of non-executive functions.

2.3 Members are being given wide discretion as to how the economic, social or environmental well-being of their Ward may be promoted or improved by their use of the RCGF for the benefit of the whole or any part of their Ward or those within it.

2.4 The RCGF enables each Member to decide items of expenditure which are for the well-being of their Ward. This expenditure will be drawn from a specific RCGF budget allocated to each Member and which may not be exceeded.

2.5 This proposed RCGF budget will be a maximum of £2,000 per financial year for each Member to spend on 'good works' within their Ward. The Scheme will only allow individual Members to carry forward to the following financial year any underspent amount if it has been agreed 3 months before the end of the financial year (and is being earmarked as part of a wider scheme either within the Ward or across a number of Wards (see point 3.7 below)).

2.6 There must be a transparent audit trail in respect of decisions under this Scheme. In compliance with the legislation, the individual Member is responsible for ensuring a record is made in writing of any decision or action she or he has taken in connection with this Scheme and must ensure that record is provided to the Administration Team within 1 month of the decision or action. The rationale must be clear – any that are unclear will be referred back to the Member, thus causing delay. A standard template will be supplied for this purpose which will form both the request to process a particular payment and also the record of that decision and reasons for it. Any electronic communication about the Scheme (forms, confirmation of joint Scheme) etc. must be sent from an authorised email address.

2.7 The Section 151 Officer will keep a record of RCGF expenditure in respect of each Ward and either they or the Monitoring Officer will inform Members on request of the balance remaining. The Section 151

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Officer or Monitoring Officer will also make an annual report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, setting out the actual expenditure in each Ward and any issues arising from the operation of the Scheme. Financial Monitoring Reports to Executive may also refer to expenditure under the Scheme.

2.8 Priority will be given to maintaining a high profile for the RCGF and the records of expenditure under the Scheme (ie a summary of the member request form above) will be publicly viewable on the Council's website and will be held for public inspection on request for 6 years by the Council.

3. Scheme Specifics

3.1 Any decision under this scheme must not be contrary to Redditch Borough Council policy, and the Council must have legal powers to make the decision and incur the expenditure proposed.

3.2 The Members' Code of Conduct applies to the exercise of the Scheme. Members must declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) or Other Disclosable Interest (ODI) in the proposal. No proposal may be put forward in which the Member has a DPI or ODI which would require the Member to have withdrawn from a meeting. Where there is any doubt over the legality or propriety of the expenditure, either the Section 151 Officer or the Monitoring Officer will determine whether the expenditure is lawful and proper, and their decision as statutory officers will be final. Accordingly, where there is any potential concern about the lawfulness or propriety of the proposed expenditure, no firm commitment for expenditure should be made or promised until such advice has been sought and a determination made as needed.

3.3 Members may wish to have regard to any Community Profiling in respect of their Ward in relation to proposals for the RCGF.

3.4 The RCGF should not be used to provide grant-support to commercial enterprises (such as Private Care Homes, Private or Public Limited Companies). The RCGF may be used to support local or national charities or voluntary bodies working within a Member's Ward if for the specific well-being of the Ward. The RCGF may be used to purchase goods or services from commercial enterprises in order to promote public well-being through use of those goods or services in the local community (see below).

3.5 The RCGF should be used for one-off items of expenditure and not for expenditure that would create an on-going financial commitment.

3.6 The RCGF cannot be used for direct employment of staff or for gifts or hospitality payments.

3.7 Two or more Members may agree on a joint proposal for the whole or part of their WCDF budgets - formal confirmation will be required from all Members involved in the joint proposals. Note that a joint proposal must be of benefit to the Wards of all Members putting it forward.

3.8 Proposals to use the RCGF for road repairs and highway schemes will be referred by the Member to the Environmental Services Directorate to determine the feasibility and cost. Funding for speed cameras is permissible if the camera is used under the guidance, authority and training of the Police.

3.9 Members should consider the financial viability of a potential recipient (such as a local voluntary body) in order to reduce the risk of public money being wasted, and in cases of uncertainty or concern are encouraged to seek advice from the Section 151 Officer.

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3.10 Members will be responsible for organising and facilitating any publicity in relation to expenditure from the RCGF which should, where possible, clearly state the link to Redditch Borough Council. Any publicity must be non-party political and in accordance with legal restrictions on the Council, with the periods before elections particularly sensitive.

3.11 Where a proposal is for a project that requires funding from more than one source (and not all sources are the RCGF) members are advised to allocate funding to a specific part of the project (e.g. new carpets, disabled toilets, painting etc) rather than put monies into a larger pot. If the payee is VAT registered and can recover VAT on goods or services to be funded, the RCGF grant should be net of VAT.

3.12 Under the rules of HM Revenue and Customs, if the grant is to be paid to an individual (rather than a group or committee) to provide a service as opposed to purchasing goods, it is necessary to consider whether the recipient should be classed as an employee of the Borough Council or self-employed. Only if it has been established that the work to be undertaken is one of self-employment can a payment be made. It is not permitted to engage anyone as an employee using the RCGF. Advice on this can be obtained from Human Resources.

3.13 Where a grant is in excess of £1,000 and the payment is to be made directly to a supplier (e.g. to buy football kit on behalf of a team), Financial Regulations must be followed and competitive quotations obtained. Advice on this can be obtained from Financial Services and Strategic Procurement within the Resources Directorate.

3.14 If for any reason the project for which the RCGF has been used does not go ahead, the recipient of the funding must contact the Member in question to discuss alternative proposals for the use of the funding and ensure that any allocation is returned to the Council. Members must ensure that any funding for such projects must be made subject to these conditions, should ensure the RCGF grant has been used for the intended purpose and must update the record supplied to the Section 151 Officer to reflect any subsequent variation.

3.15 Authorisation of expenditure from the RCGF must be made on the pro-forma provided and returned to the Administration Team who will arrange publication of the decision and forward it to the Section 151 Officer. Orders will be placed, where appropriate, using the Council's usual procurement arrangements (for which details can be obtained from Strategic Procurement), or alternatively a cheque will be produced in the name of the recipient.

3.16 In the year of a Borough Council election, no commitments, payments or related publicity may be undertaken once the Notice of Election has been published until after the date of the election. In a year of County Council elections the presumption would be the same if the member is likely to be a candidate.

4. Review

4.1 The proposed Scheme operates for a trial period from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2028. The Scheme will be reviewed at the end of the second year for its ongoing support.

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Appendix B

Redditch Borough Council

Application for use of the Redditch Councillor Grant Facility

Councillor's name:

Ward:

Details of proposed spend

Amount requested:

Recipient details (name, address, e-mail and phone number)

Description of how the economic, social or environmental well-being of their Ward may be promoted or improved by their use of the Redditch Councillor Grant Facility (RCGF) for the benefit of the whole or any part of their Ward or those within it:

Details of any consultation carried out (e.g: with Parish Council, voluntary or community bodies or other partners):

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Declaration by Councillor/s:

I/we confirm that the proposed payment

- Is legal;
- Does not commit the Council to ongoing revenue costs;
- Will not be used to pay for insurance, planning etc application costs, solicitors' or other fees;
- Will not be used to meet direct staffing costs.

I confirm that I/we do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in the proposal. I have no other disclosable interest in the proposal, unless detailed below.

Signed:

Date:

Please Return to Sarah Carroll
(on behalf of Pete Carpenter – Executive Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive)

sarah.carroll@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk