

Understanding Area Partnership devolved budgets

In February 2015 East Lothian Council devolved £1 250 000 to Area Partnerships to deliver on priorities identified in their Area Plans. This reflects the Council's commitment to 'give people a real say in the decisions that matter most... and that decision making is devolved to the most appropriate local level' *East Lothian Council Plan 2012-17*.

£350,000

- For non-recurring general services priorities determined by each Partnership in their Area Plan. This funding will be allocated equally across the 7 East Lothian wards.

£300,000

- For roads capital expenditure which can include Traffic and safety schemes, footway and car park improvements, Street lighting, carriageway repairs or resurfacing, signage and/or drainage improvements. Each of the 6 Area Partnerships will receive £50,000 of this to use in their area.

£600,000

- For services provided by the Council's amenity services which may include maintenance, renovation and minor improvements in parks, sports pitches, open spaces, hard landscaping, rural paths, woodlands and children's play areas; grass cutting; street sweeping; and street bins, seats, signs and fencing. This will be allocated equally across the 6 Area Partnerships.

TOTAL: £1 250,000

Roads Capital Funding

£50,000 has been devolved to each Area Partnership for capital projects that are able to be delivered by East Lothian Councils' Roads Service (see box above for the scope of this type of work).

This funding is intended to allow Area Partnerships to identify and fund local projects that will have an immediate benefit within their communities. These projects will be delivered in addition to the main capital works programme co-ordinated by the Roads Service, which is planned using a systematic process of assessment and prioritising across East Lothian as a whole. The decisions made by Area Partnerships regarding which projects to undertake will not therefore have an impact upon work already planned in their area.

General Services Funding

The £50,000 allocated to each ward from the Council's general reserves is new funding that Area Partnerships can use to support projects in accordance with the priorities identified in their Area Plan.

This funding can be used by the Area Partnership to directly fund an initiative or in partnership with ELC departments or other agencies to support the delivery of local services. It can also be used to 'match fund' grant applications etc.

Currently this is a one-off allocation for the 2015/16 financial year and cannot therefore be used for projects that will result in ongoing revenue commitments. It is not intended that this funding should be used as a local grant making fund for groups to bid into – instead it should be allocated by the Partnership to projects and initiatives that meet the objectives established in their Area Plan.

Amenity Services Allocation

The £100,000 allocated from Amenity Services to each Area Partnership is different to the funding devolved from the other sources. In this case the funding represents the value of services – and is effectively made up of staff time and equipment. Each Partnership has the opportunity to influence how this time is used within their ward and may choose to focus resources on a particular local neighbourhood or village, or possibly on a particular type of service eg. Street sweeping, grass cutting or beach cleaning.

This allocation could also be used as in-kind matched funding for grant applications to improve local amenities like parks and other public space or combined with other funds to deliver on a larger local project.

Area Partnership Devolved Budgets – Frequently Asked Questions....

Following presentations made to Area Partnerships in April 2015 this list of FAQs has been compiled to help ensure that everyone involved has a shared understanding of how the devolved funds can be used in their local area.

If an Area Partnership has not completed its Area Plan can it still use the funding?

Yes. East Lothian Council recognises that each Area Partnership is at a different stage in developing its Area Plan. Most Partnerships however have begun to define clear priorities for action in their wards in response to an assessment of local needs. Once projects are agreed by the Partnership for inclusion in their draft Area Plan the Partnership can further agree to allocate funding from their devolved budget.

Who will manage the devolved budgets?

Area Managers will be responsible for managing the funds devolved to Area Partnerships. In relation to the 'ring-fenced' funding from Roads and Amenity services their role will be to liaise with the relevant services to plan and budget for the projects that will be delivered by these services in response to the objectives identified in the Area Plan.

Although they will be managing these budgets Area Managers do not have the authority to make decisions regarding which projects will, or will not, be funded – these decisions rest with each Partnership.

How will budgets be split between towns/villages?

There is no expectation that the devolved funding will be shared equally across a ward area. The allocation of funding within the ward should be determined by each Area Partnership in line with the priorities established in their Area Plans and with an awareness of the overarching aim of the East Lothian Partnership to reduce inequalities between and within communities.

Can funding from the different sources be combined?

Yes. Resources from the different allocations can be used together to deliver on larger projects. They can also be combined with other locally available sources of support e.g. Community Council funds or grant funding.

What if the money can't be spent this financial year?

The funds devolved to Area Partnerships are intended to be spent during 2015/16. For capital projects however, which often require several months lead-in, it may not be possible to complete all of the identified work within the current year. In this case any funding allocated to the project would be carried over into the following year for expenditure.

If a Partnership is unable to agree on projects to be funded through the general service or the Roads capital allocation it may be possible for some of the funding to be carried forward, but this would need to be agreed on a case by case basis. Resources allocated from Amenity Services however cannot be carried forward.

Will the funding allocated to Area Partnerships have an impact on the support Council Services already provide to other local groups?

No. ELC are very aware that the work being done by local In-Bloom groups, Friends organisations, sports clubs, parent councils, TRAs and Community Councils to enhance their local area relies on the in-kind support they receive from council services, including Amenity Services, and there are no plans to alter these arrangements.

Are Area Partnerships being asked to choose which potholes get filled and which drain covers get replaced?

No. Roads Services will continue to undertake regular maintenance and repair programmes across all areas as part of their day to day activities.

The funding allocation from Roads Services, while a small proportion of the overall roads capital spend across East Lothian each year, is intended to give Area Partnerships the opportunity to identify and fund small projects that are agreed as important locally but which may not have been recognised as priorities otherwise.

How will Area Partnership avoid duplicating or undermining work already being done/planned when setting priorities and identifying projects?

At the Area Partnership meetings on the devolved budgets officers from each service highlighted key works already planned for each ward. Area Managers will have an important role to play in providing the Partnerships with more detailed information relating to these projects and how they relate to emerging local priorities and initiatives.

Area Managers will also be working closely with other ELC departments (eg Economic Development, Housing and Planning) on behalf of their Area Partnership to ensure that wider initiatives and investment from across the Council, other public services and external funding bodies compliment and build on each other in the short, medium and longer term to have the greatest impact on delivering local priorities.

Is there the opportunity for the Area Partnerships to influence priorities and Council spending outwith these funding allocations?

Yes. The Area Plans being developed by the Partnerships are designed to be strategic 10 year plans. Once agreed these Plans will provide the mechanism for local communities to influence longer term planning, prioritising and resource allocation across the Council and other public services through the East Lothian Partnership.