

Area Housing Panels

19, 20, 21, 22 February 2019

Briefing Paper: Update on the Estates Development Budget review

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Estates Development Budget (EDB) is a pot of money set aside each year by Housing to improve estates, through projects put forward for funding by residents
- 1.2 The amount of money available in the EDB reduced from £518,000 in 2017/18 to £354,000 in 2019/20. The reduction would have been greater had the budget not been topped up by reserves from historic EDB underspends. It was anticipated that the budget for 2020/21 would be £183,000 and that changes to the scheme would be needed to ensure maximum value could be achieved from the reduced funds.
- 1.3 Although the main driver for change was financial, there were other reasons why it was timely to review the EDB, including:
 - An internal audit of EDB which found that although ‘...residents have an important role to play in its allocation, the principles of making best use of council resourcesneed to be met in projects funded this way’
 - Resident dissatisfaction with the current scheme, particularly over the time between making bids and the delivery of successful projects
 - A lack of clarity around EDB ‘rules’ ie the type of projects that can be funded, whether bids can be made on non-Housing land and who can make them
 - An over representation of bids from seniors’ housing.

2. EDB Task & Finish Group

- 2.1 A task and finish group of residents and officers was set up in July 2018 to identify ways of improving the EDB for residents, staff and contractors. Membership of the task and finish group is set out in Appendix A. Residents were drawn from the EDB Panel, Area Panels and Service Improvement Groups.

2.2 The group was tasked to;

- Make EDB easier to understand and easier to make bids
- Finds ways to shorten the main bid process from application to the point of delivery
- Introduce new processes to encourage more and varied bids
- Ensure the processes are fair and equitable

The group approached this by exploring; its purpose, the projects it funds and the processes in place throughout the lifecycle of each budget.

2.3 The group met seven times between July 2018 and January 2019.

2.4 As the meetings were coming to an end three important things happened, which would either directly or indirectly affect the EDB;

- It was confirmed that the money available for EDB in 2020/21 will remain at the 2019/20 level of £354,000 as historic underspends were still available to 'top up' the budget.
- From April 2020 day-to-day repairs and empty home repairs for council housing will be carried out in house when the contract with Mears ends, including delivery of works and materials funded by EDB.
- A new environmental improvement budget is being considered, to run for three years from April 2019, with funding of £500,000 per annum.

2.5 Maintenance of the EDB at its current funding level in 2020/21 means the maximum value of bids can remain at their present level for a further year. A reduction is still expected in subsequent years, so whether or not the value of bids should be reduced, will still need to be considered, although there is now a longer deadline for this work. This time can also be used to consult more widely on some of the issues identified by the review group that are still outstanding and to consider what changes will be needed to processes when the delivery of EDB projects changes in April 2020.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The table in Appendix B sets out some short-comings the review group identified with the current arrangements for EDB, their impact and suggested actions to resolve them.

3.2 A summary of these actions is set out below. Some can be carried out in time for the next round of EDB and some will require further consideration.

To be introduced in time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme	
1	Improve the information and guidelines for residents making EDB bids, including information from Neighbourhood Action Plans and the new process for progressing with environmental improvements.
2	Offer applicants who want to know more about EDB and how to make bids appointments with officers.
3	Set up a separate EDB budget from the citywide allocation for Seniors' housing; to be trialled for one year.
4	Decisions on Seniors' bids to be made by the Sheltered Housing Action Group.
5	Bids for fencing to be restricted to communal areas.
6	Carry out a review of new fencing installations and repairs.
7	Introduce an improved online EDB application form.
8	Aim to increase the number of decision points in the EDB cycle for main bids, to at least two a year.
9	Increase the maximum value of quick bids from £750 to £1,000.
10	Reduce the number of EDB Panel meetings from 10 to 6 per year.
11	Performance on the EDB programme to be reported twice yearly, including an end of year report.
12	Improve communications between the council and applicants at each stage of the EDB cycle.
Requiring further work	
13	Consider setting up a 'community chest' for community wellbeing projects funded from the grants to residents' associations' budget as it is regularly underspent.
14	Review maximum value of bids, for anticipated reduction of funding in 2021/22.
15	Review the decision making body for EDB bids.
16	Review how EDB funding is split between areas and/or property types.

- 3.3 Area Panel members are invited to comment on this report and to support the actions identified to reaffirm the purpose of the EDB, clarify the type of work and projects it can fund, and ensure the processes that support it are fair, easy to use and accessible to all council residents.

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Appendix A

Membership of the Estates Development Budget Task & Finish Group

Name	Group
Alison Gray	EDB Panel member – West Area representative
Barry Hughes	Neighbourhood & Tenancy Service Improvement Group - Chair
Carl Boardman	EDB Panel member - Central Area representative
Christine El-Shabba	EDB Panel member – East Area representative
Jason Williams	EDB Panel member – Central Area deputy representative
Lynn Bennett	EDB Panel member – East Area deputy representative
Muriel Briault	EDB Panel member – West Area deputy representative
Roy Crowhurst	Seniors' Housing Action Group - Chair
Ted Chapman	West Area Housing Panel - member
Terence Hill	EDB Panel member – North Area representative
Vic Dodd	Business & Value for Money Service Improvement Group - member

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Appendix B

No.	Theme	Issue	Impact	Suggested action	Timescale
EDB Purpose					
1	EDB Criteria	The current criteria are broad ranging eg bids should lead to 'an improvement to a council housing owned building or community facility and the quality of life of tenants'.	<p>Residents appreciate the flexibility this gives but would like to know what will be considered improvements rather than repairs, before bidding.</p> <p>Knowing what to bid for is made more difficult for residents as much of the guidance around EDB is a result of previous reviews or 'custom and practice' and is not together in easily accessible formats.</p> <p>Bids are currently for works or materials, and do not include projects that could improve residents' wellbeing and reduce isolation eg fitness classes, arts and crafts groups or homework clubs.</p>	<p>Examples to be given of the type of bid that can be made under each criteria in the EDB guidance.</p> <p>All guidance on what can and can't be funded through EDB to be brought together in a single document available as part of the application process.</p> <p>Bids for projects that benefit council residents on land owned by other parts of the council will be considered for EDB funding providing they have the permission of the relevant directorate.</p> <p>Consider how some of the budget for grants to tenants and residents' organisations could also be used to fund a 'community chest' for small wellbeing projects.</p>	<p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p> <p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p> <p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p> <p>During 2019/20</p>
2	Links between EDB and residents' priorities	EDB is a substantial budget that has potential, through the work and projects it funds, to address problems residents	Residents lose the opportunity to make bids that address issues that have already been raised.	Provide information for each of the 4 Area Panel areas in the EDB application guidance on priorities identified through the	In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme

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		<p>have told us about their neighbourhoods eg in the Neighbourhood Action Plans.</p> <p>There is no promotional material that gives information about neighbourhood priorities to residents interested in making EDB bids.</p>		<p>Neighbourhood Action Plans, and other routes.</p> <p>Offer appointments with officers to applicants who want to know more about EDB and how to make bids. Residents know the problems they want to address, but do not always know how to do so.</p>	<p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p>
EDB Projects					
3	Seniors' Housing	<p>Bids from residents in seniors' housing are funded from the EDB allocation for the area housing panel in which they are located. Across the city, the number of projects funded from EDB in seniors' housing is consistently higher than any other type of property.</p>	<p>Residents in seniors' housing receive a greater share of EDB funding than residents in other types of property.</p>	<p>The Senior's Housing Action Group (SHAG) supports the proposal that a separate budget is set up for Seniors' housing based on the percentage of this type of housing in the overall stock. Decisions on applications will be made by SHAG rather than Area Panels. To be trialled for a year.</p>	<p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p>
4	Fencing	<p>Some associations with areas of benefit that are predominately made up of houses put forward bids to fence individual properties.</p> <p>This type of improvement is usually a tenant's responsibility, although the tenancy team has a city wide</p>	<p>The few properties that receive fencing through the EDB are not always consecutive which lessens the impact of the improvement to the surrounding community.</p> <p>Unlike other fencing to individual properties provided by the council, these bids do not take</p>	<p>A review of how fencing repairs and renewals to individual properties is carried out, to identify options for funding this type of work in a transparent, fair and accessible way.</p> <p>For 2020/21 associations to advise members in need of</p>	<p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p> <p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB</p>

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		budget for exceptional need.	<p>account of the tenant's circumstances (other than whether or not they are in arrears).</p> <p>No information is received on bid forms why the particular properties have been put forward from the area of benefit, rather than others.</p> <p>Together these two points indicate an outcome that is not consistent with the council's need to make sure its resources are used well and in a fair way.</p>	fencing to contact Housing Customer Services for advice on their individual case.	Programme
5	Value of bids	<p>At the start of the review it was anticipated that the funding available for EDB in 2020/21 would be just over half of its current level. By using the current underspend to top up the budget for next year it is possible to maintain EDB at its current level.</p> <p>A reduction in the overall budget is expected in 2021/22, although this will be subject to the annual budget setting process.</p>	Any reduction in the overall budget requires consideration to be given to reducing the maximum value of individual bids as a way of increasing the number of bids that are funded each year.	<p>As the amount of money available for EDB will be the same in 2020/21, there is no need to reduce the current £10k maximum value of bids.</p> <p>The review group felt that when the budget is reduced the maximum level of funding is set at £5k. It is suggested that the EDB Panel consider this further as part of their work programme in 2019/20.</p>	During 2019/20

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EDB – Process					
6	Application	<p>The majority of applications are on paper forms, with a few using an electronic form that is then printed off.</p> <p>The recent audit of EDB found that the quality of bids needed some improvement, with more information provided, particularly around the consultation carried out regarding the proposal.</p>	<p>The use of paper forms require officers to re-enter the information from the form onto a spreadsheet which is time consuming and needs to be updated every time there is a change to bids.</p> <p>Incomplete application forms can cause delays in bids being costed.</p> <p>There have been reports of paper forms getting lost.</p>	<p>Introduce an online form, similar to the one that is used for bids to the council's 'Communities Fund'.</p> <p>Residents can use the form as a 'work in progress' as they complete the different stages of making a bid, as it will have a 'save as you go' facility.</p> <p>Advice and support will be available to residents to make online applications.</p> <p>There will be no need for officers to spend time entering data and setting up spreadsheets, as these will be integrated with the on line form. Time saved on this can be used to support and advise groups interested in making bids.</p>	In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme
7	Decision making - timescales	There can be a gap of up to 20 months between bids for funding over £750 ('main' bids) and their delivery.	Groups advise that this timescale makes their members lose faith in the council and confirms their view that it is slow to make decisions over what are simple requests eg for a new shed or	Aim to increase the number of decision points in the EDB cycle with at least two deadlines a year for main bids eg in January to be voted on in April and July to be voted on in	In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme, if possible – decision to be made by

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		<p>The EDB Panel meets 10 times a year to consider 'quick' bids. This can lead to meetings where there are a small number of bids to consider.</p>	<p>bench.</p> <p>Resident representatives feel this can have a negative impact on their association and discourage attendance at events.</p> <p>Horticultural bids eg for trees or bulbs are sometimes agreed at a time when they are not available eg a decision to fund spring bulbs made in April can't be fulfilled until the autumn.</p> <p>The current timescale contributes to the build-up of underspends; if a project comes in under budget, there is no opportunity to spend the remaining money within the same financial year.</p> <p>Meetings with less than 10 bids to consider are not a good use of residents' and officers' time.</p>	<p>October. This will speed up the time between decision and delivery and allow for seasonal bids to be delivered at the right time.</p> <p>Increase the maximum value of quick bids from £750 to £1,000 to increase the number of bids that can be agreed throughout the year. Based on this year's bids, this will only lead to a slight increase in the number of 'quick bids' so this would not significantly increase the work of the EDB Panel who make decisions on these types of bids.</p> <p>Reduce the number of EDB Panel meetings from 10 to 6 a year from April 2019.</p>	<p>March 2019</p> <p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p> <p>In time for the 2019/20 EDB Programme</p>
8	<p>Decision making – who decides on which bids are funded</p>	<p>Decisions are currently made, depending on the value of the bid, by Area Panels or the EDB Panel. Area Panels are made up of residents elected</p>	<p>The current decision making process favours bids from formally recognised residents associations which puts it at odds with the criteria which</p>	<p>The review group spent some time looking at different ways decisions on bids could be made more inclusive and mitigate against the possibility</p>	

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		<p>from their residents' association and the EDB Panel from residents elected from the HOME Service Improvement Group. Informal groups of residents who put forward bids are not therefore able to take part in the decision making process.</p> <p>Some of the review group felt that the current way of deciding on EDB bids encouraged 'Eurovision syndrome' where residents voted for bids on the basis of friendship or familiarity rather than the quality of the bids.</p>	<p>welcomes applications from groups of residents, whether they are part of a recognised association or not.</p> <p>Decisions are made by a small number of residents and while this has merits, there is a risk of bias (conscious or unconscious creeping in).</p>	<p>of individual bias. This included expanding the role of the EDB Panel and bringing all Area Panels together for voting meetings.</p> <p>More work is needed on how best to widen decision making, and to ensure decisions are made on the basis of the bid alone. It is proposed that the EDB Panel with co-opted reps from the current task and finish group continue to work on options that form part of a wider consultation eg through Homing In and the Council's online consultation portal to give more residents the opportunity to be involved in this decision.</p>	<p>During 2019/20</p>
9	Evaluation of successful bids	<p>No work is done to assess the impact of successful EDB bids once they are delivered eg to find out if they met the objectives in the application form.</p>	<p>Opportunities to celebrate good bids are missed, and likewise chances to learn from bids that don't deliver the anticipated improvements.</p>	<p>An end of year report to be produced, involving all stakeholders of that year's programme to include, eg number of bids, what was funded, impact, and changes needed to the guidelines for the following year based on 'lessons learnt'.</p> <p>To tie in with Resident</p>	<p>In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme</p>

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				Inspectors reviewing the delivery of some projects and meeting with local residents.	
10	Communication	<p>Most of the communication at the start of each round of EDB is with recognised residents' associations and groups that have previously had a successful bid.</p> <p>The long timescale between bid submission and delivery is matched by long periods where there is no communication between the Resident Involvement team and groups about their bids.</p>	<p>This favours groups who are 'in the know' and may limit the number of bids coming forward from new groups.</p> <p>Groups are unsure of the status of their bids and can't advise members, if asked about them.</p>	The resident involvement team has started to work with the council's communications team to find the best way of making information accessible to people at each of the main points in the EDB lifecycle ie making bids, bids being accepted, and outcome of bids.	In time for the 2020/21 EDB Programme
11	Funding split	The annual EDB budget is split between the 4 area panels according to the number of properties in each area.	This method doesn't take account of; the amount of common land in each areas, the split between different property types, the need for environmental improvements and historic spend.	<p>There is insufficient time to revise the way the EDB 'pot' is split across the city before the next EDB cycle, so for 2020/21 the same formula will be used.</p> <p>The EDB Panel, with co-opted representatives from the current task and finish group continue to work on options for the funding split, and that these are part of a wider consultation.</p>	In time for the 2021/22 EDB Programme

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