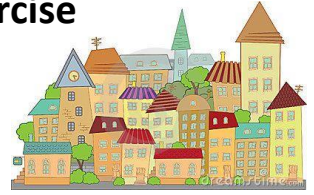


ThinkLet #12 Activity Pack: Decision-Making Exercise

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The Scenario

You are local parish councillors in the fictional village 'Fothergill' that is in the fictional country of 'Forthland' (a place a lot like England in terms of its social and political institutions). The government of Forthland has accepted that its social policies are in crisis. They have admitted that schools need more teachers, hospitals need more doctors and nurses, and the police service needs more officers on the beat. They have conceded that poverty and homelessness have reached unacceptable levels, that the regeneration of inner cities is an urgent task and that something needs to be done to address the growing inequalities within their society. They have agreed that there needs to be a huge increase in public spending to tackle a whole range of social problems they are facing in the 21st century. In short, they have decided to radically rethink their social policies.

The Task

The Forthland government has said it needs time to come up with proper policies for tackling these problems. In the meantime, they have decided that local communities should be given some emergency funding to help address social problems at the local level. Of this money, you - the Fothergill Parish Council - have been given £22,000 to cover the next three years. After an extensive survey of local people, a short list of four applicants who could benefit from this extra money has been drawn up. Unfortunately, there is not enough cash to help all four people; this means that you – as the Parish Council - must decide who is going to get the money and who is not. Moreover, there can be no half measures or splitting of the cash: you must give people all of the money for which they have applied or none at all. More importantly, there is a chance more money will be made available in the next year or two, meaning the Parish Council may have to repeat this exercise soon. You need, therefore, to be clear about the principles behind your decisions so that similar rules can be applied in the future. In short, you need to be clear about why you are giving money to people when deciding who gets it. Please read the description of the four applicants' circumstances carefully before considering the task.

Applicant No.1 Betty



Betty is 75 years old and retired fifteen years ago after working all her life for a local manufacturing company. She now has limited mobility following a fall causing a hip fracture, and wants the Parish Council to (a) pay for a care assistant two mornings a week to carry out some of the tasks she can no longer manage and (b) pay for some modifications to her house to help her get around in her wheelchair. Betty's local Social Services Department agree that these measures would help her, but they can't afford to pay for them at the moment, which is why Betty is turning to you. However, not everyone has sympathy for her; Betty has been a life-long heavy smoker and this has been a contributory factor in bringing about her current condition linked with the chronic osteoporosis from which she suffers. For many years doctors have been warning her to give up smoking, but although she has made several attempts including using NHS stop smoking services, she has not been able to quit.

Cost: £9,000 (£1,500 for modifications + £2,500 per annum for three years for care).

Applicant No.2 Darren

Darren is 15 years old and has recently been permanently excluded from school for violent conduct, drug abuse and petty theft. Outside of school he is well known to local police officers due to his involvement in criminal activity, particularly burglary and car theft. Social workers have suggested a way should be found of helping him complete his education, but the headteacher of the school will only allow Darren to return for his final year if he is placed in the school's highly intensive isolation unit. Students in the unit are heavily supervised by specialist teachers and follow their own unique programme. In Darren's case, the programme will abandon national curriculum subjects and GCSE examinations in favour of a vocational training programme based around motor vehicle maintenance. However, funding this programme is expensive, and the request is that the Parish Council provides the additional resources needed for it.



Cost: £15,000

Applicant No.3 Deborah



Deborah is 23 years old and shares a house with her friends. After gaining a reasonable set of GCSEs, she left school at 18 to take up an apprenticeship in the local railway works. Deborah enjoyed this job a great deal and ended up spending much of the next four years combining her work with evening classes at the local college, gaining a number of engineering qualifications. However, she is currently unemployed after the railway works closed down. She has been trying to find a similar job in the local area for six months, but the depression in the engineering sector has made it very hard for her to do so. She also feels that when jobs have become available employers have preferred to give them to men. While jobs may be available further afield, she is reluctant to leave the local area as her mother relies on her quite a bit for support. After two months without work, Deborah was placed on the government's work programme for young unemployed and had hoped to find a government subsidised placement as an engineer through this scheme. Four months on, however, they have been unable to find her such a job and she has been told her benefits will be stopped if she does not now (a) work for a charity for 6 months, (b) work with an Environment Task Force for 6 months or (c) go back to college to work towards a recognised qualification. Deborah feels this is unfair. She already has engineering qualifications that she worked very hard for and really wants to pursue a career in this field. She wants the Parish Council to fund an extension of the benefits she has been receiving until she finds such a job. She feels there is good chance that work will become available soon as Interrail have made a commitment to refurbishing its old InterCity carriages in the local area.

Cost: up to £4,900 per year (Comprising: weekly benefit payments for unemployment benefits, housing benefit to help with rent and council tax benefit).

Applicant No.4 Tom

Tom is 7 years old and lives with his two parents and elder brother. He is suffering from a rare life-threatening disease and now has very little time to live – a matter of weeks - unless he receives treatment. Standard treatments have not worked on this rare condition, but a specialist believes that a radical new treatment available in America may help to cure him. Unfortunately, while this experimental procedure has had respectable results so far – a 30% success rate – it is not available from the NHS because the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) believes it is too expensive. So, Tom's only choice is to receive treatment in a private hospital. His parents have private health care insurance that will cover some of the cost of doing this and are putting all of their savings into his treatment. They have also received a huge amount from the general public after a television appeal and fundraising campaign. However, they still need extra money to cover the difference between what they have raised and the cost of the treatment. They are asking the Parish Council to do this.



Cost: £17,000

1. *Who are you going to allocate the funding too?*
2. *How did you reach that decision? What principles did you apply when choosing who to allocate the funding to?*
3. *Was it an easy decision to make or not? Why/why not?*