



PR.32 14/15

Policy & Resources
Committee

15th January 2015

Subject: Community Grants

Report by:

Chief Operating Officer

Contact Officer:

Lead Officer for Enterprising Communities
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Purpose / Summary:

To establish an updated community grants programme for a three year period.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. That Members approve the use of funds in accordance with Option 1 in this report.
2. That Members approve carry forward of all community grant funds from existing schemes for the new community grants programme.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: Appropriate procurement procedures must be followed and set criteria will be required for managing and monitoring grant funding schemes.

Financial : FIN/109/15

There is circa £92k remaining in the Councillor Initiative Fund Earmarked Reserve, which is adequate to support the provision of a scheme for 2015/16 only, with £2k available per Councillor. This would result in £20k remaining at the end of 2015/16 which would then be returned to General Fund balances unless further resources are identified for a continuation of the scheme beyond 2015/16.

It is proposed that any remaining funds from both the Community Chest and the Community Asset Fund will be amalgamated with the Community Budget Earmarked Reserve to fund the proposals of a new Community Funding Programme and no additional resources would be required for this purpose. Any underspends to be carried forward for future community grant schemes.

Staffing : None

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : Grant funding activity will be delivered in accordance with WLDC equality and diversity policies. Organisations receiving funding will be required to meet the same standards.

Risk Assessment : N/A

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

x

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

x

No

1. Background

1.1 On 28th September 2011 the Prosperous Communities Committee agreed to the establishment of the Council's Localism Programme. This was partly in response to the new Localism Act 2011 but also to change and enhance the way in which the Council engaged and supported communities. As part of this process the Localism Programme included the formation of some community grant funding schemes.

1.2 The schemes set up and still currently operating are:

Councillor Initiative Fund

£2,000 per Councillor per annum

Each Councillor has a set allocation of funding and is able to make awards to local projects and organisations in their areas. A quick delivery time enables funding to be awarded within days/weeks to an organisation. This fund is administered in house.

Community Chest

(formerly Community Action and Volunteering Fund)

Total budget: £250,000

Total management cost: £62,587

(1st January 2012 to 31st March 2015)

Small community grants up to £500 for a wide range of community and volunteering projects. A simple application process designed to enable small groups or those new to funding to deliver projects for the benefit of the community. Community Lincs are commissioned to manage and deliver this fund.

Community Assets Fund

Total budget: £1.05 million

Total management cost: £158,927

(1st April 2012 to 31st March 2015)

Designed to support a range of projects such as the development or refurbishment of community buildings, development of social or community enterprises and improve local sport/leisure facilities. Delivers a mix of grant/loan funding with an emphasis on leveraging in additional funding to the district. CAN are commissioned to manage and deliver this fund with Plunkett Foundation sub-contracted by CAN.

1.3 In addition to the above funds a decision already taken by Members has agreed to allocate £250,000 from reserves for a new Community Budget fund. The principle of this new fund would be to provide medium sized grants to support a range of voluntary sector action. The fund would provide grants in the gap between the Community Chest and the Community Assets Fund.

1.4 The above funds have collectively supported hundreds of projects, enabled hundreds of hours of volunteering action and levered additional money into the district. A range of case studies has been produced showing the valuable contribution our funding has made and the lasting improvements realised by local communities.

- 1.5 The contractual arrangements for the Community Chest and Community Assets Fund come to an end in March 2015. The following sections detail issues and challenges experienced with the separate funds and explore the options for future delivery.

2. Current Grant Fund Budgets

- 2.1 Whilst the existing funds are still operating it is not possible to give an exact figure of how much budget will remain at the end of March 2015. The following lists the most recent update for each fund.

Councillor Initiative Fund

Scheme closed on 24th October 2014.

There is £92,000 remaining for use in future years.

Community Chest

As of 6th November 2014: £72,266

Estimated to have £44,000 remaining by the end of March 2015.

Community Assets Fund

As of 8th October 2014: £504,949

Estimated to have less than £400,000 remaining by the end of March 2015.

- This fund does have funds allocated but not yet awarded. If any projects do not meet application criteria by end of March 2015 these allocated funds will also be returned. The total amount of allocated funds as of 8th October 2014 was £533,054.
- This fund has two existing loan arrangements and the possibility for more to be established before the fund closes. Income from any existing loan arrangements will continue to come in for a number of years.

Community Budget

Agreed budget: £250,000 from reserves

Estimated £786,000 available from existing/agreed budgets in April 2015.

3. Corporate Priorities

- 3.1 The funds help support priorities within the Corporate Plan. Any options to continue or change delivery of the funds will continue to support the following priorities:

- Priority 1.3: Open for business
- Priority 4.1: Increasing community action and volunteering

- Priority 4.2: Promote well-being and healthy communities

3.2 The funds provide high profile recognition of the support WLDC can give to community projects. Members are directly involved either making final award decisions or taking part in decision making panels.

4. Issues and challenges

4.1 Whilst each existing fund has supported a wide range of community projects, there have been a number of issues with individual funds and how they operate collectively. Some of the key issues have been:

- Each fund is managed and delivered in isolation using different processes
- Individual funds have jointly funded the same project reducing the amount of external leverage
- Low application rates at times leading to low up-take of funds
- Concerns raised by Members of high management and delivery costs
- Lack of quality control with external delivery partners
- Missed opportunities to seek additional funding leverage
- Complicated or sometimes lengthy processes to obtain funding or support
- Lack of Member support for some of the funds

4.2 Since the launch of the current grant funding schemes the funding market has changed. In 2011 the social investment market was new and limited options existed to obtain funding for community enterprise projects. There is now a much wider selection of social investors able to offer grants and competitive loan funding. Our own funding programmes require updating to ensure we are matching with regional and national schemes.

5. Options

5.1 There are 3 options to be considered:

OPTION 1. Launch a new re-aligned Community Funding programme using remaining and existing committed budgets (PREFERRED OPTION)

This option would establish a comprehensive community funding programme featuring a range of funds designed to empower and strengthen our communities. A standard mechanism of delivery would be adopted to ensure each fund is managed and delivered in the same way preventing duplication, enhancing the customer experience and seeking best value for money.

The updated community funding programme would launch on or after 1st June 2015 and run until 31st March 2018.

A new emphasis on seeking the best possible leverage and value for grant money will underpin all funding activity. Applying standard monitoring and evaluation across all funds will evidence the full impact of the funding programme.

Using budgets remaining from existing grant schemes and budgets already committed, the following funds will be delivered under this option:

- **Councillor Initiative Fund**
Total fund: £72,000 for 2015/16 (from council reserves)
Remaining balance of £20,000 available for 2016/17
Awards made by Members with £2,000 each per financial year

Continuation of the existing fund to enable Members to directly support local projects and community organisations. The fund has been very well received over the past two years allowing Members as locally elected representatives to become engaged and involved in local community projects.

Criteria:

- Managed and delivered in house using existing Member and Support Services arrangement;
 - All awards will be paid in advance with robust project monitoring;
 - Community groups, Parish/Town Councils, charities, social enterprises and voluntary sector organisations are eligible;
 - Any funds remaining at the end of the financial year will be carried forward to help reduce the amount required from reserves in the next year and make the fund more sustainable;
 - Members will be supported by the Localism Team to help make their awards go further and lever additional funding where possible.
- **Community Grants**
Total fund: £494,000 over 3 years
Any additional funds above the remaining estimates from existing schemes will top up community grants budget for the three year period.

Small grants up to £500

Large grants £500 to £8,000 (up to 80% of project costs)

Match funding grants up to £8,000 (up to 30% of project costs)

A rebranded WLDC Community Grant incorporating the Community Chest and the proposed Community Budget. This single grant scheme will be the main community grant scheme from WLDC. There will be a single delivery structure with separate strands. Small grants will continue to deliver the positive outcomes seen by the Community Chest whilst large grants will support bigger projects including capital works on

community buildings. The match funding grants will provide a quick response leverage to support organisations applying for external funding such as BIG Lottery, WREN and Charitable Foundations helping to secure additional funds into the district.

The small and large grants would be delivered by an external organisation selected through a competitive procurement process. The selected organisation would provide day to day fund management, direct support to applicants and wider fund leverage. A key element of selecting a provider will be the local knowledge, impact and influence they have. The management cost would be deducted from the total fund amount listed above.

The match funding grants would be managed internally within the Localism Team to ensure a quick and flexible response to requests. We will work with other funding organisations to reduce the amount of paperwork applicants need to complete to obtain match funding grants. Match funding grants can also be used to lever and secure loan investment from social investors or other community financial investors.

Criteria:

- Grants paid appropriately according to the amount being awarded with robust project monitoring;
- Community groups, Parish/Town Councils, charities, social enterprises and voluntary sector organisations are eligible;
- Strong emphasis on securing additional levered funding and supporting volunteering action/hours;
- Simple and quick match funding grants to secure external funding from other funding bodies;
- Will accept successfully completed grant applications submitted to other funding bodies where possible.
- Small grants would be reviewed monthly by area panels made up of community action officers, local District Councillors and selected community representatives.
- Large grants would be reviewed twice annually by a grant panel consisting of community action officers, Members nominated and selected at annual council. This panel will have five members in total.
- Match funding grants will be reviewed on an on-going basis by Enterprising Communities Officer and Chair of Prosperous Communities Committee.

- **Local Communities Improvement Fund**
Total fund: £200,000 over three years
(dependent on end of financial year balance of existing grant funds)
Individual projects up to £10,000

A new funding approach designed to make direct improvements to communities throughout the district. This fund will help address local issues that often fall through the gaps of other funds available.

Funds will be allocated to support improvement projects that will enhance community, environment or economic benefits. Physical improvements that could be funded include village signs, benches, litter bins, street furniture, public spaces, footpaths, community buildings and heritage sites. All projects would be led by WLDC with a system in place to allow WLDC staff, Members and the public to put forward suggestions of projects to deliver. The fund will be able to support both reactionary and preventative projects.

By creating a public participation system with the fund, a member of the public can directly put forward suggestions for improvements in their local area. A strict assessment process will determine the need and deliverability of each suggestion. Promotion of projects undertaken will showcase how we deliver local improvements based on what local people need. The publicity title that will be used with this fund is: 'You Said, We Did'.

When individual projects are identified and approved they will be delivered using the most effective route taking into consideration value and quality. Where possible we will make use of internal resources to deliver projects such as Property Services. Where we don't have the capacity to deliver a project we will use external suppliers and/or contractors again seeking value for money and high quality.

This fund will also provide support in emergency situations. Enabling quick access to funding in an emergency is essential to respond to local issues. This can include public spaces work suddenly required to protect the public or supporting a key voluntary sector organisation facing financial or service delivery issues. So called emergency or crisis grants would be available to voluntary sector organisations who can be more vulnerable to sudden changes beyond their control.

Examples of what this fund can support include:

- Install a new bench at a bus stop used by local elderly residents;
- Install a new dog waste bin in an area with high levels of dog fouling;
- Quickly replacing a criminally damaged litter bin to prevent further criminal damage or ASB;
- Contributing towards speed aware signs on a local road with speeding motorist issues;
- Crisis grant to cover the cost of emergency building repairs at a community building, without which it would close due to health and safety.

Criteria:

- Managed and delivered in house within the Localism Team with additional administration resource from Member and Support Services;
- Funds would be released for WLDC to deliver the project unless another organisation is capable of delivering for better value and quality;

- Strong emphasis on securing additional levered funding where possible;
- System to allow any member of the public to put forward a suggestion for local community improvement.
- Fund investments would be reviewed twice annually by the Large Community grants panel consisting of community action officers and nominated Members.

Advantages to this option:

1. Continue to support a wide range of community action
2. Develop stronger links between local communities, WLDC and Members
3. Support the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities
4. Provide an improved streamlined customer experience
5. Bring all funds in-line using standard processes and templates
6. Reduce external management and delivery costs
7. Provide clearer overview to Members and public on grant spending
8. Secure more external funding into the district
9. Support more volunteer action to take place
10. Increase participation of residents and members in community funding and improvements

Disadvantages to this option:

1. Increased administration time of funds within WLDC
2. Additional officer time required to manage fund delivery
3. Funds may appear less transparent not delivered by external organisations

5.2 OPTION 2. Continue delivery of agreed funding schemes only

This option would continue to deliver the Councillor Initiative Fund as in Option A and use the £250,000 committed as Community Budget to deliver the Community Grant (large grant) also featured in Option A. Any other remaining budgets from existing grant schemes would return to WLDC for re-distribution.

Advantages to this option:

1. Continue to deliver two funding schemes for community benefit
2. Reduced external management and delivery costs
3. Remaining funds from existing grant schemes would be returned to WLDC
4. Reduced officer time required for management of funds

Disadvantages to this option:

1. Lack of financial investment in supporting community action and improvement
2. Would end positive work and outcomes achieved by existing grant funds
3. Reduced funding for community projects and enterprises in difficult financial times
4. Negative public reaction to withdrawing community funding support

5. Community organisations and businesses may be put at risk without funding
6. Less community activity and volunteering may take place without funding
7. Reduction in volunteer hours supported by WLDC

5.3 OPTION 3. Close all funding schemes

This option would end all existing and proposed funding schemes. All funds remaining would then be available to re-distribute within WLDC. No community funding would then be delivered.

Advantages to this option:

1. No management and delivery costs
2. No officer time required to manage funds
3. Remaining funds from existing grant schemes would be returned to WLDC

Disadvantages to this option:

1. No financial investment in supporting community action and improvement
2. Would end positive work and outcomes achieved by existing grant funds
3. No funding for community projects and enterprises from WLDC in difficult financial times
4. Negative public reaction to withdrawing community funding support
5. Community organisations and businesses may be put at risk without funding
6. No community activity or volunteering would be financially supported
7. No volunteer hours supported by WLDC funding

6. Recommendation

- 6.1** That Members approve the use of funds in accordance with Option 1 in this report
- 6.2** That Members approve carry forward of all remaining funds from existing schemes for the new community grants programme.