

## **RURAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GRANTS – REPORT OF THE POLICY AND STRATEGY PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To change the current arrangements for member Rural Assistance Grants to enable a new Rural Communities Assistance Fund to be set up.
- 1.2 To agree a supplementary estimate to enable a new scheme of Community Engagement Grants for all members.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Council at their meeting in February 2004 agreed to additional budgetary provision of £13,000 to set up a scheme for Rural Assistance Grants. This was funded from anticipated savings arising from the Council's 'Excellent' status'. At that time 26 members in rural areas were allocated a Rural Assistance Grant of £500 p.a. which they could allocate as they felt appropriate to areas of need within their rural community.
- 2.2 This scheme has proved useful and the Corporate Overview Panel has previously recommended to the Cabinet that, subject to budgetary considerations, the scheme for Rural Assistance Grants should be extended so that all Members of the Council receive a grant allocation.
- 2.3 The Leader of the Council in proposing the 2008/09 budget expressed sympathy for the extension, but felt that the Council should take account of potential new guidance/legislation around community engagement.
- 2.4 The new guidance/legislation on community engagement is beginning to emerge and does reinforce the role of local members being given greater support, including the power to offer grants, to help them fulfil a leadership role in their local communities. This is also very much in line with the District Council's new Corporate Plan, Leading Our Forest Communities.
- 2.5 Recent months have also seen growing pressures on local communities, particularly rural communities with the closure or threatened closure of post offices and the impact of rising fuel prices and less consumer spending.

### **3. DETAIL**

- 3.1 The Provisional Final Accounts and Final Financial Monitoring report elsewhere on this agenda (item 11 Report H) identifies Local Authority Business Growth Initiative Grant income of £737,000 in 2007/08 which had not been budgeted for.

- 3.2 In view of this and together with the success of the scheme and the feedback received it is proposed to extend the scheme by means of Community Engagement Grants of £500 to all members of the Council under the same conditions as previously applied.
- 3.3 At the same time it is recognised that there are still special problems faced by rural communities and therefore it is also proposed to establish a separate Rural Communities Assistance Fund of £20,000. This would be available to the following rural communities to apply to on a one off basis. The fund would be administered by the Leisure, Culture and Youth Matters Portfolio Holder in line with other community grants.

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Ashurst, Copythorne South and Netley Marsh	Puttock and Tipp
Boldre and Sway	Rickman and Wise
Bramshaw, Copythorne North and Minstead	Forse
Bransgore and Burley	Greenfield and Penwarden
Brockenhurst and Forest South East	Mrs Holding and Vickers
Downlands and Forest	Heron
Fawley, Blackfield and Langley	Mrs McEvoy and Wappet
Fordingbridge	Shand and Dr Whitehead
Forest North West	Dow
Furzedown and Hardley	Parkes
Holbury and North Blackfield	Dunsdon and Mrs Lord
Hordle	Mrs Lovelace and Tinsley
Lyndhurst	Mrs Wyeth
Marchwood	Mrs Hoare and Shotter
Milford	Kendal and Pemberton
Ringwood East and Sopley	Treleaven

- 3.4 Although this fund will be focused on the most rural areas of the District as outlined above, there should be some flexibility to consider bids in adjoining areas.

#### **4. CRIME AND DISORDER, ENVIRONMENTAL AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The funding being made available to all members will have a positive impact in all these areas by enabling local members to quickly address individual issues as they arise.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Currently there is a budgetary allocation of £14,000 for Rural Assistance grants. To set up a Community Engagement Grant Scheme to give an allocation of £500 to 60 councillors and change the current Rural Assistance Grant Scheme into a Rural Communities Assistance Fund with provision of £20,000 will require additional funding of £36,000.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Cabinet be recommended to agree:

- 6.1 That a new Rural Communities Assistance Fund of £20,000 be established, under the terms outlined in the report, to be administered by the Leisure, Culture and Youth Matters Portfolio Holder;
- 6.2 That a new Community Engagement Grant Scheme be established to replace the existing Rural Grant Scheme under which an amount of £500 will be made available to all members of the Council to allocate within their wards; and
- 6.3 A supplementary estimate of £36,000 to fund the Community Engagement Grant scheme and the Rural Communities Assistance Fund.

#### **For Further Information Contact:**

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#### **Background Papers:**

Published documents