

HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 17 JANUARY 2024

PORTFOLIO: COMMUNITY, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

COMMUNITY GRANTS

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommends to Cabinet that:
- a) Community Grant awards, totalling £130,000 in revenue grants and £96,040 in capital grants, as set out in Appendix 1, and in more detail in Appendix 2, be approved for inclusion in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2024/25.
 - b) The proposed recommendations as set out in section 4.2 be approved.
 - c) The Community Transport grants totalling £51,100, as set out in section 5.5 be approved along with the recommendation to respond to the HCC consultation, as detailed in 5.7.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following previous encouragement to promote the community grants, the Task and Finish Group were pleased to see many applications from new organisations, supporting a range of groups and that covered the whole district.
- 2.2 On 27, 28, 29 and 30 November 2023 the Community Grants Task and Finish Group met to consider the Revenue Community Grant applications received for the 2024/25 financial year. We received 43 applications from a range of organisations, including many new organisations. Due to the number of Revenue Grant applications, the Task and Finish Group met on 15 December 2023. We received 15 Capital Community Grants applications.
- 2.3 The value of Revenue grant applications totalled £617,199, (£249,430 in 2022) and Capital grant applications totalled £243,640 (£161,400 in 2022).
- 2.4 The recommended Revenue Community Grant amount includes £35,000 awarded to Community First Wessex as part of a two-year funding agreement which ends on 31 March 2025. Quarterly meetings are held to provide updates on activities undertaken as detailed in the agreement.
- 2.5 Due to the number and value of applications the Group sought to prioritise those that support our most vulnerable residents and communities and provided the most community benefit.
- 2.6 Applicants each gave a presentation to the Task & Finish Group and answered questions. The Task and Finish Group comprised Cllrs, Alvey (Chairman), Armstrong, Crisell, Dowd, Dunning (Vice Chairman), McCarthy and O'Sullivan, with input from key Council Officers.

3. PROCESS

- 3.1 Applications were reviewed by Officers, with clarification sought where there were queries with the application, for example the amount applied for, the organisations status or the type of project seeking funding. Following the review some applications did not progress and were notified accordingly.
- 3.2 All Community Grant applicants were asked to present to the Task and Finish Group and provide details of their accounts, and how their application would meet the needs of, and benefit or support, residents in the district. Applicants were also asked to explain how their funding request linked to the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan and their outcomes and key deliverables.
- 3.3 Following the presentations, the Task and Finish Group thoroughly discussed and reviewed the information submitted with the applications and presented at interview and responses to the Groups specific questions. In formulating a recommendation for each grant request, members considered the agreed criteria, the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, the value for money being offered, or if supported us in delivering our services. Due to the number and value of applications the Group had to make difficult decisions and in a number of instances the Group recommended grants of less than the amount being requested so as to support as many groups as possible and to recognise the benefits of the individual grant applications. Consideration was also given to sustaining organisations over expansions.
- 3.4 The recommendations, with reasons, of each of the grant requests, are summarised in **Appendix 1** and in further detail in **Appendix 2**. Some applicants, where a grant is not recommended, have been given advice and information to support their organisation, including alternative funding streams, details of other organisations that can offer support, such as Community First Wessex, and invitations to join the New Forest partnership meetings where they can network and understand what other organisations are doing across the district.

4. REVIEW OF THE PROCESS

- 4.1 After completing the interviews, the Task and Group reviewed the overall grants process. Whilst acknowledging the considerable administration and time involved, especially this year due to the increased number of applicants, the Group were very supportive of the Community Grants programme which supports the Council's aims and objectives. However, with the increased number of applications, which is likely to increase further in the future as the need for funding is great, it does mean that a significant amount of officers' time is spent on the scheme administration, including responding to enquiries, arranging appointments, five days' worth of meetings and listening to applicants and subsequent report writing and ongoing administration.
- 4.2 On reviewing the Community Grants process the Task and Finish Group recommend:
 - a) For applications for the 2025/26 year, that the minimum revenue grant application amount be increased from £1,000 to £3,000 and that a maximum revenue grant award is set at £20,000
 - b) That any unspent Councillor Engagement Grant at year end is transferred to the Revenue Community Grant budget

- c) That the Capital Grant scheme is reviewed to consider aligning with the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding
- d) That the Revenue Grant scheme is fully reviewed to consider whether alternative processes could be used to simplify administration, and to ensure awards match the Council's emerging Corporate Plan priorities.

5. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT GRANTS

5.1 The Task and Finish Group also considered community transport grants. There are 3 Service Level Agreements with Hampshire County Council for transportation projects all funded from the overall budget for Community Grants. Community First Wessex administer the three schemes.

- Wheels to work – This is a moped loan service which aims to help people between 16 and 25 with no access to suitable transport get to work, apprenticeships, training, or job interviews.

Current NFDC grant funding is £7,396.21 match funded by HCC. The contract is being extended for a further year so that it now ends on 31 March 2025.

- Call and Go – This is a bookable community transport service for anyone whose transport needs are not met by public bus services to go, for example, shopping, to visit a library or to see family and friends. Drivers will assist with carrying shopping and wheelchair accessible minibuses collect users from their home at a pre-arranged time. The cost will vary according to the distance travelled.

Current NFDC funding is £28,675.21 match funded by HCC. The contract is being extended for a further year so that it now ends on 31 March 2025.

- Group Hire – This scheme provides affordable wheelchair accessible minibuses to hire for voluntary or charitable organisations for a period of 3 hours to 1 week. The cost of hire depends on the distance travelled and duration of hire period.

Current NFDC grant funding is £13,671.32 match funded by HCC. The contract is being extended for a further year so that it now ends on 31 March 2025.

5.2 The total current funding for the three community transport schemes is £49,742.74.

5.3 Following an HCC review and subsequent consultation due to the need to reduce budgets, the savings programme to 2023 (SP23) was agreed by HCC Cabinet in October 2021. HCC will be undertaking a review of the Community Transport Schemes, as part of their wider budgetary review, with a decision expected to be made in July 2024 on their future.

5.4 The Group reviewed the numbers using the three schemes, which are recovering following the pandemic, and the impact of the options on service provision.

5.5 The Group was of the view that NFDC should maintain the same level of funding to support our communities, especially those in rural areas with limited transport links. Therefore, The Group recommend the following:

- Funding for Call & Go for 2024/25 to be £29,409.99
- Funding for Group Hire for 2024/25 to be £14,080.04
- Funding for Wheels to Work for 2024/25 to be £7,609.87

5.6 The recommended support funding is within the annual budget available.

5.7 The Group were very supportive of the schemes and written confirmation will be sent to HCC through their current public Future Services consultation to confirm our commitment and support to these schemes and encouragement for their funding to continue beyond 31 March 2025. On HCC making their decision we will give due consideration and discuss and agree our response, however, we will not be in a position to fund any HCC reductions in grant funding.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Task and Finish Group were advised that the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan had allowed for up to £130,000 to be awarded on Revenue Grants and up to £100,000 for Capital Grants.

6.2 The proposals, as set out in Appendix 1, total £130,000 of Revenue grants (£129,600 in 2023/24), which includes the £35,000 grant to Community First Wessex, and £96,040 for Capital grants (£92,000 in 2023/24).

6.3 The proposed budget for 2024/25 for the Community Transport Service Level Agreements, as outlined in section 5 of this report, is £51,100.

7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS / DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Community Grants have been awarded to support groups with capital projects to become more energy efficient.

8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Our Community Grants programme continues to support a wide range of organisations across the district that support, engage and benefit our diverse communities and residents, including those with mental health and disabilities, and vulnerable households.

Further information:

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Background Papers:

Community Grants Appendix
1 and 2