



Cabinet

Report of: Councillor Nick Neilson Cabinet Member for Communities

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	9th November 2017
Subject:	Community Fund Grant Scheme (CFM441)

Decision Proposal:	Key Decision
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nick Neilson , Cabinet Member for Communities
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SUMMARY

At the Communities and Well Being OSC meeting held on 5th September 2017, Members looked at the operation of the Community Fund Grant Scheme since it was established in 2015 and a number of recommendations were agreed, including the establishment of a Working Group to look in more detail at some of the issues raised.

At the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 7th November 2017, Members will consider the outcomes from the Working Group which met on 29th September 2017 and will make recommendations on proposed changes to the scheme which are set out in this report. However, as this report has been prepared before Members of the Committee meet on 7th November a verbal update will be provided to Cabinet on the day.

RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is asked to note the findings of the Communities & Well Being OSC held on 7th November, together with a verbal update and approve:

1. The introduction of a fast tracked application process for grant applications up to £2,000.
2. The continuation of the role of the Lincolnshire Community Volunteer Service (LCVS) to continue to administer part of the scheme on the Council's behalf subject to an annual Service Level Agreement and for the Member Panel to continue to make awards on behalf of the Council.
3. Agreement that the composition of the Member Panel for considering applications is Chair (or Vice Chair) of the five Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
4. That the scheme criteria for assessing all grant applications is still fit for purpose
5. Agreement that further funding for the community fund for 2018/19 be considered as part of the annual budget framework process, having regard to the projected balance of the fund as at 31st March 2018.
6. A one year pilot scheme of devolved budgets for individual councillors (the Councillor Community Fund Scheme) be set up from April 2018 with a review after six months and that a separate amount of £56,000 be included as part of the 2018/19 budget proposals.

1. BACKGROUND TO REPORT

- 1.1 The Community Fund grant scheme was set up as part of the Council's 2015/16 budget framework in order to offer financial assistance to local projects and events that deliver wide benefit to residents of South Kesteven, thereby contributing to the sustainability, vitality and well being of communities. The fund was originally established utilising funding of £300k from the New Homes Bonus reserve. The Fund was replenished to £150K for the 2017/18 financial year.
- 1.2 In July 2015, Cabinet approved the application criteria and the composition of the determining body (Panel of members from the Chairs/Vice Chairs of PDGs) used for considering and approving/refusing financial awards arising from bids from various community groups and organisations wishing to access funding from the Fund. This was based on best practice, i.e. where community funds have been successful elsewhere. The original criteria (as amended) is set out in Appendix 1. This covers eligible bodies, the types of projects supported, the basis on which applications are assessed and the application and award process, etc. It was envisaged that the award would be used as an enabler to access other sources of funding.
- 1.3 The Fund is currently administered by the Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service (LCVS) which helps to ensure the money gets to where it is needed. Each year a funding agreement is established based on the work activities the LCVS undertakes to administer the scheme. The CVS make recommendations to the Panel as to whether or not applications should be granted based on the agreed criteria.

- 1.4 On 5th September 2017, the Communities and Well Being OSC received a report which looked at the progress and performance of the Scheme, having regard to the original objectives set out in 2015 and noted that, to date over 70 community organisations had benefited with c£229k grant monies already approved.
- 1.5 Whilst the Committee agreed the recommendations put forward, it requested a Working Group of Members be set up to look more closely at some of the matters featured in the report and other related issues. The Working Group met on 29th September 2017 and their findings are set out below:

Devolved Budgets for Individual Councillors

- 1.6 The Working Group considered a one year pilot scheme (with a review after 6 months) whereby devolved budgets would be used in a similar way to the main fund but on a smaller scale. This would enable every district councillor to respond to local needs by recommending the allocation of small one-off amounts of money to support projects or activities that benefit the communities they represent. The Working Group felt that a separate proportion of the Community Fund or a separate fund – say £56,000 could be set aside for this purpose and divided equally between all 56 Councillors, i.e. budgets of £1000 each to use on supporting initiatives within their wards. The level of funding would be reviewed as part of the pilot scheme. Councillors would be encouraged to avoid grant awards of less than £100 (in order to avoid undue administrative costs) although no restriction would be put on individual award amounts. Suggested names for this initiative that are put forward are:

- Ward member grants scheme
- Members ward fund scheme
- Councillor Community Grant scheme
- Councillor Grant scheme
- Local grant scheme

- 1.7 Further details on how the scheme would work in practice, including the application and approval process are set out in Part A of the attached Appendix 2.

Revised Process to Fast Track Grant Applications Up To £2,000

- 1.8 Currently, grants can be for as little as £200 for community events and up to a maximum of £10,000 for community projects and the application process is exactly the same regardless of the amount requested. As a result, the Working Group was asked to look in more detail at the application process for smaller schemes (up to £2,000) to see whether it could be streamlined to enable the funds to be more readily available. Accordingly, this has been completed and a revised application form and scheme criteria are put forward in Part B of the attached Appendix 2. It is suggested that the process be reviewed after six months.

Other Issues Considered by the Working Group

- 1.9 The Working Group examined the criteria for assessing applications as set out in Appendix 1 and considered it to be fit for purpose. It was acknowledged that the application process for both devolved councillor budgets and fast track applications were consistent with that for larger grants from the main fund.
- 1.10 The Working Group also considered the ongoing role of the Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service and has recommended that it continues to administer part of the scheme on the Council's behalf subject to an annual Service Level Agreement and for the Panel to continue to make awards on behalf of the Council.
- 1.11 It was agreed that any decision about topping up the fund from April 2018 should be addressed as part of the annual budget framework process but this would have regard to the projected balance of the fund as at 31st March 2018.
- 1.12 Finally, the Working Group acknowledged that it was appropriate for the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations to Cabinet on any significant changes to the future management, administration and funding of the scheme, i.e. as highlighted in this report.

2. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 N/A

3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Approved grant applications are funded by the Community Fund. Additional funding will be required if the scheme is to continue into 2018/19. This will require consideration alongside other bid proposals and presented to Council at the budget meeting on 1st March 2018.

4. RISK AND MITIGATION

- 4.1 Risk has been considered as part of this report and so long as the cost of the scheme is contained within the sum allocated, there are no specific high risks.

5. ISSUES ARISING FROM IMPACT ANALYSIS (EQUALITY, SAFEGUARDING etc.)

- 5.1 N/A

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None

7. COMMENTS OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

7.1 These are contained in the report.

8. COMMENTS OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

8.1 The criteria set must be reasonable and suitable to applications at all levels of funding, capable of being applied to deliver a consistent approach to determination. The panel which will determine applications must operate within appropriate terms of reference and have the authority to make decisions on behalf of the Council. That Panel should be provided with suitable administrative support and advice.

9. COMMENTS OF OTHER RELEVANT SERVICES

9.1 None

10. APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix 1 – Criteria for Assessment & Funding

10.2 Appendix 2 – Outcomes from the Community Fund Working Group meeting held on 29th September 2017

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Report to Communities & Well Being OSC 5th September 2017