



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Cabinet – March 16th 2022
Report Number	Agenda Item 13
Subject	COMMUNITY REVENUE GRANT APPLICATIONS 2022/23
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Jane Doughty Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery Email: jane.doughty@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Heather McCulloch Community Wellbeing Manager Tel: 01993 861562 Email: heather.mcculloch@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To approve Community Revenue Grant awards for 2022/23
Annexes	Annex 1 – Schedule of Grants Panel recommended Community Revenue Grant awards for 2022/23.
Recommendation/s	a) That the recommended Community Revenue Grant awards for 2022/23 be approved, as detailed in Annex 1; and b) That officers be requested to review the Community Revenue Grant programme as part of a fundamental review of all of the Council's Community Grant schemes in time for 2023/2024 in order to address the long term security of funding for key organisations, meet the current needs of residents and encourage innovative proposals.
Corporate priorities	The award of Community Revenue Grants helps support voluntary and community activity and partnership actions that help to achieve progress in the policy priorities outlined in the Council Plan 2020-24.
Key Decision	YES
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Council's current Community Revenue Grant (CRG) application process was introduced following a review of revenue grants management and Cabinet's recent (January 2018) consideration of proposals for the future management of this voluntary and community sector funding. The Council's grant scheme guidance incorporates criteria that govern eligibility for funding and the further assessment of grant applications

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. We have received 15 applications for funding. One application has been referred to the Community Facilities grant scheme. We received applications from two organisations new to the scheme, one of which is not recommended for approval. All applications are listed as Annex 1.
- 2.2. The assessment process has reverted to the approach established prior to Covid. Applications have been reviewed to check eligibility against the criteria before being assessed by specialist officers across the organisation in advance of discussion at an officer grants panel. This input helps test the strategic fit of the project/ activity with existing provision and helps to identify if there are any issues to take into account e.g. possible duplication or displacement of activity. The Grant Panel's assessment of applications has then been reviewed with the Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery – which includes Community grants. Further to this review, eligible applications that have been recommended for approval are brought forward in this report for Cabinet approval.
- 2.3. Eligible applications that meet the relevant criteria have then been tested against the assessment criteria outlined here:
 - Relevance to meeting the Council's priority aims.
 - The extent of the community benefit and impact that the project/ activity will deliver.
 - The assessment of risks (financial and other) associated with the project/ activity.
 - The application demonstrating a financial need for grant support.
 - Whether the grant represents value for money.
- 2.4. In total, the Council's overall budget for revenue grants is £188,260. The Council's grants budget has been protected over recent years through the period of financial restraint but no inflationary increase has been applied.
- 2.5. At the Cabinet meeting held on 18 April 2018 it was resolved that, for 2018/19 and subsequent financial years, the relevant Cabinet Member be authorised to make any residual grant awards subsequent to the annual application round acting in the context of the available residual grants budget, the grant scheme guidance and in consultation with appropriate officers. Therefore, following the approval of grant awards as detailed in the current report, there is appropriate delegated authority for any subsequent grant awards in 2022/23 as these arise. Should the recommendations of this report be approved then budget will be fully allocated. In the event of there being any residual amount, following the approval of grant awards as detailed in the current report, there is appropriate delegated authority for any subsequent grant awards in 2022/23 as these arise.

3. INITIAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT PROCESS

- 3.1. A number of applicants are carrying out activity on behalf of the Council which the Council has to do – for example Cotswold Conservation Board, Lower Windrush Valley Project and Wild Oxfordshire. Requiring such organisations to bid for grant funding on an annual basis seems inappropriate in terms of the admin burden and given that the activity is pre-determined by the Council.

- 3.2. There is no doubt that the Council's investment is very effective in unlocking a high level of voluntary effort into the sector. It is reaching those who need support. It also enables organisations to attract significant levels of external funding.
- 3.3. There are rigorous assessment processes in place across all the Council Community grants. The process varies little for small or large requests.
- 3.4. Whilst applicants are expected to identify how their scheme will deliver on the Council plan there is no capacity or process currently in place to robustly evaluate or communicate how effective each scheme has been against Council priorities.
- 3.5. Applications are tested for compliance before being assessed. Both these elements are carried out by specialist officers across the Council. Consideration should be given to freeing up the specialist officers to focus on the assessment element only.
- 3.6. It is suggested that a fundamental review of all the Community grants investment made by the Council is embarked upon at the start of the new financial year. This includes the Community Activities, Community Facilities and Community Revenue grant schemes. Any planned changes to the current approach must be communicated with at least 6 months' notice to regularly funded organisations. This review will provide the Council with an opportunity to reflect on grant investment more generally, explore new models for delivery such as civic crowdfunding and consider the current priorities for residents as we emerge from the Covid emergency phase.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The recommended grant awards in this report can be financed from the Council's approved Community Revenue Grants budget. The total of the recommended grant awards is £187,851 and the available revenue grant budget for 2022/23 is £188,260. If Cabinet approves the recommended grant awards in the current report, there will be a residual amount of £409.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The award of grants is subject to the terms and conditions as outlined in the grant application form. Any funding agreement with a supported organisation will, where relevant, include provisions that are appropriate to the grant award. The Council will require the reporting of any significant changes to the service or activity that is supported through grant finance and it reserves the right to reconsider grant financing. The Council expects to receive progress reports on supported activity and will mitigate risk through relevant officer liaison with funded activities. Where subsequent financial year applications are envisaged, a progress report must be submitted in support of the new financial year grant application.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. The decisions in this report pose a limited risk to the business/Council. A number of measures are in place to limit risk. Most applicant are known to the Council having received funding and delivered services as expected in the past. Officers maintain ongoing relationships with each award recipient and monitor progress throughout the award period. The application process includes a compliance check of all applicants.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)

- 7.1. The recommendations if approved will have a positive effect on residents providing valuable community services including advice on debt and welfare.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)

8.1. There are no significant implications in relation to climate change. The activity proposed is delivered by local organisations and takes place in West Oxfordshire thus requiring residents to travel relatively short distances.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

9.1. The current report incorporates the funding recommendations that result from the Grant Panel's assessment of Community Revenue Grant applications. The approval of the report's recommendations would endorse the evaluation process and allow grant awards to proceed as advised.

9.2. An alternative option would be to not accept the report's recommendations and propose alternative options of grant awards to voluntary and community groups. It would be prudent for any such approach to be subject to further review and advice.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1. The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Report xxx to Cabinet dated xxx and associated minutes

10.2. These documents will be available for inspection at the Council Offices at xxxxxxxx during normal office hours for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. Please contact the author of the report.