

REPORT TO: Scrutiny and Overview Committee

18 October 2018

LEAD OFFICER: Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing

Community Energy Grant Review 2018

Purpose

1. To consider changes to the Community Energy Grant scheme as recommended by the Grants Advisory Committee and the Climate & Environment Committee, and to make comments on the proposals prior to consideration by Cabinet.
2. This is not a key decision because funding for the Grant in the current financial year has already been agreed, and funding for the Grant in future years would be agreed through the annual financial process.

Recommendations

3. Scrutiny and Overview Committee is asked to review the report and make comments on the recommendations prior to consideration by Cabinet to inform their decision making.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The purpose of the Community Energy Grant scheme is to support action leading to climate change mitigation and improved environmental sustainability. This aligns with emerging Council priorities.
5. Grants Advisory Committee and the Climate & Environment Committee are recommending to Cabinet:
 - (a) that the Community Energy Grant scheme is re-opened, and
 - (b) approval of the proposed amendments to the scheme guidance (Appendix A) and application form (Appendix B).

Background

6. The Community Energy Grant scheme first opened on 1 March 2018.
7. The Community Energy Grant scheme provides funding for voluntary and community sector groups, charities, parish councils seeking to deliver local energy saving and green initiatives in South Cambridgeshire. Applicants may apply for up to £3,000 for projects which must deliver one or more environmental benefits, for example reduced carbon emissions as a result of reduced energy consumption, or increased use of low carbon energy sources.

8. Eight applications were received before the scheme closed for review. These were reviewed by Grants Advisory Committee on 21 June 2018 with the result that all received the full funding requested. (One application was delayed pending further investigation and subsequently approved following the 7 July meeting).
9. The amount of funding made available through the Community Energy Grant fund in 2018/19 is £55,000.
10. Allocation of funding has been on a first-come first-served basis with the Council reserving the right to prioritise applications based on the funding available, the number and type of applications received at any given time, priorities for the financial year, value for money and the geographical spread and range of projects across South Cambridgeshire.
11. Applications are mainly submitted online, via a short online form. Paper copies are available where this is not possible.
12. On 24 May the Leader and lead Cabinet member for Finance decided to temporarily close the Community Energy Grants scheme (and the Community Chest) to allow elected members to review the schemes' criteria. It was also agreed that applications received on or before 31 May 2018 would be considered using the schemes' existing criteria.

Considerations

13. On 4 September a joint workshop of the Grants Advisory Committee and Climate Change and Environment Advisory Committee was held to review the Community Energy Grant scheme.
14. Minor changes to the scheme guidance and application process were put forward at this workshop and have been incorporated into the scheme documents, as provided, with changes tracked, in Appendix A (guidance) and Appendix B (application form).
15. The main changes put forward were:
 - Requirement for a short business case alongside the application form
 - Additional examples to be included in the list of what can be funded, viz pipe insulation, energy surveys, replacement heating systems
 - For applications concerning community buildings, encouragement to applicants to have an energy survey (professional or DIY using checklist) undertaken prior to application
 - Additional guidance on how to quantify environmental benefits.
16. Grants Advisory Committee has also requested that a short business case template be made available to applicants.

Options

17. Scrutiny and Overview Committee could review the report and make comments on the recommendations prior to consideration by Cabinet to inform their decision making.

Implications

18. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

19. This report is not seeking to amend the amount of funding available in the Community Energy Grant scheme. It is assumed that the funds, as agreed by Council in February remain in place for 2018/19.

Risk Management

20. Risk to the Council is managed via the documentation that is required of applicants plus agreement of the grant conditions.

Equality and Diversity

21. Depending on the amount of changes recommended it may be necessary to carrying out an EQIA screening.

Consultation responses

22. A joint workshop of the Grants Advisory Committee and Climate Change and Environment Advisory Committee was held on 4 September to review the Community Energy Grant scheme. The proposals for amendments in this report were made at that workshop.
23. Both the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee (20 September) and the Grants Advisory Committee (28 September) support the recommendations contained in this report.

Effect on Strategic Aims

24. The review will ensure that the Community Energy grant scheme reflects Council priorities.

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