

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Leader's Portfolio Holder Meeting

23 January 2012

**AUTHOR/S:** Chief Executive / Corporate Manager (Community & Customer Services)

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### GRANTS REVIEW

#### Purpose

1. To outline proposed changes to the existing grant schemes in place across the Council.
2. This is not a key decision.

#### Recommendation

3. That the Leader agrees to the proposal for streamlining the Council's existing grant schemes as outlined in the report for implementation from April 2012.

#### Reason for recommendation

4. A grants review is necessary for the improvement and streamlining of grants allocated to individuals, voluntary and community organisations and parish councils. A transparent, clearly defined and robust process will ensure that duplication is further limited and that Council Aims are met through the support of local projects.

#### Background

5. The intention of the review was to develop a new grant giving framework that is transparent and flexible, consolidates activity and ensures that grant aid is used to support corporate aims and actions.
6. The Leader's Portfolio Holder meeting in September 2011 was presented with comprehensive information following this review outlining all capital and revenue grants provided by the Council, to individuals, community and voluntary sector groups, parish councils and businesses. The review focused upon the non-statutory grants that SCDC provides to its communities.
7. Following this work it has become clear that that the Council's grants schemes would benefit from reorganisation under three clear themed headings, under which all grants would sit, namely: Service Support Grants; Capital Grants; Community Chest Grants (**Appendix A** outlines under which heading existing grant schemes should fall). In summary, this would cover:

**Service Support Grants** – where SCDC is providing grants to support agencies or voluntary sector groups to deliver their service either across the district or in a specific geographical area. This would include grants to CAB's, village warden schemes, housing grants etc.

**Capital Grants** – to include New Communities Capital grants, i.e. for community sports, arts and facilities, covering community resource capital development projects

and for the construction or renovation of community/historic/ environmental resources and assistance to private individuals to improve their homes.

**Community Chest Grants** - for community based initiatives and one off projects. These would be limited to <£1,000 and applied for through a simple grants application form.

8. Research has also shown that a fourth strand of Council funding exists and should be called Commissioned Services / Partnership Funding (or similar). This funding currently sits outside the existing grants application process as it is not currently administered through a grant giving process, i.e. organisations/agencies do not apply for funding against set criteria, rather they are approached by service areas to deliver a service on behalf of the authority. Examples of these are given below:
  - Parish Paths
  - Archaeology
  - Parish Planning
  - Young People's Work
  - Museum
  - Travel for Work
  - Arts Development Managers
9. Discussions are required with each service area administering this funding to ensure that Value for Money (VfM) is being achieved; there are clear links to the 3 A's and that there are synergies between this and the grants scheme. It is suggested that the proposed way forward for each of these examples should be outlined to the Leader's Portfolio Holder meeting in March 2012.
10. Following the reorganisation of grant schemes, practical changes to the existing process are necessary including the development of an online grants 'portal' to receive applications, criteria linked more explicitly to the Council's 3A's and common application forms (where possible). More information on progress within these areas is given below.

#### **Decision making process**

11. It is proposed that all service support and capital grants should be approved by the Leader as part of their regular Portfolio Holder meetings. Each of these grant schemes will be subject to individual timescales, which are outlined in **Appendix B**. It is proposed that reports to the PFH meeting should make recommendations as to which grants should be awarded and at what level. Similarly the reports should highlight which applications are not recommended for approval, together with clear reasons why. Each of these grant schemes will have a designated budget. Although notional allocations will be included for the capital grants scheme it is proposed that it will be treated as one budget with the usual provisions for money to be vired across in the usual way.
12. The only exception to this decision making process is the Community Chest which, due to the nature and level of the grants, will be approved by the Leader and one other member of Cabinet outside of the Portfolio Holder meeting. A decision notice outlining the grants made will then be published in line with existing requirements. This process has worked well in the pilot phase of the scheme and it is proposed that it should continue. A process chart has been developed for this (attached as **Appendix C**).

13. It is proposed that, for simplicity and urgency reasons, all capital grants of under £1,000 should be approved in the same way as Community Chest grants, i.e. outside of a formal PFH meeting by way of approval by the Leader and one other member of Cabinet.

### **Accessibility**

14. It is proposed that all grants should be accessed through a grants 'portal' on the SCDC website. This will include links to all of the 3 schemes outlined above, giving clear guidance on the application processes, timetables for applications to be made and contact details for further information. As part of this simplification of the application process and increased accessibility, work has been undertaken to develop common application forms and criteria for each scheme. It is also proposed that when applications are submitted through the 'portal' they will come through to a specific nominated contact. This will ensure consistency of approach and co-ordination. Work is continuing to develop this 'portal' so that it is ready for launch in April 2012. **Appendix D** outlines an indicative view of what the portal will look like.

### **Co-ordination**

15. It is proposed that a central record of all grants awarded across the authority throughout the year should be maintained to ensure that we have a clear view, at any one time, of what organisations/groups/individuals have been supported by the authority. The development of the portal and generic e-mail address outlined above and the common decision making process will assist in this task.

### **Publicity**

16. In terms of proactive publicity, it is proposed that details of all grants awarded should be recorded on the website. A regular press release should also be issued detailing how much funding has been awarded, to which organisations and outlining any opportunities to see the funding 'in action' (through photo opportunities, interviews with recipient organisations etc). This will be supplemented by individual, ad hoc press releases (including photographs) when appropriate.
17. Initial investigations have been made into the benefits of using GRANTfinder as part of the refreshed grant framework. This is a software tool that would enable the authority to search the GRANTfinder database for available grant funding in real time. This would be on behalf of external organisations/groups/individuals and also a mechanism for SCDC to identify and apply for external funding. It is proposed that a further report will be brought to the Leader's PFH meeting in March outlining the full benefits and costs of this approach.

### **Considerations**

18. South Cambridgeshire District Council is a signatory to the Cambridgeshire Compact and as such, any review of grants and emerging decisions should be undertaken with a view to remaining Compact compliant at all times.
19. In some cases, multi-agency joint monitoring meetings take place where more than one statutory organisation funds a voluntary or community sector organisation. Joint monitoring ensures that double funding does not occur and means that if one statutory organisation makes a change to its grant funding the impact upon another organisation can be limited. The elite athletes grants are currently awarded by a multi-agency panel.

20. It is rare that a voluntary or community sector organisation receives a grant from more than one grant scheme in any given year. There is generally good co-ordination between officers who are managing the different grant schemes. Where there is duplication it should be to enable specific, but different, pieces of focused work to be carried out. In addition, an organisation will invariably, if they are based in the district, also receive discretionary rate relief (DDR), although the link between DDR and grant funding needs to be strengthened as part of the development of new grant awarding criteria.

### Implications

21. This review seeks not only to streamline the Council's existing grant schemes but also to ensure clarity for the South Cambridgeshire community and transparency regarding the availability of funds, timescales and eligibility.
22. Officers are currently managing grant schemes with maximum possible communication to avoid duplication. However, a formal process is required to ensure that commissioned services and partnership grants do not duplicate the grants allocated through the formal application processes.
23. It is important that any changes to the existing grant process are communicated effectively and pro-actively with all affected parties. The move to a new process will be accompanied by a clear communications plan, highlighting the benefits of a more transparent, flexible and robust system and its links to the localism agenda.

24. Financial	There are no planned changes to the total grant scheme funding provided by the Council. However, any future funding will have to have a clear link to the emerging MTFS. Also any changes in criteria to each scheme may require the Council to commit funds over a 3-year period instead of 1-year, and vice versa.
Legal	Changes to grant scheme names, criteria and supporting paperwork must take account of the Council's legal position on the difference between a Contract, a Service Level Agreement and a Grant Funding Agreement, as well as accommodating procurement regulations.
Staffing	Existing staff will continue to manage their grant schemes as they currently do.
Risk Management	Changes to the grant schemes will be implemented in order to improve them for our customers, to ensure they are open and transparent and to continue to prevent duplication wherever possible.
Equality and Diversity	
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No An Impact Assessment will be completed in advance of implementation.
Climate Change	Grants are available to organisations wishing to carry out environmental work and to projects set up to limit climate change.

## **Consultations**

25. A limited response was received from organisations asked to give their views on SCDC grants management but of these responses, all said they were easily able to understand the schemes and the link to the Council's objectives, officers made themselves available and gave appropriate support in a timely manner (when necessary). Respondents want to see a simple and 'easy to travel' grants portal or website where, alongside grants information and application forms, they can see details of the grants given to other recipients. They want to be able to complete their forms by hand as well as electronically (as is currently the case) and wherever possible they would like 3 year funding to enable longer term financial planning. Simple application forms are preferred but the current ones were considered perfectly suitable for the purpose.

### **Consultation with Children and Young People**

26. Children and young people had the opportunity to be involved in the above consultation if they or their organisations have been in receipt of grant funding in the past and in accordance with their organisation's youth engagement strategy.

### **Effect on Strategic Aims**

27. Grant schemes already have a clear link to the 3 A's however this review will ensure that this link is strengthened and grants are allocated by the Council in accordance with the 3A's and with the priorities set out in service plans.

### **Conclusions / Summary**

28. This grants review is necessary for the improvement and streamlining of grants allocated to individuals, voluntary and community organisations and parish councils. A transparent, clearly defined and robust process will ensure that duplication is further limited and that Council Aims are met through the support of local projects.
29. The proposals in this paper form part of a broader approach to the support of the South Cambridgeshire community, and are inextricably linked to Localism and the Big Society.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Cambridgeshire Compact

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