

REPORT TO: Cabinet

7 November 2018

LEAD OFFICER: Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing

Community Energy Grant Review 2018

Purpose

1. To consider Grant Advisory Committee and Climate and Environment Committee's proposed amendments to the guidance notes and application form for the Community Energy Grant scheme and consider re-opening the scheme.
2. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) agrees to re-open the Community Energy Grant, and
 - (b) approves the proposed amendments to the scheme guidance notes and application form.

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.

Background

5. The Community Energy Grant scheme first opened on 1 March 2018.
6. 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.
7. 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 have now received the full funding requested. (Two applications were deferred pending further investigation and subsequently approved following the 7 July meeting.)
8. The amount of funding made available through the Community Energy Grant fund in 2018/19 is £55,000. The total awarded to date is £18,534.
9. 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.

10. Applications are mainly submitted online, via a short online form. Paper copies are available where this is not possible.
11. 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

12. 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. The workshop started by asking if the scheme, or a revised version of, is something that should continue to be funded by the Council. Those in attendance felt that the scheme should continue, with a few amendments, but that there is also further potential to grow the scheme in the future, with the possibility of larger grants for bigger projects that could make even more of an impact. An ambition to see electric vehicle charging points at all village halls in the district was also expressed, along with a desire to investigate this possibility further.
13. 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).
14. The main changes put forward are:
 - 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.
15. Grants Advisory Committee also requested that a short business case template be made available to applicants.

Options

16. Cabinet could:
 - (a) decide to re-open the Community Energy Grant scheme, or not (with the option of requesting further work be carried out), and/or
 - (b) approve the proposed amendments to the scheme guidance notes and application form, or
 - (c) approve the scheme guidance notes and application form with further or alternative amendments, or no amendments.

Implications

17. 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

18. 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

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

Equality and Diversity

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

Consultation responses

21. 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.
22. At the time of writing this report, the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee were due to look at a report on the Community Energy Grant fund at their meeting on 20 September. Comments from the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee will be presented verbally to the Grants Advisory Committee alongside this report.
23. Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered the recommendations on 18 October. Questions were raised as to whether the amount of information being requested of applicants is too burdensome given the relatively small amounts of funding, and regarding the need to provide an end of project report on impact. They noted the report.

Effect on Strategic Aims

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

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