

**REPORT TO:** Grants Advisory Committee

27/08/2021

**LEAD CABINET MEMBER:** Cllr John Williams

**LEAD OFFICER:** Jeff Mambery

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## **The Voluntary & Community Service Sector Support Grants – Contract Review**

### **Executive Summary**

1. The Voluntary and Community Service Support Grants (SSG) offers funding to voluntary and community organisations (VCSO) that deliver services for our residents. The scheme offers 3-year funding agreements to eligible organisations. The current 3-year agreements are due to expire at the end of the financial year 2021/22 and officers and members of the Grants Advisory Committee (GAC) took the opportunity, in a workshop on 4 August 2021, to review the scheme to ensure that the aims and objectives reflected the corporate objectives of the Council and its policy/strategic direction.
1. The workshop was attended by Councillors Jose Hales; Claire Daunton and Bill Handley; a number of items were agreed and suggestions for updating the grants were proposed.
2. A briefing meeting was later arranged with Councillor John Williams and Bill Handley to review the outcomes of the workshop.
3. This report is a summary of those discussions.
4. The report has been divided into 4 sections and provides options where appropriate for each:
  1. Review of existing SSG scheme
  2. Introduction of a new theme to support those working with children and young people
  3. The Farmland Museum Grant
  4. A complete review of the SSG Budget

## Key Decision

5. No. This is not a key decision because it reviews expenditure within current budgets.

## Recommendations

6. There are no officer recommendations on this occasion. Grants Advisory Committee is asked to review the options in the report and make recommendations to the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance on each of the 4 sections as detailed below.

## Reasons for Recommendations

7. It has been a very turbulent year for the voluntary sector. In discussions with Elected Members it was deemed appropriate that GAC be presented with the range of options for future funding for discussion and recommendation to the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance.

## Details

8. According to research undertaken by the [NCVO published](#) in March of this year, income from trading activity within the voluntary sector is expected to drop more than 17% next year; two in five voluntary organisations are reported to have six months left of reserves and many charities now run fewer services than pre-pandemic, although others have expanded. The report also states that overall grants income from service delivery contracts is expected to decline by 7% and public donations by 8%.
9. The SCDC Voluntary and Community Service Support grant agreements expire in March 2022. It is normal practice to review this grant scheme at this point in the third year, ahead of advertising a new three-year scheme. Earlier this month officers met with the Grants Advisory Committee to review funding agreements and budgets to ensure they continued to meet corporate objectives and the policy/strategic direction of the Council.
10. The Voluntary and Community Service Support grant agreement scheme has not seen a budget increase for over 10 years other than small incremental inflationary increases. As part of this scheme, the grants issued by the Housing Department have not seen a budget increase since 2007 except for inflationary increases.

11. Adding to the complexity of the review is its timing, following almost two years of unpredictable economic and social circumstances as a result of a global pandemic.
12. Whilst a number of issues were discussed, this paper asks the committee to review the following 4 issues:
  1. The timing of the launch of a new three-year grant in order to ensure a fair and equitable process.
  2. The introduction of a theme for voluntary organisations working with young people.
  3. The ongoing provision of financial assistance to the Farmland Museum
  4. The budget required for our Voluntary and Community Service Support grants moving forward.

These are addressed in greater detail as follows:

### **Part 1 : Existing Grant Recipients and re-launch of Voluntary and Community Service Support grants scheme.**

13. The past 18 months has been exceptional and turbulent. The voluntary sector has had to undergo rapid change to adapt and continue to provide vital frontline community services. Some organisations were more adversely affected, particularly those in community transport and those working with the medically vulnerable and those who were self-isolating.
14. It may be appropriate to consider extending existing contracts by 12 months to March 2023, to allow organisations the time and opportunity to improve performance based on more normal circumstances. This will also enable Grants Advisory Committee (GAC) to review performance against objectives next year in a more settled economic environment.
15. Alternatively, GAC could proceed with launching the new three-year scheme from April 2022 on the understanding that decisions could not be made on performance over the last 2 years against objectives and that we would be asking grant recipients to make business forecasts at a time of continuing economic uncertainty.

### **Part 2: Introduction of a new theme for Children and Young People**

16. At the Member workshop an additional theme for “Children and Young People” was discussed. If this were to go ahead, the Fit to Learn theme would be incorporated under this heading (though the timing of this would depend on the decision above in Part 1). The proposed inclusion of this strand is in response to the ongoing negative impacts of Covid-19 and the disruption to education and life of children and young people. The theme should be open to

organisations who work with children and young people that, for example, seek to improve life skills and address social inequalities (exact criteria to be agreed). For further insight into the impacts of covid-19 on children and young people please read the report produced by the [Children's Society](#).

17. The children and young people's funding could begin as 1-year introductory funding, should it be agreed that the SSG agreement renewals are delayed by 1 year, and would be delivered using the £38K unspent mobile warden scheme funding (which it was agreed at a previous meeting would be added to this grant scheme funding for 2022 onwards).

18. Alternatively, if GAC decide to proceed with launching the new three-year scheme in 2022, this new theme could still be initiated, incorporating the Fit to Learn Theme and immediate 3-year grant funding awarded, using the £38K outlined above but apportioned over 3 years.

### **Part 3: Farmland Museum Grant**

19. The museum has been particularly negatively impacted by the pandemic in terms of visitor numbers and opportunities to increase its revenue, despite having made many positive changes to their business model. They have, however, strengthened their financial position mainly due to the furloughing of staff, receipt of a business support grant and a HLEF grant (National Lottery).

20. There has not yet been sufficient time to assess if this business model is working. It would seem prudent to consider allocating funding for a further 12 months. Thereafter, if the Council develops a Heritage and Culture strategy with associated grant funding in time for the 2022 round of SSG grants, the museum could be invited to apply for grants from this budget.. Money already assigned for this grant could be moved across into a Heritage and Culture fund.

### **Part 4: Review the SSG and housing and homeless prevention budgets**

21. The budget for the Voluntary and Community Service Support grants has not been reviewed for at least 10 years but has benefitted from inflationary increases over that time. We currently fund 10 organisations within an operating budget of £143,000.

22. The Housing and Homelessness Prevention Budget currently services 3 organisations within a budget of £12,500. This budget has benefitted from inflationary increases since 2007 but has not been reviewed in that time.

23. For consideration, over the next 10 years, it is expected that the voluntary and community sector will play a much greater part in local service provision and

ill-health prevention as the health and social care sectors work more collaboratively with the voluntary sector.

The population of South Cambridgeshire is predicted to increase by 28.8% between 2016-2036. Based on CCCRG future population estimates (which consider local growth plans in their methodology so are assumed to be more accurate), in South Cambridgeshire the predicted increases 2017-2035 in those experiencing certain conditions are:

- Moderate physical disability: 19.4%
- Serious physical disability: 20.6%
- Mod/Serious personal care disability: 19.8%
- Common mental disorder: 17.8%
- A fall: 65.4%
- Dementia: 93.4%

24. Additional need will add additional demand on service provision.

25. Investment in preventative interventions compared to treatment is known to be a cost-effective approach to managing health and wellbeing which will ultimately ease demand on statutory services in the longer term.

## Options

26. The Grants Advisory Committee could recommend to the Lead Member for finance to:

### Part 1:

- a) Launch a new three-year scheme from April 2022. Applicants would need to make budgetary forecasts based on an uncertain future and an extraordinary past performance as a result of the pandemic.
- b) Extend the existing 3-year grant agreements for another year to allow time for the climate to settle post-pandemic and to enable budget forecasts to be based on more predictable circumstances.

### Part 2:

- a) Use the unspent £38K from the Mobile Warden Scheme to begin a new theme specifically to support charities and organisations working to advance the wellbeing of children and young people. This would be a 1-year fund initially, to support demand resulting from the pandemic. We would then offer a 3-year grant agreement moving forwards beginning in 2023 in line with the Voluntary and Community Service Support grants (see part 1a option above). Suggestions for the aims and objectives of this fund can be found in Appendix B.

- b) Use the unspent £38k from the Mobile Warden Scheme to begin a children and young people theme offering 3-year grant funding beginning in April 2022 in line with existing Voluntary and Community Service Support grants if committee choose option part 1b as above. This would result in the allocation of c £12,500 per year to charities and organisations working to advance the wellbeing of children and young people.

### Part 3

- a) Continue to fund the Farmland Museum for a further year, to finish in March 2023. Thereafter, following the introduction of a cultural and heritage strategy, invite the Museum to apply for grant funding from the associated budget.
- b) Continue to fund the Museum with annual performance reviews as has been undertaken historically.
- c) Discontinue future funding of the Farmland Museum from April 2023.

### Part 4

- a) Continue to deliver the Voluntary and Community Service Support grants scheme within the existing budget with inflationary increases three-yearly at re-launch. Please note that organisations will be asked to consider annual inflationary increases within their applications.
- b) Review and increase funding to the Voluntary and Community Service Support grants to reflect anticipated ongoing demand and service provision and offering inflationary increases three-yearly at re-launch. Please note that organisations will be asked to consider annual inflationary increases within their applications

## Implications

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

### Financial

28. Should committee agree to review budgets, increased funding would need to be agreed and sought from the general fund.

### Consultation responses

29. Grants Advisory Committee and internal Officers via a workshop. (Please see a list of questions in Appendix A).

## **Alignment with Council Priority Areas**

### **A modern and caring Council**

Ensure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer an outstanding quality of life for our residents: the grant programmes promote a good quality of life for all residents, assisting directly or indirectly through voluntary organisations schemes which help overcome the challenges faced by residents imposed by age, infirmity, disability, low income or rurality.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A: Workshop Questions

Appendix B: Suggested criteria for the Children & Young Persons theme.

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