

<b>Report to:</b>	Grants Advisory Committee	26 November 2021
<b>Lead Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr John Williams	
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Jeff Membery	

## **Community Chest Grants: Review of criteria and inclusion of biodiversity and Community-Led Plan funding**

### **Executive Summary**

1. The purpose of this report is to propose changes to the Community Chest Grant (CCG) criteria as follows:
2. To bring the £10,000 of Wildlife Enhancement Grants formerly delivered through the Planning Service into the CCG. These will be grants to support Biodiversity projects through a ringfenced fund. This change will require amendments to the CCG criteria for clarity. Parish Councils will be eligible to apply for this funding, provided that they are not already in receipt of a grant from the Council's ZCC fund for the same financial year.
3. To include in the CCG funding for post-Covid Community-led Plans. The proposal is to include a £50,000 ringfenced rolling fund (until end of October 2023) to support the creation of Community-Led Plans. Parish Councils will be eligible to apply for this funding.
4. To increase the upper limit for all CCG awards from £1,000 to £2,000 per application.
5. To include reference to Community Interest Companies (CIC) being eligible applicants to the CCG fund.

### **Key Decision**

6. No

### **Recommendations**

7. It is recommended that the Grants Advisory Committee approve these proposals and recommend them on to the Lead Member for Finance.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

8. Bringing these separate funds together in line with existing CCG criteria should result in more funding reaching communities for projects in line with Council priorities. Improving the application process to bring them in line with the CCG criteria will also provide more clarity around eligibility and outcomes will result in an improved experience for the applicant.

## **Details**

### **Biodiversity Grants**

9. Currently there is no clear application process or written criteria for the administration of grants for biodiversity projects. The proposed amended CCG criteria include input from the Council's Natural Environment Team Leader, giving details of eligibility and examples of the types of projects that can be funded.
10. It is proposed that applications will be processed as part of the established CCG process and recommendations considered at Grants Advisory Committee in the usual way. This will include officers from the Natural Environment Team being consulted beforehand to help provide an officer report to the committee.
11. It is possible that some projects will include elements of the core CCG scheme and ringfenced biodiversity fund. By bringing the formerly separate schemes together GAC will be able to make recommendations to the portfolio holder for an appropriate award at the same time. The £10,000 would be ringfenced meaning a minimum of £10,000 is available for biodiversity projects.
12. Bringing this fund in line with the CCG provides a transparent application process and could result in more than the original £10,000 being allocated towards biodiversity.
13. It is recommended that Parish Councils be eligible to apply for this funding as they are for the Council's Zero Carbon Communities (ZCC) funding, provided that they are not already in receipt of a grant from the Council's ZCC fund for the same financial year.

### **Community-Led Plan Grants**

14. As part of the Council's post-Covid work, support is available to Covid Community groups and Parish Councils. Part of this is support with developing and delivering Community-led Plans (CLP) to coordinate and take forward locally led initiatives in a community.
15. It is proposed that a one-off allocation of £50,000 from existing and available Council post-Covid funding be incorporated into the CCG for this work and distributed in accordance with the CCG criteria. This sum would be allocated

from adoption of the changes until the end of the current Community-Led Plan project (October 2023, in line with officer resources).

16. This money would be ringfenced for work of this kind (but with no further funding being allocated from the main CCG pot). This money will not fund projects that result from creation of a Community-Led Plan and is only for the creation of the Community-Led Plan itself. These costs are likely to include printing, the delivery of surveys and associated literature and the costs involved in holding public meetings.
17. The budget allocation is expected to be sufficient to ensure there is funding available until October 2023. Finance has given their support to this suggested process. Two specific changes to the guidance are required:
  - Parish Meetings and Parish Councils need to be able to apply for the CLP funding which the criteria currently prohibit
  - Revenue costs such as printing and promotional materials will be funded for the creation of Community-Led Plans. However, revenue costs associated with the resulting projects will not be funded (a separate bid could be submitted for consideration from the main CCG fund).

### **Increased upper grant award limit**

18. Increasing the upper CCG grant limit of £1,000 to £2,000 would allow community groups and, where appropriate, parish councils to request a larger contribution to their projects. The cost of materials and equipment is increasing across the board and since most CCG applications are for the maximum award of £1,000 towards a greater project cost, it is felt that increasing the limit would encourage more applications and reduce the need for applicants to 'shop around' for the remaining funding (which in the voluntary and community sector is a huge challenge). There is currently £35,108.76 remaining of CCG funding, and historically this fund is underspent. By increasing the maximum award to £2,000 it is more likely that remaining funds will be spent by the year end and a full allocation can be made in future years.

### **Community Interest Company (CIC)**

19. A CIC is a special type of limited company which exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders. CIC's require a 'community interest statement', explaining the plan of the business and the benefits it makes to the community, an 'asset lock' - a legal promise stating that the company's assets will only be used for its social objectives, and setting limits to the money it can pay to shareholders and a constitution. Community Interest Companies are eligible for CCG funding but this is not stated explicitly in the criteria and, following enquiries about their eligibility, it is felt they should be mentioned for the sake of clarity.

### **CCG updated criteria**

20. The changes recommended in this report will require the CCG criteria to be updated. A draft of the necessary changes has been included. See appendix A.

## **Options**

1. The Grants Advisory Committee could recommend to the Lead Member for finance any of the following options:
  - a. to approve the recommendations as presented
  - b. to approve the recommendations with amendments, giving details
  - c. to select and approve from the list of recommendations, giving reasons and details of any refusals or changes
  - d. to refuse all recommendations, giving reasons.

## **Implications**

21. 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**

22. The £10,000 of funding for biodiversity projects would need to be transferred to the CCG fund for 2021-22 and arrangements made for future years. This funding would need to be tracked, with a summary of spend brought to Grants Advisory committee at regular intervals.
23. The £50,000 post-Covid funding would need to be allocated to the CCG fund and tracked separately from the CCG budget, with a summary of spend brought to Grants Advisory committee at regular intervals.

## **Staffing**

24. Applications will need to be managed carefully by officers, ensuring compliance with the criteria and accurate budget management. Officers from the Natural Environment Team would be invited to take part in reviewing applications for biodiversity grants and formulating officer recommendations to Grants Advisory Committee. This will require coordination to ensure approval and submission deadlines for Grants Advisory Committee are met.

## **Health & Wellbeing**

25. Community groups and parish councils have been instrumental in supporting vulnerable people throughout the pandemic. Support is available through the Communities Team for those wishing to continue with their activities as well as those who might wish to change or broaden their remit and those wishing to

consider succession planning. It is envisaged that health and wellbeing will be a focus of this work with many such projects emerging from Community-Led Plans.

### **Consultation responses**

26. The changes recommended improves access to grant funding. Increasing the limit for the core CCG has previously been discussed by GAC. The Council's officer Leadership Team have also been briefed and are in support. Leadership Team suggested that grant expenditure and case studies are published to members and the public, including on the Council's website.

### **Alignment with Council Priority Areas**

#### **Being green to our core**

27. The proposal to align the biodiversity grants to the existing CCG process, thereby providing a transparent, accessible scheme for biodiversity projects is directly aligned to the above Council Priority Area.

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

28. The proposal to offer funding for the creation of Community-Led Plans is part of a package of support on offer to groups and parish councils who wish to continue (and in many cases broaden) their offer to local residents, many of whom are vulnerable and/or have suffered adversely during the Covid pandemic.

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A: Proposed revised Community Chest Guidance Criteria

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