

REPORT TO: Grants Advisory Committee 25/11/2022

LEAD CABINET MEMBER: Cllr John Williams

LEAD OFFICER: Gareth Bell, Service Manager, Comms and Communities

Service Support Grants (SSG) to the Voluntary and Community Sector: Funding Applications April 2023 – March 2026

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to support the Grants Advisory Committee in making recommendations to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, regarding grant allocations for the new funding cycle of the Service Support Grants to the Voluntary and Community Sector. These grants will be for three years, April 2023 to March 2026.

Key Decision

2. No

This is not a key decision because it decides grant recipients within previously agreed budgets.

Recommendations

3. The Grants Advisory Committee is asked to review the report and make recommendations to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources regarding the allocation of funding and to inform his decision-making in respect of concerns, if any, for future monitoring and/or investigation.
4. The Committee is asked to review the applications in light of the cost-of-living emergency that was declared at a meeting of the Council on 22 September this year, where it was acknowledged that the Council should seek to support those residents most at risk from the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, particularly those residents on low incomes who will face unprecedented hardship this winter. The cost-of-living emergency was declared after the themes for the SSGs were considered and agreed by members and a bidding process initiated.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. Funding agreements for grants provided through the SSGs to the Voluntary and Community Sector are for three years, subject to satisfactory performance at each review stage and subject to the confirmation of Council budgets in February, ahead of each new financial year.
6. The majority of the themes within this grant scheme are aimed at providing funding to organisations who support residents to live and travel independently, and get the support, advice and advocacy that they need. While these services are not designed exclusively for those experiencing difficulties as a result of the recent rise in living costs, these residents are certainly among those to whom these services are targeted.

Details

7. Following a review of the existing SSG agreements with members of the Grants Advisory Committee in Summer 2021, it was recommended to the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance (now the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources) that the existing grant agreements between the Council and recipient organisations would be extended by one year with no alterations to the terms and conditions. It was felt that the prior eighteen months had been exceptional and turbulent for the voluntary sector due to the pandemic and that it would not be the right time to ask organisations to forecast future business projections and performance in an environment of ongoing economic uncertainty.
8. The SSG scheme was reviewed again by the Grants Advisory Committee in July 2022. This was to ensure a more streamlined and equitable approach and to ensure better alignment with renewed Council priorities.
9. As part of the latest review of the scheme, an adjustment was made to the funds available that reflects average inflation rates over the last five years. Funds to be made available went from £151,610 to £167,400.
10. The review also resulted in a revision of the grant themes within the scheme from eight to five as set out in the table below.

11.

Previous Funding Cycle themes 2019-22	Funded amounts £	New Funding Cycle themes 2023-26	Indicative funding amounts £
Independent Living	4,500	Mental Health and Wellbeing	24,000
Advice Services	97,110	Advice Services	100,000
Community Transport	9,000	Independent Living	22,000
Fit to Learn	4,000	Support for the VCS	11,400
Support for the VCS	10,000	Arts, Culture and Heritage	10,000
Combined Community Transport & Independent Living	18,500	-	-
Planning and Economic Development	8,500	-	-
SSG TOTAL	151,610	-	167,400
Housing and Homelessness (service budget)	12,520	Housing and Homelessness (service budget)	14,250
TOTAL (with additional Housing and Homelessness Grant)	164,130	-	181,650

12. The Housing and Homelessness Grants are part of a service budget and while treated in the same way as the other themes and advertised publicly for transparency, they are not considered from a financial perspective to be part of the SSG grant scheme. Any uplift was applied separately.

13. Appendix A includes all details relating to the award decisions agreed by the Lead Cabinet member for Housing.

14. Applications for the new three-year agreements were invited from 5 September to 14 October 2022 for the period April 2023-March 2026.

15. Since the scheme was reviewed and opened, at its meeting on 22 September 2022 the Council declared a cost-of-living emergency.

16. There is evidence to suggest that some people are less able to cope with the cost-of-living crisis so soon after the pandemic. Households, particularly those with low incomes, have now run down savings and increased debt. The Office for National Statistics found that by December 2020, nearly 9 million people had to borrow more money than usual because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Groups which are more likely to have taken on more debt since the start of the pandemic include renters, people from minority ethnic groups, parents and carers, disabled people, and young people.

17. This situation will not improve soon, and it will certainly worsen during the winter months. The Council agreed to support those who are most at risk from the impacts of the rising costs of food, fuel and other utility bills, particularly those on low incomes who will face unprecedented hardship this winter.
18. The Committee may wish to consider the 6-month SSG monitoring update also submitted to this meeting as valuable supporting information on how the current funding is being utilised by grant recipients over £15,000. Similarly, appendix B, the End of Year summary report of all awarded SSGs 2021-22 may also support and give context to the current recommendations for the new funding.
19. Previous grant recipient for 2019-22, Disability Cambridgeshire, has not reapplied due to ongoing operational and structural difficulties which have caused the charity to close.
20. Following the closure of the bidding process, a panel of officers met week commencing 17 October 2022 to review and assess the applications against the scoring matrix.
21. The officer panel assessment and suggested funding allocations are included within Appendix C. As the bids received exceed the funding available and a cost-of-living emergency has been declared, the recommended allocation of the funding includes additional consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, the Chair of Grants Advisory Committee and the Lead Cabinet Member for Communities. This aims to support GAC to discuss the SSG scheme and allocations more effectively.
22. The full applications from bidders contain commercially sensitive information and are therefore not published.
23. In the new funding cycle for 2023/24 to 2025/26, organisations in receipt of annual grants greater than £10,000 are required to submit performance reports at 6-monthly intervals; those in receipt of funding of less than £10,000 are required to submit performance reports annually.
24. Grants over £15,000 will be made in two six monthly instalments and only on receipt of approved monitoring information.

Options

The Grants Advisory Committee could recommend to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources to:

1. agree all the recommendations as presented by the officer panel and/or
2. agree an amended set of recommendations, detailing any changes and giving reasons, and/or
3. highlight any concerns for further monitoring, investigation or action giving reasons, and request that a follow up report be returned to GAC within appropriate timescales.

Implications

25. 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:-

Legal

26. Arrangements are in place with grant recipients, which should be followed should a variation or discontinuation of funding be proposed and agreed.

Consultation responses

27. Officers have consulted with the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, the Chair of Grants Advisory Committee and the Lead Cabinet Member for Communities regarding the number and type of applications received as it is clear that despite the review, the applicants are by and large the same as in previous years. It had been hoped that the scheme would attract new organisations. Despite no significant increase in new organisations coming forward to bid, it was felt that the process of assessing applications and allocating funding should continue.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

A modern and caring Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council will provide their customers with high-quality services, strive to reduce costs, build on what they are good at to generate their own income and make decisions in a transparent, open and inclusive way. The ongoing objectives into 2022-23 include continuing to work with public sector partners and a network of parish councils and voluntary groups to support the most vulnerable people in the district throughout the phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council is committed to creating and supporting local community groups and organisations to deliver services for South Cambridgeshire residents. The Service Support Grant funding scheme to the Voluntary and Community Sector has been designed as a contribution to meeting this commitment.

Appendices

Appendix A Housing Grant Decisions 2023-26

Appendix B End of Year SSG summary report 2021-22, reviewed by GAC on 24/06/2022

Appendix C SSG assessment and recommendations 2023-26

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