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| Report to: | Grants Advisory Committee 22 February 2024 |
| Lead Cabinet Member: | Cllr John Williams |
| Lead Officer: | Bode Esan |

Clarifications to Zero Carbon Communities Grant Guidance 2024-25

Executive Summary

1. This report proposes clarifications to the Zero Carbon Communities Grant criteria and guidance documents. The clarifications concern nature projects, solar PV projects and how applicants calculate avoided emissions.

Recommendations

2. The committee are invited to review the proposed changes and recommend to the Lead Cabinet Member that these are accepted for the grant cycle 2024-2025, or to suggest additional or alternative changes.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The clarifications have been proposed in response to the annual review of the officer panel scoring process, and comments made by the Grants Advisory Committee at the presentation of the 2023-2024 applications at the July 2023 committee.

The Climate and Environment Advisory Committee have had the opportunity to review the proposed changes and support them. Details

4. The Zero Carbon Communities Grant is due to open for a sixth round of applications in April 2024, prompting this review of the current application criteria and guidance (see Appendix A for current guidance, available on the District Council website).
5. It is proposed that the grant themes and objectives will remain the same as the previous two rounds, with projects once again invited under the 'reducing carbon emissions' or 'community engagement' themes.

Nature Projects

6. Officers noted that no nature projects were funded in the previous grant cycle, although there were several applications received under the community engagement theme. These applications did not adequately demonstrate that the project would engage residents and communities on the climate emergency or promote behaviour change. The applications outlined valuable plans to support nature recovery, but despite submitting under the community engagement theme, the engagement described in the applications was often limited to volunteers directly involved in the project or was a secondary aim with practical measures to support nature as the principal aim.
7. It is not recommended that nature projects are excluded from the ZCC grant, but that the guidance is updated to direct projects whose sole focus is on nature towards more suitable funding sources such as the Community Chest Biodiversity pot, or the Cambridgeshire Peterborough Fund for Nature. The guidance will be updated to emphasise that projects should define themselves principally as community engagement projects to perform well under this category or should advertise their carbon reduction benefits clearly if applying under the other category.

Solar PV Projects

8. Upon the review of the ZCC Grant applications at the July 2023 Grants Advisory Committee, members commented on the variations in costs between solar PV projects that appeared to be delivering similar outcomes. While seeking multiple quotes was recommended previously, the new guidance would request that applicants for solar PV projects have sought a minimum of three quotes to improve value for money.

Calculating Avoided Emissions

9. There is a recommended methodology for calculating avoided CO₂ emissions in the current application guidance and criteria. However, applicants don't always use this methodology in the section of the e-form that asks them to provide an estimate of avoided emissions. This makes it hard to compare the figures like for like when assessing applications. It is recommended that the phrasing on the e-form is tightened to request applicants use the methodology provided to make their estimate (unless they can clearly evidence another method of calculation).

Implications

10. 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

11. Financial resources for the Zero Carbon Communities grant have been assigned through the Council's usual budgetary processes.

Staffing

12. Staffing for the administration and promotion of the Zero Carbon Communities grant have been assigned through the Council's usual processes.

Climate Change

13. The Zero Carbon Communities grant enables communities to take action on climate change at a local level.

Consultation responses

14. The Zero Carbon Communities grant has been subject to internal consultation, and a verbal report on the changes has been delivered to the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee who have noted the report.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Being green to our core

15. The Zero Carbon Communities grant supports the Council's ambition to influence climate-friendly behaviour change and assist communities in reaching a Net Zero district by 2050.

Background Papers

Appendix

Appendix A - Current Zero Carbon Communities Grant Criteria and Guidance (text from webpage)

Appendix B – Proposed updated Zero Carbon Communities Grant Criteria and Guidance

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