

Report to:	Grants Advisory Committee	25 April 2024
Lead Cabinet Member:	Cllr Bill Handley – Lead Member for Communities	
Lead Officer:	Gareth Bell – Communications and Communities Service Manager	

Community Growing - Small Grant

Executive Summary

1. It is proposed to create a new Community Growing Small Grant to support community growing initiatives across the district as part of our ongoing cost of living and sustainable food work. The launch of this grant scheme is timed to follow on from Good to Grow week 2024, from 22 to 29 April, supporting growing initiatives across the UK. Groups in South Cambridgeshire will be able to apply for up to £500 for capital start-up costs with officers judging applications to ensure a quick turnaround.

Recommendations

2. The Committee are asked to note the content of the report and the appendix and offer comments and/or make recommendations to the Lead Member for Resources as appropriate.

Details

Background

3. Part of the 'cost-of-living project' initiated in March 2023 included a commitment to support groups to grow their own food for the benefit of their community.
4. Support and advice has already been provided to allotment associations across the district to support better allotment provision, including the creation of an allotment toolkit. There are also plans to support allotments to donate their excess food to those in need, likely through their nearest foodbank.
5. The Good to Grow week 2024 runs from 22 to 29 April. This celebrates the new growing season and aims to inspire the next generation of growers. This grant proposal is timed to follow on from the Good to Grow week and supports the work of local groups promoting this.

Community Growing grant

6. It is proposed to create a new grant scheme for groups to apply for a maximum of £500 to be spent on capital infrastructure required to start a community growing project.
7. The initial fund pot will total £5,000 to fund at least 10 projects across the district, however it is possible to increase this should there be excess demand.
8. Any groups wishing to apply, whether a formal constituted group or an informal group of local residents, will be able to apply to the fund and officers will ensure that the necessary plans are in place for the project to be successful.
9. To ensure that each project benefits the community, each application will be required to demonstrate how they intend to share their produce should there be a surplus. This could be through a donation to their nearest foodbank, or a 'help yourself' box placed nearby. It will also be encouraged for groups to share photos of their produce and any donations to foodbanks to help promote this scheme.
10. For most projects, it is anticipated that a community growing project will likely involve the purchase of raised beds to transform previously unused pieces of land. The grant will also cover other start-up capital expenditure, such as seed and sowing compost, tools, trays, and pots.
11. Officers will ensure each application meets the conditions for the grant and will score each of the three questions in the application form out of ten. Where an initial application may be denied, officers will work with the applicant to make the necessary changes for it to meet the criteria.
12. Decisions on each application will be communicated to the applicant within two weeks of their application to ensure the projects can start as soon as possible. Each decision will be communicated to the Grants Advisory Committee at the next available opportunity.
13. It is not anticipated that the number of applications will exceed the funding available. Should this occur, applications receiving the highest scorers will be prioritised.
14. Once the grant is paid, it will be up to each community group to look after their community growing project and share the produce. Each group will be asked to fill out a short evaluation for their project one year after they receive the grant, and a grant adherence agreement will be put in place for each successful application.
15. The grant will run until 31 March 2025, or until funds are exhausted.
16. Full guidance documentation is set out in Appendix A.

Reasons for Recommendations

17. The new grant scheme is required to encourage communities to start a community growing project.

Options

18. The Grants Advisory Committee may consider to

- a. agree to recommend the new grant proposal and proposed guidance under Appendix A to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources.
- b. agree to recommend the new grant proposal to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, with suggestions to alter the proposed amount and/or guidance and criteria.
- c. defer a decision if further information is required.
- d. not recommend the proposal to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources stating the reasons for this.

Implications

19. 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 and Fraud Risk

20. An initial £5,000 of funding will be ringfenced from the cost-of-living budget assigned in March 2023. Should there be a high number of good quality applications, it is possible to increase this to £10,000 from the same budget.

Climate Change

21. The grant will have a positive effect on climate change as it will increase biodiversity and transform previously unused pieces of land.

Health and Wellbeing

22. The grant will have positive effects on Health and Wellbeing. Not only will it improve the mental health and wellbeing of those taking part, but it will also encourage people to eat a healthier diet leading to improved physical health outcomes.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Being green to our core

23. The creation of the new grant scheme for community growing projects will increase biodiversity and supports the Good to Grow week 2024.

A modern and caring Council

24. This grant scheme is one part of the cost-of-living project, supporting residents with various pressures through the cost-of-living crisis.

Appendices

Appendix A: Guidance notes

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