

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Portfolio Holder for New Communities

20th May 2010

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Corporate Manager for Planning and New Communities

REVISION OF PROCESS AND GUIDANCE NOTES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES CAPITAL GRANTS PROGRAMME

Purpose

1. The PFH is asked to consider revisions to the guidance notes for the Sustainable Communities Capital Grants Programme, as attached to this report, with a view to approving them for release to applicants and to manage and deliver the 2010/11 programme.
2. This is not a key decision. Portfolio Holder agreement and approval is sought to formalise the revised guidance notes for applicants to the Sustainable Communities Capital Grants Programme as the programme is highly valued and appreciated across the district. Most specifically the revisions cover the formalisation of the approach introduced in the second half of 2009/10 in considering grant applications in batches.

Recommendation

3. That the Portfolio Holder for New Communities approve: the revisions to the guidance notes for the Sustainable Communities Capital Grants Programme as outlined in this report (and as attached in full).

Background

4. In 2009/10 the decision making process for the allocation of capital funds through the Council's Community Services Capital Grants Programme (now known as the Sustainable Communities Capital Grants Programme, following organisational restructuring) was altered.
5. In the past, funding bids had been received throughout the year and grant decisions were made relatively quickly upon receipt of the application. However, in September 2009, Officers identified the likelihood that the budgets were going to be oversubscribed. In order to be as accessible, transparent, and equitable as possible, the Portfolio Holder consequently made the decision to hold all capital grant award applications until early 2010 when all bids could be considered at the same time.
6. The keen take-up of the grants illustrates both their importance and the effective level of advertising on the Council's website and via the South Cambs Magazine.
7. This revised 'batching' process proved effective in maximising both the programme's ability to equitably cater to local needs aligned against SCDC priorities and deliver the greatest cross-district value for money from the funds available.

8. It should be noted that there are other 'community' type grants available from the Council but these are typically much smaller and aimed at enabling community activity (rather than the larger facilities and equipment capital grants referred to in this report). These will be subject to a review over the next 2-3 months to ensure that the delivery process for these is still working effectively and efficiently.

Considerations

9. Although it is not possible to accurately predict the number of capital grant applications the Council is likely to receive in 2010/11 it is felt, from the 2009/10 experience, that a twice yearly batching up and consideration of all valid applications will prove a more satisfactory method of fairly allocating the capital grant monies available.
10. These decision-making sessions would be scheduled as the last New Communities PFH meeting in September 2010 and similarly in February 2011.
11. The number of applications, and potential applications, will be regularly monitored to assess the ongoing level of pressure upon the programme budget and reported by Officers to the PFH as deemed necessary.
12. In extreme circumstances where schemes would be demonstrably jeopardised by adhering to the twice yearly decision-making timetable, or there were other verifiable emergency grounds for the very rapid deployment of grant funds, then the PFH could choose to allocate funds outside of the fixed schedule.
13. In order to both provide clarity and certainty to applicants it is therefore proposed that this approach be laid out in an appropriately revised set of application guidelines (ass attached) and advertised in all areas where the Grant is promoted.

Implications

14. Financial	Deliver the greatest cross-district value for money from the funds available.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Risk Management	The revised approach should reduce the risk of priority projects not receiving the appropriate SCDC element of the funding and support they warrant.
Equal Opportunities	Maximising the programme's ability to equitably cater to local needs aligned against SCDC priorities
Climate Change	The revised guidance contains a specific section on climate change

Consultations

15. None – key revisions already tried and tested but not formally adopted.

Effect on Strategic Aims

16. Revised guidance directly supports the council aim that:

'We are a committed and listening council providing first class services accessible to all.'

Conclusions / Summary

17. An important revision to the decision-making process for the award of Sustainable Communities (previously known as Community Services) Capital Grants was successfully introduced/trialled in the second half of 2009/10 and is recommended to be carried forward into 2010/11. This revision essentially sees the decision-making process shifting from a first-come first-served approach to a twice-yearly batched approach where all eligible applications received in a six month period are considered and assessed together by the PFH.
18. In order to provide clarity and certainty to the process for applicants it is important that these revisions are formally approved for adoption within revised current capital grant application packs (as attached).

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- PFH Meeting 02:03:2010, Agenda item and report: Community Capital Grants Programme 2009-2010
- Community Services Capital Grants Programme Guidance Notes

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