

## **BIG COMMUNITY FUND REVIEW**

### **FINANCIAL ADVISORY GROUP – 23 APRIL 2013**

Report of the: Chief Executive Designate

Status: For Consideration

Also considered by: Cabinet – 9 May 2013

Key Decision: No

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#### **Executive Summary:**

This report informs Members of the results of a review of the Council's Big Community Fund. The Big Community Fund was set up in 2011 to help Members to work with their communities to improve the local area. A summary of grants made to February 2013 is appended.

The review has included analysis of the monitoring information received from Members who have completed projects. Members who sit on the Appraisal Panel and Members who have applied to the Scheme have also been consulted by survey. Approximately 50% of Members consulted have responded to the survey.

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**This report supports the Key Aims of** The Community Plan vision for Safe & Caring Communities, a Green & Healthy Environment and a Dynamic & Sustainable Economy.

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Mrs Pat Bosley

**Head of Service** Lesley Bowles, Head of Community Development

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#### **Recommendation to FINANCIAL ADVISORY GROUP:**

- (a) The Guidelines be amended to include specific mention that the work involved is not the responsibility of the landowner or delivery organisation.
- (b) The appraisal scoresheet be revised to place most importance on physical improvements and even more than the current emphasis on whether an application should more appropriately be funded elsewhere.
- (c) The application form be revised to ask applicants specifically to address how a proposed application is additional to usual maintenance arrangements and landowner responsibilities to help Members during the appraisal process.

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**Reason for recommendation:** To reflect the views of Members who were consulted as part of this review. Members consulted were those Members who sit on the appraisal panel and those who have submitted applications to the Scheme.

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## **Introduction**

- 1 The Big Community Fund was set up in 2011/12 using funding from the New Homes Bonus Scheme. It was agreed that £10,000 each month would be available to the Fund and that unspent funds in any month should be rolled forward. The first monthly round of the Big Community Fund was September 2011.

## **Aims of the Scheme**

- 2 The aims of the Big Community Fund are to help Members to work with their local communities to improve the area. In particular:
  - To make physical improvements to the area;
  - To strengthen local communities;
  - To help more vulnerable people in local communities;
  - To improve safety and well-being in local communities.

## **Scheme Guidelines and Application Form**

- 3 The Big Community Fund Guidelines set out eligibility for applications to the scheme. A copy of the Guidelines and Application Form are set out at Appendix A.
- 4 The maximum grant available for any single application is £3,000, but Members can work with Members in another ward and submit an application for a maximum of £6,000.
- 5 Members can put forward applications for a project to be delivered by any “not for profit” organisation offering open access to the community, unless they are schools or parent teacher associations, Church councils or individuals seeking sponsorship.
- 6 Examples of eligible delivery organisations include charities, residents associations or town or parish councils. Any delivery organisation other than the District Council, town or parish councils must have a constitution and a bank account.

## **Decision-making Process**

- 7 Applications are referred to an Appraisal Panel made up of Members who have been trained in appraisal techniques and who follow an approved appraisal process. Members sit on the Panel on a rotating basis, with a minimum quorum of five.
- 8 Awards are made by the Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing. Decisions relating to her ward or applications in which she has an interest are made by the Leader of the Council. When both the Portfolio Holder and the Leader both have an interest in an application, the decision is made by Cabinet.

- 9 Decision making takes account of the following:
- The extent to which the application meets the Aims of the scheme.
  - Value for money.
  - The extent to which the application has involved local people and meets identified local need.
  - The feasibility, long-term sustainability and innovation of the project.
  - The extent to which the ward has already benefitted from the scheme.
- 10 A copy of the Scoring Sheet is set out at Appendix B.

#### Summary of Grants

- 11 A summary of grants allocated from September 2011 to February 2013 is set out at Appendix C.
- 12 From September 2011 a total of 56 projects have received funding. 37 Members, from 26 wards, have submitted successful applications and received a total of £104,133.62 for their projects.

#### Summary of Monitoring

- 13 Performance monitoring is “light touch”. The Project Appraisal Panel sets simple performance indicators for each project recommended for approval.
- 14 6 months after the grant has been paid out, the delivery organisation is sent a simple monitoring form, copied to the Member who applied, asking them to report on progress against the indicators.
- 15 As of March 2013, 40 applications have been completed and paid out. Of these, 25 applications have been completed at least 6 months ago and have been sent monitoring forms to complete. To March 2013, a total of 15 monitoring forms have been received as completed. All monitoring forms show that the project work has been completed to the satisfaction of the delivery organisation. 91% of the indicators set out on the monitoring forms have been achieved.
- 16 A number of indicators were not achieved. Delivery organisations for Jubilee and Torch Relay events were asked to provide photographs taken by residents, but some were not able to provide these, although many delivery organisations did provide their own photographs. Some delivery organisations were asked to provide residents’ comments regarding new facilities, but were not able to provide these.

#### Consultation with Appraisal Panel as part of this review

- 17 Members who had been trained to sit on the Appraisal Panel were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their experience of the Appraisal Panel. 8 Members (42.1%) responded. The following is a summary of their responses:

- 85.7% of Members who responded said that they felt the system of recruiting Members to an Appraisal Panel monthly by their eligibility had worked.
- 100% said they thought officers had been helpful with the appraisal process.
- 85.7% said they thought that the appraisal template was clear.
- 100% said they thought it was important that the appraisal template considered Value for Money, the feasibility, long term sustainability and innovation of the project and the extent to which the application had involved local people and meets an identified local need.
- 84% said they thought the Cost Benefit Analysis on the appraisal form was important.
- Only 28.6% said they thought the extent to which a Ward had already benefitted from the Scheme was an important consideration on the Appraisal template.

#### Consultation with Members regarding their experience of the scheme

18 Members who had submitted an application to the Scheme were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their experience of the Scheme. 20 Members (51.2%) responded. The following is a summary of their responses:

- 77.8% of Members who responded said they found it easy or somewhat easy to access the application form and guidelines on the Members' Portal.
- 100% said they thought the Scheme guidelines were clear.
- 88% said they thought the application form was easy to complete.
- 55.5% said they thought it should be mandatory to have support from all of the Members in multi-Member wards. This is currently not an absolute requirement.
- 33.3% said they thought the maximum grant amount of £3,000 should be reduced.
- 82% said they thought it was important that the Scheme was only for Members to bid, rather than for other organisations. 72% thought it was important that Members can work with other wards to submit applications for a maximum of £6,000.
- 88.9% said they thought it was important that projects must be delivered by not for profit organisations.
- 100% thought it was important that projects should have a lasting positive effect in their ward.

- 100% thought it was important that the Scheme does not contribute to ongoing running costs.
- 89% thought it was important that applications are appraised by a panel of at least 5 Members trained for the purpose.

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

- 19 The scheme is funded from the New Homes Bonus scheme. The total amount available each month is £10,000. The scheme started in September 2011 and £180,000 has therefore been available. Any funds unallocated in a given month are rolled forward to the next month.

### Community Impact

- 20 The Scheme's aims ensure that each grant positively addresses local needs, ensuring a good impact on the community.

### Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 21 The Scheme is in accordance with the Council's overall Grant-Making Code of Practice.

### Resource (non-financial)

- 22 The work connected with the Big Community Fund Scheme administration and monitoring is being undertaken through existing resources.

### Value for Money

- 23 Value for Money is assessed as part of the appraisal process scoring criteria based on whether the application attracts funding from elsewhere and the cost compared with the benefit.

### Equality Impacts

- 24 An Equalities Impact assessment has been completed. All applicants are asked to sign an Equalities Statement. The aims of the Scheme include helping more vulnerable people in local communities and consideration of this forms part of the appraisal process.

## **Conclusions**

- 25 Comments from Members have included that the Guidelines are clear, that the scheme is well-used and has been beneficial to local communities. However, it would be helpful to make some changes.
- 26 More than half of the Members consulted thought it should be mandatory to have support from all Members in multi-Member wards. However, many commented that this would disadvantage some wards where Members may not be able to

agree. It is recommended that applicants should continue to seek support from fellow-Members. However, where this is not forthcoming, Officers should ensure that any Member in a Ward who has not signed the application form is made aware of the application and given an opportunity to comment.

- 27 Members responding to the survey have attached great importance to projects having a lasting impact. The grant guidelines make it very clear that projects should have a lasting positive effect. The appraisal scoresheet also addresses this and it is recommended that the number of points available for this should be increased.
- 28 Members responding to the survey have commented that lasting physical improvements are of the greatest value. It is therefore recommended that the appraisal scoresheet used by the Members Panel should reflect the importance that consultees have attached to this by increasing the number of points available for this part of the appraisal.
- 29 Members' responses attached importance to the fact that grants should not support ongoing maintenance or revenue costs. The guidelines are very clear on this and the appraisal scoresheet reflects this.
- 30 Members' responses included that the scheme should not be used to subsidise the work of other authorities.
- 31 The appraisal process currently asks Members to consider, under four headings, whether the scheme should more appropriately be funded by the landowner or delivery organisation. Given the importance attached to these factors by Members, it is recommended that the appraisal scoresheet should be revised to place most importance on physical improvements and even more emphasis on whether an application should more appropriately be funded elsewhere. It is also recommended that the guidelines reflect this and that application form asks applicants specifically to address how an application is additional to usual maintenance arrangements and landowner responsibilities.
- 32 The suggested changes are noted in the attached Guidelines and application form and appraisal scoresheet.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Approved projects may not be delivered	<p>Capital grants are only paid on completion of projects.</p> <p>Performance indicators are included as a condition of the grant and these are monitored. Monitoring takes place 6 months after completion of completion of the project. The Council will reserve the right to claw back</p>	<p>There may be some projects that are completed but do not meet all of the performance indicators. In all cases, the appraisal process takes into account the strength of the delivery organisation and likelihood of the project proceeding well.</p>

	funding when the project has not been completed.	
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**Appendices**

Appendix A – Guidelines and application form

Appendix B – Appraisal scoring sheet

Appendix C – Summary of grants allocated.

Appendix D – Press Cuttings

**Background Papers:**

The Council's Grant-Making Code of Practice.

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