

COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME REVIEW

Cabinet - 7 July 2022

Report of: Chief Officer for People & Places

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- People & Places Advisory Committee - 14 June 2022

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary: This report provides a review of the Community Grant Scheme with a focus on the speeding up of the process for applicants and possibility of more than one grant round in each year, as requested by the People and Places Advisory Committee on 1 March 2022.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Community Plan

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Lesley Dyball

Contact Officer(s): Kathryn Bone, Ext. 7176 and Jenny Godfrey, Ext. 7112

Recommendation to People & Places Advisory Committee:

- (a) To note the revisions to the Council's Code of Practice for Grant-making as detailed in Appendix A.
- (b) To note the recommended actions as set out in paragraphs 8 and 14.
- (c) To note the revisions to the Community Grant Scheme Guidelines as detailed in Appendix B.
- (d) To recommend to Cabinet (a) to (c) below

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- (a) To approve the revisions to the Council's Code of Practice for Grant-making as detailed in Appendix A.
- (b) To approve the recommended actions as set out in paragraphs 8 and 14.
- (c) To approve the revisions to the Community Grant Scheme Guidelines as detailed in Appendix B.

Reason for recommendation: The review undertaken by officers as requested by the People and Places Advisory Committee has revealed that the overarching code for all Council grant-making and the Community Grants Scheme guidelines and application form requires updating. It has also revealed the need for a further detailed piece of work in consultation with Legal Services and Members to address the speeding up of the Community Grants Scheme appraisal process.

Introduction and Background

- 1 On 1 March 2022 the People and Places Advisory Committee requested officers review the Community Grant Scheme and focus on speeding up the process for applicants and consider the possibility of multiple grant rounds throughout the year. This report is the result of the work undertaken.
- 2 The Community Grant Scheme exists to help those voluntary and community organisations which provide projects, services and activities that benefit people living, working and volunteering in the Sevenoaks District, focusing on those with greatest need. This remains unchanged and did not form part of this review.
- 3 The Community Grant Scheme must adhere to the Council Code of Practice for Grant-making. Dated 2015, the Council Code of Practice for Grant-making was assessed against current practices and requirements as part of this review.
- 4 The Grant Guidelines for the Community Grant Scheme were last reviewed in 2013/14 and as they set out how the Scheme operates have been evaluated as part of this review.

Review of Council Code of Practice for Grant-making

- 5 The Council Code of Practice for Grant-making dated 2015 is the overarching code of practice for grant making made by the Council. To canvas views from officers across the Council all teams with a grant-making function were contacted as part of the review.
- 6 A survey was conducted with all teams within the Council. The survey captured not only current practices with grant making but also highlighted areas where the Code of Practice needs updating to provide a fit for purpose overarching code.
- 7 A summary of the main findings are set out below:
 - Grants are made to a mixture of individuals, groups, organisations and businesses. Some are from external funding and others from Council budgets.
 - Where grants are made using external funding, a key element of managing these grant schemes is to ensure the funders' requirements are fully met.

- Grant application forms are now being made available online as well as hard copies (if required).
- As would be expected, all grant schemes involve officer time to undertake detailed analysis and appraisal. Some then involve Members in the final analysis/recommendation stages. All include for monitoring of the grants and share this information with Members.
- Some teams successfully run multiple rounds of funding in any one year enabling greater access to the grant schemes.

8 To address the findings of the survey, the following actions are proposed:

- The Council Code of Practice for Grant-making is amended as detailed in Appendix A to update it in line with current practices.
- The new version of the Code of Practice for Grant-making is re-distributed to all managers and services that offer grants.
- A meeting of all officers that deliver grant schemes is held twice yearly to share good practice and ensure consistency across Council teams.

Review of Community Grant Scheme & Scheme Guidelines

9 The scoring used for the Community Grant Scheme was reviewed and deemed still appropriate and adequate.

10 The Community Grant Scheme priorities need updating to align with the proposed new Community Plan.

11 The Scheme Guidelines require updating to reflect current practices regarding requirements of applicants and in particular ensuring that they are proportional to the level of grant being applied for.

12 The current Scheme offers the community and voluntary sector one opportunity to apply for a grant each financial year. The timescales of the current scheme means that applicants submitting their application between September and November do not hear the outcome until 4-6 months later in March, just one week before their project, service or activity is due to start:

- Community and voluntary organisations are invited to submit applications from September with a deadline circa 8 weeks later in November.
- Applications are then appraised by both officers and Members during December, with the report outlining recommendations being written by the first week in January.
- Due to the timings of the various Committees that are required to review, note and subsequently approve the report, the final decision is not made until mid-March.
- Officers then ensure that letters are sent to all applicants detailing the outcome of their application usually within one week of the decision but by the end of March at the latest.

- Grants are then paid within the first 10 days of April and must be used within 12 months.

13 The current timescales of the Scheme are a barrier to some community groups and voluntary sector organisations applying to the Scheme. During a survey of the Voluntary Sector Forum in December 2020, it was clear that the voluntary sector would like to see a simpler and more streamlined application process. Responses received as part of the consultation when asked if they would like to see any changes to the scheme include:

“The move to digital applications was a good one and further streamlining could simplify the process further.”

“A more streamlined application process would be welcomed”

“A more streamlined application and reporting process would be very welcome.”

“A shorter application process”

14 To address the findings of this review the following actions are proposed:

- To implement the amended Community Grant Scheme Guidelines attached as Appendix B.
- To amend the online application form to reflect these proposed revised Community Grant Scheme Guidelines.
- To share the revised Community Grant Scheme with the voluntary and community sector via the Voluntary Sector Forum.
- To work with Legal Services and Members to understand if and how the appraisal process for the Community Grant Scheme can be migrated from Committee appraisal to another process, potentially a panel, to enable the approval process to be more streamlined with a quicker turnaround. This piece of work will include investigating the possibility of introducing two funding rounds per year for the Community Grant Scheme.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

15 An option considered, but rejected, was to leave the Council Code of Practice for Grant-making and the Community Grant Scheme unchanged. This was rejected because:

- The Council Code of Practice for Grant-making dated 2015 is the overarching code for all Council grant-making and requires some updating to bring it in line with current practices and requirements.
- The Community Grant Scheme requires updating to align the Scheme priorities with the new Community Plan.
- The Community Grant Scheme Guidelines need revising to reflect current practices regarding requirements of applicants and in particular ensuring that they are proportional to the level of grant being applied for.

- 16 Consideration was given to the inclusion of a recommendation that the appraisal process for the Community Grant Scheme be migrated from the current Committee appraisal, potentially using a panel. This was rejected at this stage as further detailed work to understand the legal and other implications is required in consultation with Legal Services and Members.

Key Implications

Financial

- 17 Funding for the Community Grant Scheme has already been allocated in existing budgets. There are no financial implications from the recommendations included in this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 18 There are no legal implications associated with the recommendations included in this report. As set out in this report the next recommended step of this review is, in conjunction with Legal Services and Members, understand if and how the appraisal process for the Community Grant Scheme can be migrated from Committee appraisal to another process, potentially a panel.

Equality Assessment

- 19 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this report directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and does not vary between groups of people. The summary results of this analysis are set out immediately below.
- 20 The Council Code of Practice for grant-making exists to ensure a consistent approach to grant making, made against set rules that promote equality in relation to access to grants.
- 21 The Community Grant Scheme assists with the provision of services to support Sevenoaks District residents, particularly those in the greatest need. It provides funding for specific groups, such as older people, young people and people with disabilities.
- 22 The decision being made or recommended through this paper does not have the potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community.
- 23 As no negative impacts have been identified, no further mitigating steps need to be taken.

Net Zero Implications

- 24 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

- 25 The review undertaken by officers as requested by the People and Places Advisory Committee has revealed that:
- the overarching code for all Council grant-making requires updating;
 - there are efficiency savings & further community benefits to be made by implementing some new processes for all Council teams involved in grant-making;
 - the Community Grant Scheme Guidelines and application form requires revision to align the Scheme priorities with the proposed new Community Plan, and, to reflect current practices regarding requirements of applicants and in particular ensuring that they are proportional to the level of grant being applied for; and
 - to speed up the Community Grant Scheme's appraisal process and consider the introduction of two funding rounds in each year a further detailed piece of work is required in conjunction with Legal Services and Members.

In order to address these findings the recommendations set out in this report have been made.

Appendices

Appendix A - Code of Practice for Grant-making

Appendix B - Community Grant Scheme Guidelines

Background Papers

None

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People and Places