

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel **Date:** 2 March 2015

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 8.45 pm

Members Present: Mrs C P Pond (Chairman), Mrs G Shiell, B Surtees and J Lea

Other Councillors: -

Apologies: A Boyce, A Mitchell MBE and S Murray

Officers Present: J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services)), L Swan (Assistant Director (Private Sector Housing & Communities Support)), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), G Wallis (Community, Health & Wellbeing Manager) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

7. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that Cllr Lea was substituting for Cllr Boyce.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

9. MINUTES

Resolved:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2015 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

10. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel considered its Terms of Reference, as agreed at the last meeting.

J Chandler highlighted that the Care Act 2014 no longer referred to vulnerable adults, but described them as "adults with needs of care and support", and suggested that the Panel's Terms of Reference should be amended accordingly. The Panel concurred.

Resolved:

(1) The Terms of Reference for the Panel be revised to refer to "vulnerable adults" as "adults with needs of care and support".

11. REVIEW OF GRANT AID SCHEME FOR VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

C Overend introduced a report on the review of the current Grant Aid Scheme for Voluntary and Community Organisations.

C Overend presented the additional information requested by the Panel at its inaugural meeting on 14 January 2015. This included:

- the criteria used in the 'Scorecard' system for determining Grant Aid applications;
- the relevant Council targets impacted by the Grant Aid Scheme;
- a copy of the Grant Aid application form, which included the Guide for Applicants and the criteria to qualify for a three-year Service Level Agreement;
- a list of the groups currently in receipt of a three-year Service Level Agreement, with a description and the amount per annum; and
- a list of Groups who had received one-off Grants each year from 2009/10 to 2013/14, which had indicated the following annual expenditure:
 - 2009/10 = £57,720;
 - 2010/11 = £53,340;
 - 2011/12 = £51,743;
 - 2012/13 = £46,751; and
 - 2013/14 = £49,049.

C Overend drew the attention of the Panel to the omission of two groups from the list of those in receipt of a three-year Service Level Agreement: WAY2000 and Epping Forest District Swimming Club.

C Overend reminded the Panel that the Review was being carried out as a result of a £11,517 reduction in the budget for the Grant Aid Scheme in 2015/16. This had reduced the budget to £83,453, of which £43,453 was expenditure already committed via three-year Service Level Agreements that ran until March 2016. This left the balance of £40,000 available for the consideration of applications for one-off Grants. In addition to this, the Council also had three-year Service Level Agreements with the Epping Forest District Citizen's Advice Bureau and Voluntary Action Epping Forest which totalled £152,500.

The Panel discussed possible revisions to the current Grant Aid Scheme to deal with the budget cut for 2015/16, which Officers advised equated to approximately a 22% reduction in the funding available for one-off Grants. The proposals included: allocating proportionally less money for each Grant approved, for example a 22% reduction; a reduction in the maximum grant available from the current £5,000, for which a 22% reduction would equate to £3,900; restricting the number of Grants approved by geographic area within the District; giving priority to those Grants pertaining to District-wide activities or at least those covering several parishes; abolishing the extra grants currently given to the Epping Forest District Citizen's Advice Bureau and Voluntary Action Epping Forest, who were already in receipt of the two biggest Grants via three-year Service Level Agreements; and removing specific sectors from the scope of scheme, for example local halls.

C Overend reported that other funding schemes had also seen their available finance reduced, which had impacted those applications seeking match funding. The District Council did not liaise directly with those Town and Parish Councils that also offered Grant Aid Schemes, although requests to other bodies for funding were considered during the application process, especially when the Grant from the District Council

would not be enough to fund the entire project. A recent receipt of Grant Aid from the District Council was a factor when considering further requests for Grant funding, and advice was always freely given to Groups by the Officers concerned. J Chandler cautioned the Panel about Groups that 'double-accounted' for grant monies received.

The Panel felt that the Grant Aid application form should be revised to include a warning of any failure to disclose other funding received or applied for would jeopardise a particular bid, whilst the support of the local Council would enhance a bid. C Overend reminded the Panel that the Council requested 'End-of-Grant' reports to demonstrate the success of the project funded by the District Council.

C Overend suggested that the revised Scheme could give priority to certain Groups initially, before being opened up to all Groups later in the financial year; J Chandler stated that this would be her preferred option. The Panel felt that reducing the maximum Grant available to Groups should not be supported, as this could potentially deter some applications. Cllr Surtees highlighted the issue of Groups applying for 'pump-priming' funding; C Overend stated that a reference could be made to funding feasibility studies within the Application Form.

Cllr Surtees enquired whether, given the paucity of funding available, the Grant Aid budget could be increased with monies from outside the Council rather than cut the Grants available. Two possible suggestions from Councillor Surtees were to allow Councillors to donate part of their basic allowance to the Grant Aid budget, and persuade local businesses to contribute to the Grant Aid budget. The Group welcomed these proposals, but felt that the Basic Allowance was paid to Members to reimburse them for any expenses incurred representing their local community, and that local businesses could get involved with community projects of their choosing without unduly influencing the Grant Aid budget.

C Overend advised the Panel that the current process was for Officers to meet with the Portfolio Holder approximately every six weeks to consider the outstanding applications, before a Portfolio Holder delegated decision on which Grants were approved was signed and published. Before the implementation of the Cabinet system of Local Government in 2001, the budget was allocated to the applications at one point in the financial year, which left no monies available for applications received later in the year. This year, as was the case in most years, there was still some money left in the Grant Aid budget, for which any outstanding applications would be considered for before the end of the month. It was reiterated that the Grant Aid budget was not currently underspent as the remaining monies had still been committed to projects even if it had not been physically paid to the Groups concerned. Although, it was highlighted that if the Grant Aid budget continued to be cut then this process could take place earlier than March in the financial year. The Panel acknowledged that the current system for the allocation of the Grant Aid budget worked well.

In relation to the Funding Matrix used for the Grant Aid Scheme, C Overend reported that the elements listed were the factors considered when an application for Grant Aid was analysed, with each factor on the scorecard given a score between 1 and 5. The reference to the 2012 London Olympics had been retained as this factor was now concerned with the legacy from the staging of the Games. L Swan pointed out that greater priority was being given to older people in the new Corporate Plan 2015-20 and C Overend agreed that this should be included as a new factor. The Panel noted the list of relevant Council targets which the Grant Aid Scheme impacted upon, and C Overend commented that residents within the District supported the Scheme.

The Panel considered the current Application Form for the Grant Aid Scheme and the advice contained therein. Following on from the greater emphasis afforded to Older People in the new Corporate Plan, it was agreed that the Elderly should be a separate key priority area and renamed 'Older People', and 'Domestic Violence' should be renamed 'Domestic Abuse'. Cllr Surtees suggested that the example quoted of a counselling service as a new project should be removed from the 'What You Can Apply For?' section, and the impact of the project upon the District should also be included within the 'Factors Taken into Account' section. C Overend proposed that the 'Grant Conditions' section should include a requirement to provide the District Council with an evaluation of the funded project after six months, and Cllr Surtees added that the first paragraph of the 'Grant Decision' section should include the fact that the Portfolio Holder was advised by Officers when considering applications as this was the current modus operandi.

With regard to the actual Application Form itself, Cllr Shiell noted that the Council did not ask whether the applicant Group was part of a larger organisation. This was acknowledged by Officers and it was agreed that the question concerning the applicant Group's management structure would be expanded. It was noted that the form was generally very compact and the font size was quite small. C Overend reassured the Panel that the form could be provided with larger print and would also be offered on the Council's website for download as well. J Chandler emphasised that the Council would need to request a copy of a Group's Safeguarding Policy in future if they were applying for monies in connection with projects for children or adults with needs of care and support.

Following a thorough review of the current Grant Aid Scheme, the Panel was generally satisfied with the way that it operated and felt that a wide variety of organisations were assisted by the Scheme. The Panel considered a number of alternatives to manage the 22% budget cut in 2015/16 for one-off Grants, including the reduction of the maximum amount available or reducing the amount agreed for each Grant, but did not wish to pursue these suggestions at the current time. However, the Panel felt that priority for Grants under the Scheme should be given to new projects and/or new Groups initially, before the Scheme was opened out for others to apply. In addition, priority should also initially be given to projects concerning Older People, given their increased emphasis in the new Corporate Plan, and projects involving young people.

The Panel felt that it would be appropriate at this stage to consider the grants funded by the Council through three-year Service Level Agreements, even though it was acknowledged that these agreements did not expire until March 2016, and the Panel had already indicated a wish at its previous meeting to examine these Grants in detail during 2015/16.

Resolved:

- (1) That the satisfaction with the general operation of current Grant Aid Scheme be noted;
- (2) That the initial priority for Grants under the Scheme in 2015/16 should be for:
 - (a) new projects which had not received Grant Aid funding in the past;
 - (b) new Groups which had not received Grant Aid funding in the past;
 - (c) projects concerned with Older People following their greater emphasis in the new Council Corporate Plan 2015-20; and

- (d) projects involving young people;
- (3) That the following revisions be made to the *'Introduction'* section of the Grant Aid Application Form:
- (a) Older People to be listed as a separate Key Priority; and
 - (b) the reference to "Domestic Violence" to be amended to "Domestic Abuse";
- (4) That the following revisions be made to the *'What You Can Apply For'* section of the Grant Aid Application Form:
- (a) the funding of Feasibility Studies to also be considered in future; and
 - (b) the removal of the example of a Counselling Service from the second paragraph;
- (5) That the following revisions be made to the *'Factors Taken into Account'* section of the Grant Aid Application Form:
- (a) the support of your local Town or Parish Council to be added as a factor;
 - (b) the impact of the project upon the District to be added as a factor; and
 - (c) a further comment to caution applicants that failure to disclose other funding received or applied for would jeopardise their bid;
- (6) That the following revisions be made to the *'Grant Conditions'* section of the Grant Aid Application Form:
- (a) the requirement to provide the District Council with an evaluation of the funded project after six months to be added;
- (7) That the following revisions be made to the *'Grant Decision'* section of the Grant Aid Application Form:
- (a) the Portfolio Holder was advised by Officers before taking a decision to be added to the first paragraph;
- (8) That the question on the Application Form in the *'About Your Organisation'* section concerning the management structure of the applying Group be expanded to include whether the Group was part of a larger organisation;
- (9) That *'Support of Older People'* be added to the *'Contribution towards Relevant Council Objectives'* section of the Funding Matrix for the Grant Aid Scheme Scorecard;
- (10) That the requirement to provide the District Council with a copy of the Group's Safeguarding Policy if they answered 'Yes' to the question concerning working with Children and Vulnerable Adults be added to the *'Grant Aid Application - Check List'*;
- (11) That the revised Grant Aid Scheme and Application Documents be included as part of the final report of the Panel; and

(12) That an initial analysis of the Grants funded by Three-Year Service Level Agreements, due to expire in March 2016, be undertaken at the next meeting.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Panel noted that there was no other urgent business to consider.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted that its next meeting was scheduled for 31 March 2015.

CHAIRMAN