

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel **Date:** 31 March 2015

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 8.00 pm

Members Present: Mrs C P Pond (Chairman), A Mitchell MBE, S Murray, Mrs G Shiell, B Surtees and Mrs H Kane

Other Councillors: -

Apologies: A Boyce

Officers Present: J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services)), G Wallis (Community, Health & Wellbeing Manager), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

14. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

There had been no substitute Members appointed for this meeting.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor C Pond declared a personal interest in agenda item 6, Review of Grant Aid Scheme for Voluntary and Community Organisations, by virtue of being a volunteer with Loughton Voluntary Care. The Councillor had determined that her interest was not pecuniary and would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the issue.

(b) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor H Kane declared a personal interest in agenda item 6, Review of the Grant Aid Scheme for Voluntary and Community Organisations, by virtue of being involved with WAY 2000. The Councillor had determined that her interest was not pecuniary and would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the issue.

(c) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor B Surtees declared a personal interest in agenda item 6, Review of the Grant Aid Scheme for Voluntary and Community Organisations, by virtue of his son being a customer of Zinc Arts. The Councillor had determined that his interest was not pecuniary and would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the issue.

16. MINUTES

Resolved:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2015 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment to minute 11:

(a) "...to allow Councillors to donate **part of** their basic allowance ...".

17. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel noted its Terms of Reference, as previously agreed.

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

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

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.

C Overend drew the attention of the Panel to the Monitoring Major Grants Form, and the Visits to Long Term Funding Groups Form, attached at Appendix 2 to the report. The Panel noted that Officers undertook follow-up visits to Groups following the award of a Grant, to assess how successful an approved scheme had been and discuss issues of mutual concern. It was not possible for Officers to visit all such Groups but, over a period of time, those Groups in receipt of funding via a Service Level Agreement were visited along with a cross section of other Groups. Although the issues discussed with each Group would vary, the Monitoring Form gave an indication of the topics which could be discussed. Appointments were always made for visits with the relevant Group; there were no surprise visits scheduled.

Cllr Kane added that many progress meetings were held with the bodies in receipt of three-year Grants. C Overend reminded the Panel that the receipt of Grants were predominantly evidence based, i.e. invoices had to be produced, although sometimes an order form was accepted for payment in advance. Councillor Surtees suggested that the Town or Parish Council could be involved in the monitoring process, especially if they already had an involvement, financial or otherwise, in the project. C Overend acknowledged that Groups had to declare on the Application Form whether they were seeking funding from other bodies, and local Councils could be involved in the future if they had a connection with the project. The Portfolio Holder added that the Council assisted organisations to obtain further funding from other sources, such as the National Lottery.

C Overend highlighted the information on the current advertising and consultation arrangements for the Grant Aid Scheme, which had been attached at Appendix 3 of the report. This listed the methods currently used to advertise the Grant Aid Scheme, and the consultees for each application form received.

The Panel noted that there was no mention of advertising the Scheme on Social Media, and this should be considered as a method of communicating with younger people to make them aware of the Scheme. It was also highlighted that the '*Think Loughton!*' newsletter issued by the Loughton Town Council was not listed, and that the scheme could also be advertised on the websites of the Town and Parish Councils throughout the District. J Chandler suggested the Council could produce a

press release following the publication of each Portfolio Holder Decision for the Grant Aid Scheme.

Cllr Murray informed the Panel that all groups who received Grant Aid from Loughton Town Council were invited to the Annual Parish Meeting to receive a certificate. The District Council could operate a similar arrangement whereby Groups could be invited to receive a cheque or certificate from the Chairman before either each Council meeting or maybe just a selected few Council meetings. G Wallis added that a networking event could be held before the Council meeting when the Groups were due to receive their certificate or cheque, and to which other Grant providing bodies could be invited.

Cllr Mitchell suggested the use of the term 'Senior' rather than 'Older' or 'Elderly'. The Panel recognised the import of this point but decided to discuss it fully at the next meeting when the final report of the Panel for 2014/15 would be discussed.

With regard to the current consultation arrangements, the Panel felt that the relevant Parish Clerk should be added to the list if the local Council had been involved with the project.

C Overend presented a list of the bodies in receipt of Grant Aid from the Council via a three-year Service Level agreement, which had been attached at Appendix 1 of the report. The criteria for the award of a Service Level Agreement were not dissimilar to that for a one-off Grant. However, the money was granted towards core activities as opposed to a particular project. In addition, the Group concerned had to have received at least one previous Grant totalling £1,000 or more, be the main or an important provider of the service within the District, and be working in partnership with the Council – ideally for a number of years.

C Overend added that there were four different levels of Service Level Agreements which the Council considered. Once the current list had been reviewed, some bodies could be removed whilst other bodies could become more relevant and qualify for additional funding; the amounts quoted were per annum. There were some local bodies that could be considered for a Service Level Agreement when the next tranche began in April 2016. The Council requested minutes of meetings, progress reports and case studies from all the bodies with a Service Level Agreement, and an Officer and/or the Portfolio Holder would attend the Annual General Meeting of all bodies. It was pointed out that the Epping Forest District Citizens Advice Bureau and Voluntary Action Epping Forest had separate Service Level Agreements with the Council which were not included in the figure of £83,453 quoted in previous meetings. The Citizens Advice Bureau also received extra monies from the Housing Revenue Account and the Housing Service Improvements and Enhancements Fund for the provision of Debt Counsellors within the District and other such services.

Cllr Surtees opined that a Group in receipt of a three-year Service Level Agreement from the Council should demonstrate added value to the District from its use of the funding. Cllr Murray felt that consideration should also be given as to whether Sports Clubs and Museums should continue to be funded through Service Level Agreements. C Overend stated that the Sports Clubs and Museums currently on the list were considered to be unique within the District and reassured the Panel that their continued funding via a Service Level Agreement would be reviewed during the next twelve months. The Panel also noted that some Youth Groups did not apply for a Service Level Agreement, even when encouraged; hence WAY 2000 was the only youth group on the list.

Cllr Pond requested the Panel to consider whether the principle of the Council providing funding for Groups via three-year Service Level Agreements should be continued. The Panel was in strong agreement that the principle of Service Level Agreements should be supported.

Cllr Surtees highlighted that Zinc Arts worked with socially excluded and disabled people, which was not explicitly stated in the description in the Appendix. C Overend suggested that the Panel could visit Zinc Arts in 2015/16, to see their work for themselves. Zinc Arts also accentuated the debate about whether the Grant Aid Scheme should only fund specific projects, or whether it should be allowed to contribute to an organisation's general operating costs. And Zinc Arts also raised the question about whether the Grant Aid Scheme should be used for Organisations whose reach stretched beyond the boundaries of the District. Cllr Surtees informed the Panel that Zinc Arts were very keen to get more involved with the local populace, and a visit from the Panel during the next municipal year could be an opportunity to boost this process.

Cllr Pond suggested that the Panel could also visit the Epping Forest District Citizens Advice Bureau and Voluntary Action Epping Forest during 2015/16, as well as invite both organisations to meetings of the Panel as it investigated further the Grants distributed via Service Level Agreements. The Panel was reminded that the next meeting would begin a little earlier than normal at 6.00pm, and would consider the final report of the Panel for 2015/16.

Resolved:

- (1) That the relevant Local Council be requested to assist in the monitoring of major grants if they had a connection, financial or otherwise, with the project concerned;
- (2) That the Grant Aid Scheme be advertised on Social Media to make younger people aware of the Scheme's existence;
- (3) That the feasibility of inviting Groups in receipt of Grant Aid to Council meetings to receive a cheque or certificate from the Chairman be investigated, along with the possibility of holding a networking event prior to the Council meeting concerned with other Grant providing bodies invited;
- (4) That the Grant Aid Scheme be advertised also on the websites of Local Town & Parish Councils, as well as in the '*Think Loughton!*' newsletter issued by Loughton Town Council;
- (5) That the relevant Parish Clerk be added to the list of consultees if the local Council had already been involved with the project;
- (6) That the principle of providing local Groups with Grant Aid funding via three-year Service Level Agreements be supported; and
- (7) That a number of the Groups currently in receipt of Grant Aid via a Service Level Agreement be visited by the Panel and invited to a meeting of the Panel during 2015/16, including Zinc Arts, Epping Forest District Citizens Advice Bureau and Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other urgent business for the Panel to consider.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted that its final meeting in 2014/15 was scheduled for 16 April 2015, and would commence at 6.00pm.

CHAIRMAN