

## ***Decision by Portfolio Holder***



**Report reference: HCS-020-2020/21**

**Date of report: 17 March 2021**

**Epping Forest  
District Council**

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**Portfolio: Housing and Community Services – Cllr H Whitbread**

**Author: Rachel Smith (Ext 2710)**

**Democratic Services: J Leither**

**Subject: Grants for Residents Groups (Resident Involvement Support Grant & Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant)**

### **Decision:**

**(1) That the Support Grants available to recognised Resident Groups be increased as follows:**

- i) The maximum Start-up Support Grant that may be claimed be increased from £100 to £125.**
- ii) The maximum annual Support Grant that may be claimed be increased from £250 to £312.**

**(2) That a new Support Grant be made available to recognised Resident Groups to honour the cost of video conferencing as follows:**

- i) The maximum annual Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant that may be claimed be set at £150.**

**(3) That delegated authority be granted to the Service Director (HRA Projects) to agree all future requests from recognised Resident Groups, for the award of Video Conferencing Licence Support Grants.**

<b>ADVISORY NOTICE:</b>	
<b><i>A Portfolio Holder may not take a decision on a matter on which he/she has declared a Pecuniary interest. A Portfolio Holder with a non-pecuniary interest must declare that interest when exercising delegated powers.</i></b>	
I have read and approve/ <del>do not approve</del> (delete as appropriate) the above decision:	
Comments/further action required: None	
Signed: Councillor H Whitbread	Date: 25th March 2021
<i>Non-pecuniary interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of non-pecuniary interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:</i>	<i>Dispensation granted by Standards Committee: Yes/No or n/a</i>
None	
<b>Office use only:</b>	
Call-in period begins: 25 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	Expiry of Call-in period: 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2021

***After completion, one copy of this pro forma should be returned to Democratic Services IMMEDIATELY***

**Reason for decision:**

The financial support that the Council affords recognised Residents Groups within the District has not been reviewed since 2011.

A review undertaken of Support Grants available to recognised Residents Groups indicates that the level of Support Grant available to groups is no longer sufficient to cover the administration costs of running a group.

It is the Council's ambition for members of recognised Residents Groups to feel supported and equipped with the right tools to enable their groups to function, whether that be in the form of training, access to a dedicated Resident Involvement Officer who can offer advice and support to residents where support is needed, or to provide financial support to help cover the costs of running a residents group and minor estate enhancements.

The Council currently provides financial support in the way of a Support Grant available to support the setting up and running costs of recognised Residents Groups, set at £100 on start up and thereafter annual Support Grants of up to £250 on application. It is recommended that these Grants be increased to £125 and £312.00 respectively; an increase determined using a "time value of money" comparison.

Recognising advances in technology and customer preferences, it is recommended that a new Support Grant be agreed, to fund subscriptions to appropriate video conferencing platforms, to enable groups to continue to run meetings and communicate with their members, the wider community and partners during the pandemic and beyond, should this be the preferred medium of communication. It is recommended that an annual Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant be made available to recognised Residents Groups on application of up to £150.

For reasons of efficiency, in future it is recommended that delegated authority be granted to the Service Director (HRA Projects) to agree all future requests from recognised Resident Groups, for the Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant.

<b>Initialed as original copy by Portfolio Holder:</b>
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### **Options considered and rejected:**

1. Not to increase the amount of the Start-up Support Grant and Annual Support Grant.
2. To agree a different amount available in relation to the Start-up Support Grant and Annual Support Grant.
3. Not to agree the creation of a new annual grant to support recognised Residents Groups with the cost of video conferencing licences.
4. To agree a different amount available, in relation to a new annual grant to support recognised Residents Groups with the cost of video conferencing licences.
5. Not to grant delegated authority to the Service Director (HRA Projects) to agree all future requests from recognised Residents Groups to access a Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant.

### **Background Report:**

1. The District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement was developed in conjunction with the Epping Forest District Tenants Forum and formally agreed by both parties in March 2000. The Epping Forest District Tenant and Leaseholders Federation formally agreed an updated version of the Agreement in November 2011, which was further updated by the Tenant and Leaseholders Panel in 2018. Under the Agreement, the Council supports existing resident groups and encourages new groups by providing financial support. This support takes the form of annual Resident Group Support Grants of £100 on start-up and annual grants of up to £250 thereafter. Groups can also apply for funding from delegated budgets for minor estate enhancements of up to a maximum of £500. In 2016, delegated authority was given to the Director of Communities, to agree all future requests for annual Resident Group Support Grants (HGG-005-2016/17 refers), and in 2018 for the granting of delegated budgets for minor estate enhancements (HSG-021-2018/19, refers).
2. Only Resident Groups that meet the Council's recognition criteria are considered as formally recognised by the Council. Included in the process of formal Resident Group recognition is the requirement for local estate-based agreements. These are drafted by the Council and must be agreed by new groups within three months of their Constitution being approved by their membership. Resident associations must apply for recognition by the Council each year.
3. The following Residents Groups are currently recognised by the Council:

Romelands Residents Association  
Ninefields Residents Association  
Romelands Residents Association  
Epping Forest Tenant and Leaseholder Panel  
Epping Forest Sheltered Forum

The following Residents Groups are working toward regaining / attaining recognition status:

Oakwood Hill Residents Association (OHRA)  
Shelly Residents Association  
Limes Farm Resident Association  
The Debden Panel  
Coopersale Residents Association  
Churchill Court Residents Association

It should be noted that although agreements are in place for the Epping Forest Tenant & Leaseholder Panel and Epping Forest Sheltered Forum, and as such are recognised by the Council, they do not receive Support Grants as the Council undertakes the administrative duties associated with these Panels, and nor do they have access to delegated budgets for minor estate enhancements.

4. The financial support the Council affords recognised Residents Groups within the District has not been reviewed since 2011.
5. A review undertaken of Support Grants available to recognised Residents Groups indicates that the level of Support Grant available to groups is no longer sufficient, to cover the administration costs of running a group.
6. It is the Council's ambition for members of recognised Residents Groups to feel supported and equipped with the right tools to enable their groups to function, whether that be in the form of training, access to a dedicated Resident Involvement Officer who can offer advice and support to residents where support is needed, or to provide financial support to help cover the costs of running a residents group and minor estate enhancements.
7. The Council currently provides financial support by way of two Support Grants which are available on application, to support the setting up and running costs of recognised Residents Groups. The value of these grants are £100 on start-up and thereafter £250 annually. A review of expenditure against previously awarded Support Grants show a need to review the current levels of Support Grant available. It is recommended that these grants be increased to £125 and £312 respectively; an increase determined using a "*time value of money*" comparison. Furthermore, in future years these amounts are increased in line with the cost of inflation.
8. Recognising advances in technology and customer preferences, it is also recommended that a new Support Grant be agreed, to fund licence subscriptions to appropriate video conferencing platforms, to enable groups to continue to run meetings and communicate with their members, the wider community and partners during the pandemic and beyond, should this be the preferred medium of communication. It is recommended that an annual Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant be made available to recognised Residents Groups on application of up to £150.
9. For reasons of efficiency, in future it is recommended that delegated authority be granted to the Service Director (HRA Projects) to agree all future requests from recognised Resident Groups, for the Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant.

#### **Resource Implications:**

A financial resource of £936 can be met from existing resources for recognised groups from the Resident Involvement Support Grant budget.

An additional £1,311 may be required from the Resident Involvement Support Grant budget should those Resident Groups who are currently working towards regaining / attaining recognition status and also qualify for the maximum allowance. Similarly, this could be financed from within existing resources. However, if more Residents Groups during the course of the year wish to start up, an additional budget provision will need to be found.

An additional budget provision will be required to honour the new annual Video Conferencing Licence Support Grant should it be agreed. In this regard, a financial resource of £450 will need to be made available should the all of the existing recognised groups apply for the grant. A

larger budget of £1350 may be required if all existing recognised groups and those working towards recognition apply for the grant.

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

Housing Act 1985

### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

These grants enable Resident Groups to take responsibility locally for improvements / issues that they feel are important to local residents. It is not possible to define any safer, cleaner and greener implications since it is for Residents Groups to decide what improvements / issues will be addressed. However, many of the Council's projects and ambitions are supported by these groups, such as "*More than Bricks and Mortar*", "*The Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act – Bin Project*" and "*Modernising Resident Involvement*", which all rely on meaningful communication with residents and have an emphasis on the Safer, Greener, Cleaner agenda.

### **Consultation Undertaken:**

Consultation with members of the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, recognised Resident Groups and those groups previously recognised, who are working towards regaining recognition status.

### **Background Papers:**

- District-wide Tenant Participation Agreement 2018-2021.
- Decision by Portfolio Holder in October 2016, "*Support Grants to Residents Associations*".

### **Impact Assessments:**

#### **Risk Management:**

The level of Support Grant entitlement that may be awarded to each recognised Resident Group has not been reviewed since 2011. If the amount of Support Grant entitlement is not increased, recognised Groups will struggle to fund the basic costs incurred in administration. This is particularly the case in larger groups where there are more members.

If a budget is not made available to support the expense of annual video conferencing licences, groups may struggle to continue to run meetings and communicate with their members, the wider community and partners during the pandemic. Notwithstanding the current pandemic, trends within the Sector show the use of video conferencing to be on the increase, which has become the preferred model of communication for many Residents Groups, enabling residents to involve a more diverse range of residents than ever before. Not providing a budget to cover the expense of video conferencing licences will stifle opportunity for resident engagement and prevent communities reaching out to residents and partners, which has become common place across the Sector.

### **Key Decision Reference (Y): N**

### **Equality Analysis:**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an Appendix to the report.