

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-002-2010/11

Date of meeting: 7 June 2010



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Well Being

Subject: Individual Grants Scheme

Responsible Officer: Julie Chandler (01992 564214).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That approval be given to the cessation of the Individual Grant Scheme and that £6,000 of the budget for this scheme be used to extend and enhance the annual Bursary Award Scheme for Young People aged 13 – 25.

(2) That it be noted that as a consequence of this arrangement a revenue saving of £4,000 per annum will be realised.

Executive Summary:

The Council currently allocates £10,000 per annum for provision of Grant Aid, for the benefit of talented individual sports players; coaches; athletes; musicians; performers and artists of all ages resident within the district. A maximum grant of £250 is awarded per individual towards costs associated with additional training, materials, equipment, competition entries and other 'new' activity to improve or enhance performance. However, this amount must only represent 50% of the total costs towards the new activity, with the remainder being provided by the applicant.

Only one individual grant can be awarded per person throughout the course of a financial year and all applications are initially assessed by officers from Sports and Arts Development, with a final decision being taken by the Leisure and Well Being Portfolio Holder on a six - weekly cycle in line with the Council's Committee cycle.

In addition to the Individual Grant Scheme, £3000 funding is allocated to provision of two annual Leisure Bursary Awards of £1,500, which are awarded to 1 x arts and 1 x sports person aged between 13- 25 years, towards their pursuit for excellence and as special recognition of their achievement. For Sports applicants, this may be competing at National and International level.

Following an Audit Review of Grant Aid in 2008, a recommendation was made for officers to review the individual Grants & Leisure Bursary Policy and process arrangements, by December 2009. This was in line with a policy review of the Council's Major Grants Scheme.

This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval for suggested changes to improve the allocation of Individual Grants and Leisure Bursaries from 2010/11.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Policy for Individual Grant and Leisure Bursary Schemes has been in place since the mid 1990's and has remained relatively unchanged during this time. In respect of individual grants, the current maximum level of grant awarded per individual is insufficient to make a real difference to the applicant, in terms of their potential development.

All applicants are required to equally match fund any grant awarded and this is a barrier to many individuals and families.

The current 'open' process for assessing applications throughout the financial year does not make efficient use of officer time.

The proposed new Bursary Award Scheme would enable the Council to increase its publicity and particularly through increasing opportunities for award winners to be ambassadors and positive role models for young people, at local events.

Other Options for Action:

- (i) To continue with the current policy and procedures for Individual Grants.
- (ii) To withdraw the funding available to local residents through Individual Grant Aid and Leisure Bursaries. However, in view of London 2012 Olympics and its associated Cultural programme, this decision could prevent the development of an Olympian or Paralympian, or outstanding artist from Epping Forest District.

Report:

1. The Council has operated an Individual Grants Scheme for approximately 15 years, to support talented local people from sports, music, performance and the Arts. The budget for this scheme has been provided on the basis of an annual inflationary increase over this time.
2. The current budget allocation for the Individual Grant Scheme is £10,000 per annum which is distributed to sports players, coaches, athletes, musicians; performers and artists of all ages resident within the district. A maximum of £250 Grant Aid is awarded per individual, towards costs associated with training, materials, equipment, competition entry and other activity to improve performance.
3. All grant applications are received and initially assessed by officers from Sports and Arts and then forwarded to the Leisure and Well - Being Portfolio Holder, who makes the final decision on whether or not they are acceptable and worthy of the Council's support, and the level of award appropriate.
4. Current policy requires applicants to secure match funding of 50% towards overall costs related to their application and people can only apply for one grant during the course of a financial year. Although grants are determined according the applicants' ability to meet set criteria, there is no means testing undertaken and it is therefore suggested that the process is not equitable, as the requirement for the applicant to provide 50% of the total amount is prohibitive to many people, as there are very limited opportunities currently available for raising match funding from other sources such as charities. Means testing of applicants has been suggested on previous occasions but has been rejected on the basis that it is impractical. It is recommended that there be no means testing of applicants under the enhanced bursary scheme.
5. In addition to the Individual Grant Scheme, the Council allocates £3000 per annum to

the provision of two annual Leisure Bursary Awards of £1,500, which are awarded to 1 x arts and 1 x sports person aged between 13 - 25 years. The Bursaries are provided to support young people in their pursuit of excellence and as special recognition of their achievement at National and International level. There is no requirement for individuals to match fund their bursary award, but applicants are required to attend an interview and winners may not re-apply for a period of 3 years.

6. In 2009, Internal Audit undertook an assessment of the Council's Grant Aid schemes, policies and procedures and as part of this review, a recommendation was made for Officers to review the Individual Grant Policy and procedures. This review was undertaken in December and the findings were as follows:

- In light of the high costs associated with individual progression and development in sports and the arts, it was felt that the current maximum grant award of £250 was now insufficient.
- The higher level of funding available through the Leisure Bursary Scheme enables young people to develop their skills and reach their potential more effectively and this has been demonstrated through the success of previous Bursary Award winners.
- The requirement for individuals to provide 50% of their total costs towards improving their performance prohibits some individuals and families from applying in the first place and this has been evidenced through local knowledge.
- The amount of time spent in processing 'ad hoc' grant applications throughout the year is inefficient and does not provide the opportunity to assess applications fairly against others and prevents an initial baseline from being set.
- It was agreed that the availability of more Leisure Bursaries ranging from £750 to £1500 would provide a better level of support to young talented individuals and the selection process for this would include a formal interview, where officers and Members would have the opportunity of meeting applicants, rather than judging the posted applications alone.
- The most effective way of administering the Bursary Awards would be for this to be undertaken centrally by the Communities, Policies and Research Assistant.
- Under an enhanced bursary scheme, best use could be made of promotional opportunities involving successful applicants.

7. If the proposal to amalgamate the Individual Grant Scheme and Leisure Bursary is agreed, a saving of £4,000 per annum could be made.

Resource Implications:

The current budget for the Individual Grant Scheme and Leisure Bursary is £13,000 per annum. If the two schemes are amalgamated there is an opportunity to make a saving of £4,000 per annum.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The process for assessing annual Bursary Awards would include a written application; initial assessment and short – listing, followed by a formal interview by officers and Members, therefore providing a more controlled and effective system of support.

Guidelines have been drawn up to reflect these new arrangements, which will replace the current Leisure Bursary application form.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

N/A

Consultation Undertaken:

Internal consultation undertaken and informal consultation with local young people.

Background Papers:

Audit of Grant Aid 2009.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
N/A.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
N/A.