

Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Panel



Report Reference: GAR-001-2014/15

Date of meeting: 14 January 2015

SCRUTINY



Subject: Grant Aid Scheme – Scoping and Terms of Reference

Responsible Officer: Lyndsay Swan (01992 564146)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To consider the proposed scope and terms of reference for the review of the Grant Aid Scheme for voluntary, community and leisure groups, and to recommend these to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for adoption;**
- (2) To agree timescales for the review as set out in this report; and**
- (3) To discuss the arrangements for the review, specifically:**
 - (a) times/frequency of meetings of the Panel;**
 - (b) evidence required by officers/members;**
 - (c) issues to be covered by the review; and**
 - (d) any proposals for consultation.**

Report:

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 16 September 2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the establishment of a new Task and Finish Panel to review the Council's Grant Aid Scheme for Sports, Arts, Leisure and Community Groups in terms of the overall policy/guidance and procedures for Major Grants and Service Level Agreements including those for the determination of applications, and those for the pre and post determination stages.

Background Information

2. Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides specific authority for the Council to incur expenditure on anything which is in the interests of and will bring benefit to its area. This includes the activities of voluntary and community groups acting for public service. Many local authorities developed grant aid schemes for such purposes with 'dedicated' budgets and set criteria against which applications can be considered and determined.

3. The sector plays key roles as follows:

- Building 'social capital' by promoting self-organised communities and by encouraging volunteering and active citizenship;
- Providing services to local people and to particular groups in the community, thereby meeting social and individual needs;
- Advocacy on behalf of communities;

- Contributing expertise on policy formulation through dialogue with the Council and the wider statutory sector;
- Providing employment and income, thereby contributing to economic output; and
- Delivering public services and offering greater customer choice.

4. Recognising the value of these roles, the District Council has had a grant aid scheme in place since the 1980's. The policy governing the Scheme has been revised several times during this period in the light of changing Council priorities and as a reflection of changes in society. The most recent extensive review place in 2009 although minor amendments are made to the scheme on an ongoing basis in the light of experience.

5. Since 2001 decision-making with regard to the grants has been the responsibility of the relevant Portfolio Holder, currently the Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing and Community Services. Prior to this, applications were determined by a Policy and Resources Sub-Committee which was later to become the Grant Aid Panel.

6. The Grant Aid Scheme currently has an annual budget of £94,970. This is made up of:

- One-off grants of up to £5,000 (20 in 2013/14) towards specific projects; and
- 15 grants of up to £5,000, totalling approximately £47,000, to support community groups over the longer term. These are funded under 3 year Service Level Agreements (SLAs) all of which expire in March 2016.

7. In addition to this the Council currently provides 2 larger grants to VAEF and the CAB totalling approximately £153,000 in 2014/15.

8. In December 2014, as part of a review of the General Fund in order to effect savings, the Cabinet agreed to reduce the budget for the Grant Aid Scheme for 2015/16 by the following amounts:

- £7,550 which had been allocated to Homestart (this was an amount subsidising the rent payable by Homestart for their premises at Oakwood Hill, Loughton and was separate from the £94,970 referred to above). Homestart ceased functioning during 2014 and it was decided not to re-allocate their funding); and
- An overall reduction in the one-off grant 'pot' of £11,517, reducing the Grant Aid Budget to £83,453 from April 2015 onwards.

9. The review will have to be carried out in the light of this overall budget reduction.

10. The Scheme's current eligibility criteria and policies have been developed in line with the Council's leisure and cultural strategies which have recently been reviewed. In its scrutiny of the Scheme the Panel may wish to consider recent revisions to these strategies.

11. Locally the Council has a long history of supporting, working and consulting with individual voluntary groups and VAEF the 'umbrella' body for the voluntary sector in the District. This review will provide an opportunity to ensure that the strategic and operational linkages between the voluntary and community sector, the Council and other partner bodies are strengthened further.

12. The proposed terms of reference for the Task and Finish Panel are set out at Appendix 1 to this report. It is proposed that the review be managed as follows:

- (a) to report findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to submit a final report for consideration by the Committee and the Council by [date to be set at the initial Panel meeting];
- (b) to take into consideration the budget available;
- (c) to gather evidence in relation to the review, where the Panel considers it

appropriate, through visits to some of the Schemes that have received grant funding, the consideration of relevant information and good practice elsewhere;

- (d) to have due regard to relevant legislation and the Council's procedures;
- (e) to consult political groups and independent Councillors during the review process;
- (f) to consult other parties, such as voluntary and community groups, if the Panel considers it appropriate to do so; and
- (g) To meet the following timescales:
 - Task and Finish Panel to meet on 15 January 2015 to agree the Panel's Terms of reference and the scope of the review;
 - to undertake appropriate stakeholder consultation by [date to be agreed at the initial Panel meeting];
 - to bring forward final proposals to the Panel by [date to be agreed at the initial Panel meeting];
 - to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee by [date to be agreed at the initial Panel meeting]; and
 - to report to Council by [date to be agreed at the initial Panel meeting].

13. The review is due for completion by [date to be agreed at the initial Panel meeting] to allow time for the final report to be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a view to implementation by [date to be agreed at the initial Panel meeting].

Recommendations:

14. The Panel is asked to:
- (a) agree the scope and terms of reference for the review;
 - (b) agree the timescales for the review; and
 - (c) discuss options for undertaking the review.

Appendix:

- Task and Finish Panel Terms of Reference. Grant Aid Scheme