

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

13th September 2016

VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR GRANTS PROGRAMME 2017/18

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Bill Hartnett, Community Leadership & Partnership inc. Voluntary Sector
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis, Head of Community Services
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report contains recommendations as to the funding split and themes for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) grants process for 2017/18. See Appendix 1. The theme titles are aligned with the Council's strategic purposes. In respect of the £75,000 Investing Grant, the Committee is asked to consider a 3 year procurement process for this theme.
- 1.2 The Executive Committee is also asked to consider how it will deal with any underspend in the grant pot at the end of financial years.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee are requested to **RECOMMEND** that

- 1) **the themes and percentages of funding be allocated for the 2017/18 voluntary and community sector grants process as set out in Appendix 1;**
- 2) **the £75,000 Investing Grant be allocated for financial/debt support and problem solving advice and be awarded via a 3 year contract; and**
- 3) **underspend in the grants at the end of any year be put back into balances.**

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

13th September 2016

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The current voluntary and community sector grants budget is £241,000. This report recommends the continuation of this budget allocation in 2017/18 but with the £75,000 Investing Grant awarded on a 3 year contract. This contract would be subject to the annual funding approval of the Executive Committee.
- 3.2 There have always been small amounts of underspend every financial year. This is because the grants requested do not exactly match the amount available or because during the financial year the projects have not achieved all aspects of their initial proposals and the funding has been altered to reflect this. For the last two years any underspends at the end of the financial year have been put back into balances. The Committee is asked to approve the process for all future years.

Background

- 3.3 Each year the grants team look at how the Grant Programme can best serve the local VCS while aligning the programme to the Council's Strategic Purposes. For an overview on how the 2016/17 grants programme aligned to the strategic purposes see Appendix 2.
- 3.4 The Grant Programme includes the Stronger Communities grants which enables small groups to deliver a wide variety of projects. Examples of projects funded to date for 2016/17 include:
- Funk up your Junk project;
 - Celebration of the Queen's Birthday;
 - Two week activity programme for children aged 8 to 13 during the six week summer holiday;
 - Men in Sheds project;
 - Older Peoples' Choir.

A full list of all funded organisations is published on the Council's website.

Legal Implications

- 3.5 The Council needs to continue to ensure that it has a transparent and fair grants scheme, ensuring that we comply with the Local Government Transparency Code 2014.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

13th September 2016

- 3.6 Under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to incur expenditure which in its opinion is in the interest of and will bring direct benefit to its area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants. The direct benefit accruing must also be commensurate with the expenditure to be incurred.
- 3.7 There is a further power to make grants to voluntary organisations providing recreational facilities under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.8 The themes and proposed split of funding for the 2017/18 Grants programme were updated in 2016/17 to reflect the Council's Strategic Purposes and customer demand as follows. Officers propose that this funding split as detailed below remains unchanged for 2017/18:

Strategic Purpose	Funding allocation 2016/17	Funding allocation 2017/18
Help me to be financially independent	£85,000	£85,000
Help me to live my life independently	£65,000	£65,000
Provide good things for me to do, see and visit	£6,000	£6,000
Keep my place safe and looking good	£15,000	£15,000
Help me run a successful business	£50,000	£50,000
Stronger Communities Grant Programme - 3 rounds per year	£16,000	£16,000

From the £241,000 budget, £4,000 is retained for the delivery of training to the VCS and to facilitate external funding workshops/events.

- 3.9 Deadline dates for both the main grants programme and the Stronger Communities grants programme have been set in order to ensure the smooth delivery of the programme. The timetable also takes account of the Overview and Scrutiny recommendation that sufficient time is given to enable Voluntary & Community Sector organisations to plan constructively for the year ahead. See Appendix 3 for timescales.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

13th September 2016

- 3.10 To enable the Council to deliver its grants programme, Officers will need to continue to work closely with the Communications Team to ensure that a full and informative guide to the new procedure is implemented and that Officers are engaging with the full range of VCS organisations and groups within the local area.
- 3.11 By working closely with BARN & local VCS organisations on delivering our long term training & support, we can ensure that the sector will receive an agreed standard of training with the Council ensuring that we receive value for money. Outcomes initially identified are:
- **Increase volunteers skills in bid writing**
 - **Facilitate events that invite external funders to Redditch**
 - **Encourage partnership working within the Boroughs VCS**
 - **Event to raise awareness of local VCS organisations**
- 3.12 An approach has been made by the current provider of the £75K Investing Grant for consideration to be given to awarding this grant on a longer term contract. This is in order for the project to develop and expand within the Borough. Such a proposal would be in accordance with the Council's policy for funding VCS organisations using the Shopping, Investing and Giving Framework attached as Appendix 4.
- 3.13 National experience has shown that the benefits of funding being awarded for a longer term are:
- A clear service specification enables services to be developed and shaped over time and in response to identified community needs.
 - A provider can build up a longer term relationship with the local community and other local VCS organisations and have a better understanding and ability to react to changing local needs.
 - Enhances the long term financial stability of the service provider. It is common for VCS organisations to be only financial stable on a year by year basis as one year grants are received.
 - Strengthens the organisations ability to attract funding from other sources, particularly larger national funding streams. Frequently to access these funds an organisation has to evidence a 3 year Sustainability Plan. In addition being able to identify matchfunding strengthens a bid application. Attracting additional funding will add value and increase service provision and accessibility for Redditch residents.
 - If an organisation has a desire to have premises in the Borough, funding that is only guaranteed for one year restricts lease options and the availability of external funding for this purpose.

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

13th September 2016

- Crucially it assists the bedding in of effective partnerships with other local agencies from all sectors and including ourselves. In particular a longer term partnership arrangement would support the financial inclusion work that the Council is undertaking within locality teams.
- Experience from other areas has shown that stable/secure funding for the generalist advice service enhances opportunities for successful funding applications involving 'add on' services such as paid debt caseworkers, welfare benefits caseworkers and projects designed to reach people in most need in the community. The ability to secure an office base would enable volunteer recruitment and retention from the local community to be increased, and to grow advice provision with the knock on effect of enhanced job opportunities.

3.14 If a 3 year grant was approved, this would be procured in accordance with our Financial Regulations and against a detailed contract specification. The specification would require the provision of free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to enable Redditch residents to deal with a wide range of issues including benefits, housing, money advice, employment, consumer, relationships and taxation. The nature of the assistance provided would depend on the clients needs. Service Standards would be set out and there would a requirement to work in partnership with the Council. In addition any contract would set out how it supports the Council's Strategic Purposes. In particular a 3 year contract would enable the Council to better meet the delivery of its strategic purpose of "Help me to be financially independent".

3.15 The Council currently provides high level financial advice and support through a Financial Support Framework. This enables Officers to pull support from a number of providers, using the one most suitable for the individual customer needs. This is currently funded through the Essential Living Fund (ELF), however grant funding for ELF has ceased and the current RBC budget will not be sufficient to fund this in future.

Having analysed the type of support provided through this framework, much of it could be provided through the VCS via a service level agreement as suggested in 3.14. This would significantly reduce the budget needed for the very high level intensive support that will still be needed for a small number of customers.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

13th September 2016

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.16 The 2016/17 grants programme has supported 22 projects under the main grant fund with 21 projects/events being funded in the first two rounds via the Stronger Communities fund.
- 3.17 The 2016/17 Grants Programme received 44 applications from organisations, with the programme seeing several new organisations applying to the programme who had not applied to this fund previously.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Where needed the Grants Officer identifies external funding streams and invites external organisations to host events to raise awareness of the funding streams they have available to the local VCS. Officers have also made themselves available for one to one sessions to support funding applications for both internal and external opportunities. Redditch Borough Council's grant programme is widely advertised both locally and county wide.
- 4.2 The Council has an approved Grants Policy which clearly sets out how grants are awarded. It alleviates the risk to the Council from any organisations receiving funding and which then subsequently closes. It also encourages organisations to be not solely reliable on this grant funding.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Themes and funding split
Appendix 2 - Overview of aligning to strategic purposes
Appendix 3 - Timetable - Main Grants Programme and Stronger Communities Grants
Appendix 4 – Shopping, Investing and Giving Framework

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Local Government Transparency Code 2014
- Voluntary Sector Task Group Report 2014
- Reference Executive Committee report 2010

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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