

Appendix 1 - Councillor Community Grants Scheme – Feedback on Proposal

The following table sets out responses from VCS representatives, relevant officers and Councillors regarding the proposal to move from a competitive grants process to a Councillor Community Grants Scheme. Issues are listed which have been raised and where possible a response has been given which may address the issue.

	Issue raised	Response
1.	The scheme could be viewed as a good opportunity for the VCS in Redditch to get to know their local Councillors better and for Councillors to gain a better understanding of the groups operating in their local area and in Redditch as a whole.	This is one of the major benefits of the proposed scheme.
2.	In some cases, VCS groups would welcome the lifting of the burden of writing applications forms.	The complexity of the process and the application forms has been a consistent criticism of the current scheme over the years. The proposed scheme would address this issue by taking away the burden of having to fill in a long application form.
3.	Without set criteria (as in the current scheme) VCS representatives were unsure about what projects/initiatives/service they could request funding for.	<p>VCS groups have been assured that the spirit of the proposed scheme is still the same as the current scheme so community projects focussed on similar themes would be welcomed.</p> <p>A list of types of projects which Councillors would be looking to fund needs to be drawn up by Officers and distributed to VCS groups and included in Councillor Guidance notes once the new scheme is launched.</p>
4.	Concerns were raised by VCS organisations about those organisations whose projects focussed town wide. How would they know which Councillors to target and will it be difficult to convince Councillors to fund their projects rather than something in specific ward areas?	<p>The scheme has already been changed in light of feedback around this issue, however, it is acknowledged by officers that this could pose a problem to those groups who target their work across the whole of Redditch.</p> <p>VCS groups who fall into this category would be advised to approach all Councillors if they felt their project benefitted people from all areas in Redditch.</p> <p>Training provided to Councillors will cover the fact that some organisations and groups target all of Redditch and will encourage them to find ways that they</p>

		might apportion their funding pot between groups in the local ward and those that target the whole of Redditch as well as communities in their own ward.
5.	VCS organisations felt that existing personal relationships with Councillors would have a bearing on how successful they may be.	Groups who already have a good relationship with their local Councillor(s) are likely to find it easier to make those first approaches for funding. However, this gives VCS groups an incentive to forge new positive relationships with their local Councillor(s) and other Councillors in Redditch. Training given to Councillors will cover the need for them to look beyond personal relationships and take this opportunity to find out what else is out there before they make any decisions about their funding pot.
6.	Concerns were raised about the level of inconsistency which may arise from 29 different Councillors making decisions about how to spend grant funding. Some Councillors may only require a quick chat whereas others may want more information, statistics and evidence before being convinced to fund projects.	This is a potential problem of the scheme. The Grants Team though training can try to encourage councillors to be as consistent as possible in the way they make their decisions throughout the process.
7.	Some concerns have been raised about accountability of the funding and ensuring funding is spent wisely.	<p>Pending approval of this new scheme, the VCS Grants Policy will be refreshed to take into account this new way of working and how to ensure councillors are accountable for their spend. The Policy will still set out basic rules about what types of organisations and projects can be funded. Monitoring arrangements will still be in place which will be undertaken through the Grants Team.</p> <p>It is also suggested that some onus be put on leaders of each political group to ensure that Councillors within their group are spending money in accordance with the Grants Policy.</p>
8.	Some concerns have been raised around the impact the proposed scheme will have on planning projects.	Officers need to consider this issue and offer guidance through the policy and guidance notes. Flexibility around agreement and timing of release of funds for groups could be built into the process to circumvent potential problems which could arise.

9.	<p>There were queries around underspend and what happened to any funding left over. It was also asked if the organisations themselves would be able to carry over funding into the next financial year.</p>	<p>The County Council model permits councillors to carry over a £1000 underspend into the next financial year. This is something that needs to be considered and written into the policy and guidance notes. Current policy stipulates that grant funding needs to be spent within the grant year so it is suggested this remains the same for this scheme.</p>
10.	<p>Questions around funding levels and risk have been raised by the VCS. Will there will be a capped amount that community organisations can receive determined by their status e.g. whether they are constituted or not?</p>	<p>The current VCS Grants Policy and process does have strict guidelines around what levels of funding the different types of organisations can receive. For example, the Policy states that new organisations only in existence for a year can only receive £5, 0000 from the Major Grants Pot until they are able to demonstrate a good track record of financial management through their accounts.</p> <p>The current Stronger Communities Pot encourages grassroots and community groups to apply but there is only £500 available to these types of groups. It is suggested that officers build in some criteria into the guidance and policy for the new scheme ensuring that levels of funding being allocated are commensurate to the type of organisation which is applying.</p>