

CABINET

12 OCTOBER 2005

COMMUNITY REVENUE GRANTS – REVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR 2006/07

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES

Contact Officer: Sally Horne Tel No: 01962 848582

RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB747 'Community Grants – Policy and Review 2004/05' 03 December 2003

CAB1013 'Community Grants – Revenue Awards 2005/06' 08 February 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In preparation for the 2006/07 Community Revenue grants process a review has been undertaken of the policies and criteria. As a result a number of amendments have been implemented which provide the grant allocations with an increased strategic focus. This report seeks approval of the amended priorities and the related changes to the criteria and application form.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That Cabinet approve the amended application criteria, as outlined in Appendix 1, for the community revenue grants in 2006/07.
- 2 That Cabinet approve the amended grant priorities, as outlined in Appendix 2, for the community revenue grants in 2006/07.
- 3 That Cabinet note the amended application form, as outlined in Appendix 3, for the community revenue grants in 2006/07.

CABINET

12 OCTOBER 2005

COMMUNITY REVENUE GRANTS – REVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR 2006/07

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES

DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present an overview of the review which has taken place of the policies and criteria for the Community Revenue Grants awarded annually to voluntary and community sector organisations and to seek the approval of the revised criteria and grant policies prior to the release of application packs for this funding stream for 2006/07.

2 The Review Process

- 2.1 As part of the ongoing process of managing the grants an informal review is undertaken on an annual basis. Ordinarily this process makes minor amendments to update the criteria.
- 2.2 The last review, which took place in 2003, concentrated on the recommendations of the Best Value Review and primarily considered the criteria and assessment process. This was undertaken internally by officers and agreed by Cabinet in November 2003. In preparation for the revenue grants in 2006/07, it was considered that a full review of the policies and criteria was required.
- 2.3 Since the 2003 review a number of developments have taken place affecting the voluntary and community sector, including the negotiation of the Compact, the publication of the Community Strategy through the Local Strategic Partnership and the emergence of Government policies on children and young people, namely the Children Act 2004 and the green paper Youth Matters. It was felt important that these developments are reflected in the grants process. This has also presented the opportunity to more closely focus the grants to the Council's own Corporate Strategy.
- 2.4 An officer working group was assembled comprising of the Council's Head of Policy, Head of Community Development, Policy Officer, Partnership & External Funding Officer as well as the Chief Executive of Winchester Area Community Action (WACA). This working group used the Community Strategy and cross referenced it with the Corporate Strategy, the delivery areas of the voluntary and community sector and current grant priority areas. From this analysis and process nine draft priorities emerged across the themes of the community strategy – including from the housing, health & wellbeing and social inclusion themes.
- 2.5 Consultation on these nine priorities, which are detailed in Appendix 1, has taken place with the two Members with a remit for grants – the Portfolio Holders for Healthy and Inclusive Communities and for Culture, Heritage and Sport. The feedback and comments of these Portfolio Holders is reflected in the amended priorities. The relevant officers in community, arts and housing have also been consulted.

3 Priority Area Changes

3.1 For a number of years the grant priorities have been:

- a) Projects and services which promote social inclusion
- b) Provision of services and activities for young people
- c) Provision of services and activities for the elderly
- d) Projects that help to improve access to activities and services that are not readily available.

3.2 Whilst these priorities are based on the corporate priorities and departmental strategies, they have lacked distinct ties with policies. The areas incorporated an extremely wide range of activities making it difficult to sift and prioritise the huge number of applications which the funding stream attracts each year (over 40 applications were received for the revenue grants 2004/05).

3.3 The revised priorities, which can be found in Appendix 1, have been developed from both the Community Strategy and the Corporate Strategy as outlined above. Whilst they continue to cover a broad range of voluntary and community sector activities these nine priorities are more focused and strategic in their approach which will make the process of prioritisation of applications more transparent.

3.4 In conjunction with these changes to the priorities a significant change has been made to the application form (Appendix 3). For 2006/07 applicants will be required to complete a simple grid outlining which of the priority areas their organisation contributes to and how. This will again aid the assessment and prioritisation process.

3.5 A further, smaller review of the new priorities will be undertaken next financial year prior to the application packs for 2007/08 being released. This is necessary due to a number of Government policies in relation to children and young people to be implemented in the coming year as well as the development of the Council's own strategy for this age range. Such a review, which should result in only minor amendments, will be necessary to ensure that the revenue grants are able to aid in the delivery of Council's commitments in this area.

4 Criteria Changes

4.1 The criteria basically cover the rules of the grant programme in relation to eligibility to apply for a grant. These often relate to the legal and financial status of the organisation. The review revealed areas requiring clarification and these are outlined below. The amended criteria are outlined in Appendix 2.

4.2 One important improvement to the criteria relates to the layout. Previously the priorities and key information relating to eligibility were towards the end of a lengthy, cumbersome document. The overall impression created was of negativity as the exclusions from the scheme were listed at the start. There were also issues in relation to the tone / language used. The new format places more emphasis on the positives of the scheme – that is the priority areas where the Council may be able to provide financial assistance. The format has been adapted to reflect that of the Community Chest (the small grants scheme) which has received good feedback from applicants in terms of format and language style.

- 4.3 In relation to the content itself, advice on the financial aspects of the grants programme has been sought from the Assistant Director of Finance (Accountancy) and included in the discussions of the working group. This overall process has resulted in a number of improvements being made in relation to:
- a) The level of budgetary information required including the introduction of a standard format / requirement
 - b) The appropriate level of supplementary financial information to be supplied with the application (for example, accounts and balance sheets)
 - c) The level of reserves which should be held by applicant organisations (this area has also been amended to reflect the Compact)
 - d) Applicants demonstrating running costs of at least one year. Whilst this has been an implicit requirement in previous years, it will now be a formal requirement for eligibility to the grants scheme.
- 4.4 The above improvements to the criteria have also had an impact on the application form (Appendix 3) and again a number of changes have been necessary. Improvements include:
- a) The provision of a budget template
 - b) Improved questions in relation to use of the grant and other funding accessible by the organisation
 - c) Streamlining of questions where previously there were repetitions
- 5 Assessment Process
- 5.1 To coincide with the improved priority areas, criteria and application form minor changes are also to be implemented to the assessment process for the revenue grants. These focus on a more formalised approach to the assessment process.
- 5.2 The overall process will remain largely the same – a panel of officers will assess the applications in the first instance with these comments and findings fed into the consideration of the applications by the two Portfolio Holders. These coupled with the assessment of the Portfolio Holders form the basis of the recommendations to Cabinet for approval.
- 5.3 Two changes to the officer stage of the assessment process will be implemented as follows.
- 5.4 For 2006/07 the membership of the officer panel will be revised and will consist of the following City Council officers:
- a) The Head of Community Development
 - b) The Community Development Manager (if in post at that stage)
 - c) The Policy Officer (to provide an overall strategic and LSP perspective)
 - d) The Partnership & External Funding Officer (as administrator of the grants).

- 5.5 In the spirit of the Compact between the statutory and voluntary sector, the Chief Executive of Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) will also attend in an advisory capacity to give the voluntary and community sector perspective (although will be excluded from discussions on the WACA and related grant applications to avoid any conflict in interest). This involvement of an external and voluntary agency is a new development for the panel and it is hoped that as an advisor to the panel it will bring an additional degree of accountability and transparency to the grants process.
- 5.6 Written comments on applications will also be submitted by officers as appropriate including the Arts Development Officer, Community Officer and from the Housing department. The panel will bring together a broad range of knowledge and experience which will be used to inform the Portfolio Holder recommendations which will be submitted to Cabinet for approval.
- 5.7 The second change and in addition to the role of the panel above, is an improvement to the financial assessment of applications. For 2006/07 an objective assessment on the financial status of applicant organisations will be undertaken in consultation with the Assistant Director of Finance (Accountancy). Previously this has been included in the main officer panel assessment however the direct involvement of the Accountancy team will ensure an independent and objective assessment of financial status and eligibility. Again the findings of this meeting will feed into the recommendations of the Portfolio Holders.
- 6 Timescales for the Grant Awards 2006/07
- 6.1 Assuming agreement to the amended criteria, policies and application forms the following timescales apply to the grants process for 2006/07:
- a) *Mid October*: Release of the application packs and publicity of the grants
 - b) *Early December*: Deadline for the submission of applications
 - c) *Mid December – January* : Assessment of the applications
 - d) *Early February*: Submission to Cabinet for approval.
- 6.2 These timescales will ensure applicants are informed of the decision in relation to their application in advance of the start of the new financial year.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

7 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1 The community grants scheme is of direct relevance to a number of key objectives and priority areas for both the Corporate Strategy and the Community Strategy as identified in the report above.
- 7.2 In particular the community grants scheme relates to the following areas of the Corporate Strategy:
- a) Housing

- b) Social Inclusion
- c) Cultural and Leisure Opportunities

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1 Community Revenue Grant Priorities 2006/07
- Appendix 2 Community Revenue Grant Criteria 2006/07
- Appendix 3 Community Revenue Grant Application Form 2006/07