

CABINET

7 FEBRUARY 2006

COMMUNITY GRANTS – COMMUNITY CHEST – REVISED POLICIES 2006/07

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB747 Community Grants – Policy and Review 2003/04 3 December 2004

CAB825 Community Grants – Community Chest Policy and Criteria 2004/05 3 March 2004

CAB1013 Community Grants – Revenue Awards 2005/06 8 February 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The main purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet agreement to the revision of the policies and processes for the Community Chest grants scheme for 2006/07.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet agree the revised policies and processes for the Community Chest scheme as outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report.

CABINET7 FEBRUARY 2006COMMUNITY GRANTS – COMMUNITY CHEST – REVISED POLICIES 2006/07REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIESDETAIL:1 Introduction

- 1.1 The introduction of a Community Chest grants scheme, along with the criteria and processes for approval, was approved by Cabinet on 3 March 2004. The budget for the scheme is created annually from a top-slice from the main revenue grants budget.
- 1.2 As the scheme comes to the end of its second year of grant giving it was considered necessary to undertake an internal review of the criteria and process in preparation for the next financial year to ensure the scheme continues to operate effectively and supports the priority areas of the City Council.

2 The Scheme to Date

- 2.1 The Community Chest scheme was a new initiative launched in April 2004. The aim was to provide a stream of funding which could be used to support smaller community and voluntary groups from across the District access small amounts of money for one-off types of expenditure. The maximum award under the Community Chest is £500 and groups wanting to apply to the scheme have to demonstrate how their activity fits into the criteria for a particular theme. Grants are approved under the Delegated Portfolio Holder Decision Notice method. The funding comprises of six themes:
- a) Community Development
 - b) Arts
 - c) Sports
 - d) Community Safety
 - e) Heritage
 - f) Town Twinning
- 2.2 In relation to the budget for the scheme, all grants are funded from a top slice of the main revenue grants budget. The exception to this is the funding for the town twinning grants which are currently funded from the twinning reserve. The original intention had been to top-slice a minimum of £10,000 a year for the scheme however pressures on the budget have limited this.
- 2.3 In its first year of operation (2004/05) the scheme was highly successful. A total of 54 applications were received, requesting over £24,000. Of these, 34 were approved a grant with the entire £12,558 budget allocated (including twinning budget contribution). Appendix 1 shows a breakdown of the awards made across the theme areas. As anticipated the Community Development theme, which has the widest criteria and is the main focus of the scheme, attracted the majority of the applications

and approvals with 60% of the budget being allocated to such organisations. The Arts theme has also proven very popular, taking 31% of the budget. This reflects the fact that prior to the Community Chest there was a small arts grant provision, creating an expectation for the provision of small grants in this field.

- 2.4 During the second / current year of the scheme it has continued to be in high demand. Overall 50 applications have been received, requesting funding of over £22,000. Of these, 31 were approved with the entire £10,448 budget allocated (again including the twinning awards). Again, Appendix 1 shows a breakdown of the awards across the theme areas. Community Development and Arts continue to be the dominant themes although there has been slight increased interest from projects concerning sports and heritage.
- 2.5 All approved organisations are requested to complete a feedback form once the grant has been spent. As yet the feedback forms for 2005/06 have not all been received or collated, however the information from 2004/05 is available. The feedback was received from 74% of the organisations and showed that:
- a) Almost all the organisations found the application process easy to use and felt they were kept well informed throughout.
 - b) Information on where applicants found out about the scheme was sketchy and led to an improvement to the application form for 2005/06. Of the data collated 50% found out about the scheme from the City Council itself, with 8% specifically identifying the publicity postcard produced. Other sources included the taped information supplied by Hampshire County Council, accessed by disability groups across the District.
 - c) The age ranges considered to be benefiting from the funding span the generations. The percentage of activities benefiting all age ranges was the highest (43%), with children under 16 next (29%). Funding for activities for older people (aged 60 years and over) represented 11% of awards.
- 2.6 For 2006/07 it is hoped that a budget of £9,647 will be available for the scheme from the revenue grants budget. This is the lowest allocation to date however due to ever increasing pressures on the main revenue grant budget it is not possible to either sustain or increase the overall amount available for the scheme. The proposed amount represents less than 2% of the overall revenue grants budget.

3 The Review Process

- 3.1 The implementation of the scheme over the last two years has identified minor areas of possible improvement. Coupled with consideration of which themes are attracting applications and securing approvals it was decided that a small internal review of the scheme should be undertaken focusing on the application theme criteria and the process for assessing the grants.
- 3.2 In undertaking this review the views of the officers involved to date with the scheme have been sought including the Head of Cultural Services, the Arts Development Officer and members of the Community Development Division. In addition the views of the two Portfolio Holders responsible for this area have been incorporated – the Portfolio Holder for Culture Heritage & Sport (who holds the remit for grants) and for Healthy & Inclusive Communities.

4 Amendments to Process

- 4.1 In relation to the assessment and approval process, the following areas were considered in need of improvement.
- 4.2 As part of the current process, informal comments on applications are requested from officers from the relevant field for the theme area, which, if submitted are included in the assessment of the request for grant. It is recommended that this system for commenting is formalised and there will be a nominated officer under each theme (with a delegate in case of absence) from whom comments will be requested. Whilst feedback will not be compulsory the appropriate officer will be required to acknowledge receipt and the intention not to comment if appropriate. To date the timescales for commenting on applications has been tight and this will be extended to two weeks. This may impact on the current target of decisions within a six week period of the application deadline and this may need to be reviewed once the new processes are in operation. Any comments will continue to be considered by the panel in deciding on grant awards.
- 4.3 To assist in the decision making process, the panel considering the applications will be expanded to include the Community Development Manager. Currently the applications are considered by the Portfolio Holders for Culture, Heritage & Sport and for Healthy & Inclusive Communities, with advice as necessary from the Partnership & External Funding Officer. The inclusion of the Community Development Manager will assist in advising on the wider policy issues as well as the main criteria for the grants. Advice on the theme specific areas will be provided by the nominated officers as outlined above.
- 4.4 It is also recommended that the number of funding rounds for the scheme is reduced from four a year to three. This proposal will assist with managing the workload generated by the funding rounds and assist with the budget management. As grants must be spent within the financial year in which they are approved this will also help to ensure that organisations have plenty of time to undertake the activities and that all grants are claimed.
- 4.5 Whilst there is a requirement for organisations in receipt of grant to acknowledge this in publicity it is felt that this is an area which requires clearer guidance. In order to make the requirement clearer reference will be made in the application form to ensure groups are prepared to undertake necessary measures (for example, displaying the logo on publicity etc). A change will also be made to the funding agreement signed by approved applicants to make the requirement an express condition of the grant award.
- 4.6 It has also been noted that there has been an increased trend for organisations to apply for the maximum amount of £500 rather than what is actually required and the application form will be amended to make it clearer that the applicant should only apply for what is needed. It is also recommended that the scheme will continue to focus primarily on small, local community and voluntary groups rather than larger organisations with other fundraising ability. In light of the comments received by officers it is not intended to explicitly exclude partnership bids seeking small amounts of match funding although each will be considered on its own merits and in light of available resources / budget.

5 Amendments to Criteria

- 5.1 In relation to the theme specific criteria a number of themes have been amended. It should be noted that no changes are proposed to the current priorities for the arts or the town twinning themes. The amended theme specific criteria can be found at appendix 2.
- 5.2 *Community Development:* Only one slight amendment is to be implemented for this theme which will expand the current priorities to encourage groups to apply for funding to help enhance the skills of volunteers within their organisations. This priority is intended to incorporate a wide range of organisations including those which may also fall under a different theme in terms of their primary activities (e.g. sports or heritage groups).
- 5.3 *Sports Development:* In light of the forthcoming Sports and Recreation Strategy, the priority areas for this theme have been amended to reflect the outcomes of the recent consultations which are forming the overall aims for the strategy. Applications to the scheme from sports related organisations have been low although those applying have had a high level of success and it is hope the new, more strategic priorities based on the strategy will encourage applications.
- 5.4 *Community Safety:* These priority areas have been amended to reflect the Community Safety Partnership's Action Plan. Take up under this theme has been particularly slow to date and again it is hoped that this more strategic approach to the priorities will help to encourage appropriate applications.
- 5.5 *Heritage:* In light of low take up under this theme it is to be expanded to incorporate conservation (including the natural and built environment). This also helps to address the loss of the conservation and environmental grants from the Development Directorate. Whilst this inclusion is welcomed to meet a need within the District it should be noted that this expansion may increase demand to a very limited overall budget and needs to be kept under review over the course of the financial year.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

6 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 The community grant schemes are of direct relevance to a number of key objectives and priority areas: -
- Working with and supporting the voluntary sector to deliver the most appropriate services for local communities - Corporate Priority
 - Helping the voluntary sector to provide better services to the community - Cultural Strategy
 - Recognising the importance of small-scale community facilities and services and support these wherever possible - Cultural Strategy.
 - Providing more and better leisure opportunities which meet the needs of young people and people after retirement - Cultural Strategy

Many of the projects are assisted under the well-being power in S 2 Local Government Act 2000. This is the power to promote the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area – and is relevant to partnership working with other community organisations. The Council has to have regard to any relevant provisions of the community strategy, as well as the above strategies in making grants. Some projects can also be justified under other powers e.g. S19 Local Government Act 1976 – non-profit making recreation projects; S142 Local Government Act 1972 – advice on people's rights; S 145 Local Government Act 1972 – promotion of the arts and S73 Housing Act 1985 – assistance for voluntary organisations concerned with homelessness.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 Any resource implications are considered within this report and CAB1200, which is also featured on the agenda for this meeting.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1 Overview of Community Chest Applications
Appendix 2 Community Chest Theme Priorities 2006/07