

CABINET

17 June 2009

REVENUE FUNDING FOR *THE ENGLISH PROJECT*

REPORT OF HEAD OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Winchester City Council has supported the development of The English Project since it was first proposed in 2005. The Project, which is managed by volunteers, seeks to explore and celebrate the development of English and to establish Winchester as the 'cradle' of the language. The Project has the potential to make a major economic contribution to the City and wider District, and has already begun to make its mark nationally and internationally through a programme of publications, lectures and community initiatives.

The Council awarded a special grant of £10,000 from Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) funds to the Project trustees in 2008/09 to support development work and act as match funding for other external grants. The trustees have requested a similar amount for 2009/10, with another major Heritage Lottery Bid in preparation, and it is proposed that Members approve this grant from the remaining wholly unallocated LABGI funds.

RECOMMENDATION:

That a grant of £10,000 be made to The English Project in 2009/10, taken from unallocated LABGI reserves, to support the initiatives outlined in paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of this report.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Winchester City Council has supported the development of The English Project since the concept was first proposed in 2005, originally an offshoot of the Hyde900 celebrations. The Project rapidly grew in ambition and imagination. It aims eventually to bring a new visitor attraction to the city, exploring the history and continued development of the English Language. In the meantime, The Project has been engaged in a range of high profile activities, from the publishing last winter of an anthology of *Kitchen Table Lingo* to a project with University of Winchester students and ITV Fixers to collect and explore 'Text' language.
- 1.2 The English Project reinforces Winchester's position as a creative and cultural centre in the South East, and continues to grow in scope, support and following. Much of the development work on the Project has been undertaken by a team of volunteers, with some external grant funding to support feasibility studies and other strategic documents. In order to continue to develop the concept, there is now a need for additional grant aid and the trustees have therefore approached the City Council with a request for a £10,000 grant in 2009/10.
- 1.3 Given the potential of The Project for making a major contribution to the future economic vitality of Winchester, it is proposed that grant of £10,000 be made from currently unallocated LABGI reserves.

2 Progress of the Project

- 2.1 The Project was formally launched in March 2008 with a lecture by renowned academic and author David Crystal at The University of Winchester. This was enjoyed by a capacity audience, and further lectures are planned during 2009/10 including the first of their 'Language Makers' programme as part of this year's Winchester Festival. The first annual debate will also take place in June at the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) in London.

- 2.2 During this year, the trustees are planning to increase schools engagement, through a series of resource materials being created to suit curriculum needs. These are already under development. Unusually, they encourage site visits to see language in action in different settings, adding a new dimension to traditional English language studies. The English Project is testing these in Hampshire, with the support of the County Council, but is keen to see them become national resources over time.
- 2.3 The trustees have identified a need to give The English Project a national profile, without losing sight of its Winchester roots, and this has inspired a proposal to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a new Language Open Days initiative along similar lines to the popular Heritage Open Days. The plan for a three-year pilot period is the subject of a £1 million funding bid now under development. The concept also supports the recommendations of the Collections Audit and Audience Development Plan commissioned in 2008/09 by the trustees using HLF funding, which recommended further activities designed to include and engage people in exploring the diversity of language.
- 2.4 2009/10 also sees another English Project initiative designed to reach out to and involve an ever-widening audience, called *A Million Voices*. This will seek to capture one million individual voices and use them for installations suitable for touring and distribution around the country.
- 2.5 The successful delivery and evaluation of these initiatives is important in developing concepts for the end goal of creating a new visitor centre in Winchester, and the Project team has many other innovative ideas for this year and the years ahead.

3 The Proposed Grant

- 3.1 As The English Project continues to engage with a wider variety of audiences, from schools and young people to top academics across the world, on its journey towards the creation of a permanent visitor attraction in the city centre. The Project is led and managed by volunteers, who invest a significant amount of time and talent, but there is a need for some 'core' cash funding to enable them to progress the concept.
- 3.2 In 2009/10, a grant of £10,000 is requested from Winchester City Council to:
- a) redesign and relaunch the website www.englishproject.co.uk to enhance content to engage with a wider audience;
 - b) stage another public event in the Winchester District in order to publicise the Project and Winchester as a cultural centre in the South East;
 - c) take forward work with children and young people, to involve at least five Winchester state schools (or around 200 pupils) from across the District in English Project initiatives during the year.

- 3.3 The money will also act a match funding for a full Heritage Lottery Fund bid of £1 million to support a national Language Open Days proposal for the next five years, along similar the lines to the popular Heritage Open Days initiative.
- 3.4 Members are asked to consider making available a special grant of £10,000 from unallocated LABGI reserves. This is because of the following factors:
- a) a lack of fit with the usual community grants programme, which is designed to support ongoing revenue overheads for organisations rather than research and development costs;
 - b) the exceptional nature of this innovative and far-reaching project; and
 - c) the Project's potential to make a long term impact on the economic vitality of Winchester.

4 Other Funding and Support

- 4.1 The English Project has benefited from a range of cash and in kind funding, including £35,000 between 2007 and 2009 from the University of Winchester and £20,000 from Hampshire County Council in 2008/09. The trustees have been successful in securing support from private businesses too, ranging from *pro bono* work by design and communications companies to cash sponsorship from a London-based law firm for the launch of the Language Open Days initiative on 13 October.
- 4.2 The City Council awarded a previous grant of £10,000 to the Project in 2008/09 (PHD166, June 2009 refers), which led to the creation of a website for the Project; the development of a schools programme, and the launch of series of celebrity lectures designed to raise the profile of the Project. It also acted as match funding for a project planning grant of £46,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to support three key studies which are the foundation for a future capital project.
- 4.3 This record of funding success provides strong evidence that any new grant from the City Council will be used to maximum effect by the trustees by leveraging financial aid from other agencies.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1 The English Project concept directly supports a key outcome in the Sustainable Community Strategy relating to economic prosperity, in particular:
- “Winchester exploits its reputation as a cultural stronghold, using this as a means to stimulate a modern and creative approach to business, by ... supporting the local development of knowledge-based industries [and] marketing Winchester as a world-class tourism destination...”*

- 5.2 Under its wellbeing power, the Council is legally entitled to deliver services which benefit local businesses after considering how this supports the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy. S2 Local Government Act 2000 is the general well-being power and enables the Council to do anything which is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area. There is nothing in other legislation or in the statutory guidance which would prevent the use of the power as set out in the report.
- 5.3 The English Project also increases participation in arts and cultural activities; celebrates the power of volunteering and seeks to inspire and engage young people. All of these are important elements of the City Council's 2012 Framework, and the Project itself is a 'milestone' project in the framework document.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 The proposed grant is for £10,000, to be taken from unallocated LABGI funds, the total of which currently stands at £497,000. The English Project stands to make a significant contribution to the economy of Winchester in the future, but does not fit any of the programmes supported by the £400,000 LABGI allocation for recession support measures agreed by Cabinet in March this year.
- 6.2 The grant in 2008/09 was also funded by a release from LABGI reserves.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 7.1 The same minor risks are associated with this revenue grant as with any other funding, in terms of damage to the Council's reputation should the activities of the grant client be brought into disrepute. However, the Council has close relations with the Project trustees; managed the 2008/09 grant through a service level agreement and held SLA meetings to follow the progress of the Project and the use of the grant during the year. The performance indicators of the 2008/09 SLA have been met in full.
- 7.2 There is also a potential reputational risk associated with a decision not to award the grant. For example, it could be inferred that the Council was not taking every step to foster enterprise, nor to support the delivery of the economic prosperity outcome of the Sustainable Community Strategy, at a time when the public and the business community in particular, are looking for reassurance during the recession.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

English Project website www.englishproject.org.uk

APPENDICES:

None