

REPORT TITLE: TOWN FORUM GRANT PROGRAMME UPDATE

11 NOVEMBER 2024

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF TOWN FORUM: COUNCILLOR MARK REACH

Contact Officer: Melissa Fletcher Tel No: 01962 848 492 Email
mfletcher@winchester.gov.uk

WARD(S): TOWN WARDS

PURPOSE

The Town Forum operated a community grants programme in 2023/24 which included contributions to core funded organisations, a Project Grant scheme and a Small Grant scheme. This paper reports on the grants awarded and outcomes achieved during 2023/24 and the programme for 2024/25 delivery.

This paper also outlines the options for making the £10,000 baseline reduction to the total town grants budget outlined in the Mid Term Financial Projections for 2025/26 and the process for how further reductions will be achieved in 2026/27.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Town Forum notes:

1. The achievements and successes of the Small Grant and Project Grant programmes in 2023-24;
2. The allocated grant budget of £30k for other grants: small/project grants in 2024/25 is currently open for application and is used to fund the new Winchester City Community grants scheme, with criteria developed to include Town Vision outcomes.

3. The important role of members in supporting the community engagement process and encouraging grant applications to the new Winchester City Communities scheme;
4. The impending review of the overall council community grants programme as part of TC25, the outcome of which will feed into the proposal to address budget reductions to the Town Forum grants budget in 2025/26 and 2026/27; and
5. That the Corporate Head of Economy and Community has the delegated authority to approve the grant criteria and allocations, in consultation with the Winchester Town Forum (Grants and Community Empowerment) Informal Group, Chair of the Town Forum and the Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement.

That Town Forum approves:

1. That the £10,000 budget saving for 2025/26 is achieved by a reduction of £5,000 to the Winchester City Community grant scheme and a reduction of £2,500 each in core grant contribution to Citizens Advice and Play to the Crowd.

IMPLICATIONS:

1. COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

1.1. Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District

The Winchester City Community grant scheme supports this outcome through the active travel priority.

1.2. Homes for all

Core funding provided to Citizen Advice supports this outcome.

1.3. Vibrant Local Economy

Core funding provided to Play to the Crowd addresses this priority.

1.4. Living Well

The Winchester City Community grant scheme supports this outcome through funding projects and activities which strengthen local communities.

Core funding provided to Citizens Advice Winchester addresses this priority

1.5. Your Services, Your Voice

The funding programmes aim to be open, transparent and inclusive. Applicants to the Winchester City Community grant scheme are invited to attend a panel meeting with members to discuss their application.

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

2.1. The Small Grant and Project Grant schemes (renamed Winchester City Community grants) form part of the Town Forum grant budget for 24/25, and was reduced by £10,000 for this financial year as detailed in paper WTF321. As a result, the grant budget is currently £70,000.

2.2. The Town Forum considered the town account budget in its mid-term financial projections on 12 September 2024 (WTF331), which included further reductions in the grants and Vision delivery budget during the period to 28/29.

2.3. Further reductions of £10,000 each year are required in 25/26 and 26/27 and this paper recommends how the 2025/26 reduction should be achieved. A summary is given in the table below and further detail provided elsewhere in the report at paragraph 11.11

FUND	23/24 Budget	24/25 Budget	25/26 Budget	26/27 Budget
Strategic Fund:				
– Citizens Advice Winchester District	£20,000	£20,000	£17,500	TBC
– Play to the Crowd	£20,000	£20,000	£17,500	TBC
Winchester City Community grants:				
– Project Grant scheme	£33,000	£30,000	£25,000	TBC
– Small Grant scheme	£7,000			
TOTAL	£80,000	£70,000	£60,000	£50,000

3. LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a general power of competence, to enter into a grant agreement provided there is good reason to do so. Once a decision is made, the authority to draft and seal the agreement (where required) is under the scheme of delegation to Service Lead – Legal in Part 3.4 of the Council Constitution.
- 3.2. Checks are in place to ensure that the funds are used for the purpose for which they were awarded. Grant agreements include clawback clauses and safeguards include grant monitoring/reporting and for larger grants, evidence of expenditure.
- 3.3. There are no procurement implications as a result of these recommendations, however seeking value for money is still relevant.

4. WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. There are no workforce implications as these programmes are managed within the existing staff resources.

5. PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. None.

6. CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

2023/24 Grant fund information and promotion

- 6.1. Information on the 23/24 grants programme was distributed to members via the DSU e-newsletter in May 2023 following the local elections. In addition, two webinars were held for members in June 2023 to give an overview of the 23/24 grants programme.

- 6.2. Four Town Forum grants panels were conducted between September 2023 and March 2024, bringing together applicants and members of the Winchester Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group.
- 6.3. Seven grant webinars/surgeries were held during the year 23/24 to inform potential applicants about community grants (three in-person and four on-line).
- 6.4. An impact report was produced during 23/24 on the previous year's community grant programme (**Appendix 3**). This included Town Forum grants awarded and was distributed widely and well received in the local press including the BBC [Winchester City Council awards charities thousands in funding - BBC News](#).
- 6.5. There is an ongoing programme of publicity for the council's community grants programme, including those funded by the Town Forum, such as promotion of schemes in newsletters, social media and at funding events.

Review of the funding programme for 2024/25

- 6.6. Following the recommendation made at Town Forum 11 March 2024 which supported the revision of grant criteria to include Town Vision outcomes (WTF329), the Winchester Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group were consulted on a proposal to replace Town Forum small grants and project grants with a new Winchester City Community grant scheme in 2024/25.
- 6.7. The new scheme launched on 1 August 2024 and all Town Forum members were informed of the new scheme via DSU and email. An online briefing for members was held in September 2024 to ensure they are well equipped to help encourage applications from their wards.
- 6.8. An online seminar is planned for November 2024 to support emerging and new groups with setting up a community/volunteer group and applying for funding. Other local groups who have recently gone through this process will be on hand to offer advice based on their experiences.

Consultation on options for savings

- 6.9. The proposal was discussed with the Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group on 16 October 2024 and the Winchester Town Accounts informal group on 17 October 2024.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1. Projects that have negative or detrimental impact on the environment, or are counter to the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, will not receive council grant support.

8. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 8.1. The council has a duty of care under the Public Sector Equality Act to consider the impact of the decision on vulnerable groups/persons. An Equality Impact Assessment is attached in **Appendix 2**.
- 8.2. The modest reduction in core funding to Citizens Advice could have the potential to impact those service users with disabilities, older people and or parents. However, as the reduction is a small proportion of the funding we provide it is unlikely to result in the alteration of support being provided. Likewise, similarly with the modest reduction to Play to the Crowd
- 8.3. Applicants are asked to explain how they ensure their activities and services are open and inclusive when they apply for a grant. Further consideration takes place during grant panel meetings and at the point of the decision making. Successful grant holders are required to report back through an end-of-grant report on whether their activities were directed at beneficiaries from groups with protected characteristics, and how they have insured that all sections of the community could benefit from the services/activities provided by the grant

9. DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1. Grant applications are managed through a bespoke system called Flexigrant, which has been designed with in-built data controls that are in line with data protection legislation.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure Inability to meet grant commitments.	Winchester City Community grant scheme is one-off funding with no further commitment and awards only made within budgetary framework. Core grants are included within the mid-term financial strategy.	
Exposure to challenge Challenge of decision to award (or not) fund.	Clear and transparent assessment process with defined criteria. Dialogue with applicants to support organisations through the process.	Signposting to alternative funding sources increases potential to lever in funding to sustain services.

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<p>Innovation Risk that organisations are not innovative with the funding provided.</p>	<p>Innovation encouraged through dialogue at grant panel meetings. Advice offered to inspire new and emerging groups to apply for funding for new initiatives.</p>	<p>Grass roots organisations often identify innovative solutions to localised issues.</p>
<p>Reputation Council funds an organisation or activity which is not well received by certain members of the community.</p>	<p>Criteria are set for the grant programmes to exclude funding of activities which are of a wholly and exclusively political or religious nature, or organisations supporting political activism.</p> <p>Every group or organisation must have a constitution or documentation which includes a formal decision-making process and aims that are acceptable to Winchester City Council.</p>	<p>Endorsement of worthwhile projects enhances the council's reputation.</p>
<p>Achievement of outcome Funding does not result in expected outcomes that align with council criteria and priorities.</p>	<p>Clear application criteria, grant allocation process and monitoring will ensure grant scheme outcomes are met.</p>	<p>Many grants generate additional social value over and above the core intended outcome.</p>

Property		
Community Support Local organisations and communities do not respond to the grant opportunities.	Provide support to applicants and extensively promote the grants. Allow flexibility in allocation of funds between different grant programmes.	Member involvement to help promote grant schemes.
Community opposition to decisions that are made	Clear and transparent grant processes.	
Timescales		
Project capacity		
Other		

11. SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Small Grant and Project Grant schemes in 2023/24

- 11.1. Grant applications received and awarded from the Town Forum Small Grant and Project Grant budgets in 2023/24 are published on the council's website here: [Voluntary and Community Grants Awarded - Winchester City Council](#).

Appendix 1 summarises some of the feedback received from grant recipients. In summary:

FUND:	23/24 Budget	23/24 Actual Awards
Strategic Fund:		
Citizens Advice Winchester District	£20,000	£20,000
Play to the Crowd	£20,000	£20,000
Project Grants	£33,000	£15,718
Small grant programme	£7,000	£9,094
TOTAL	£80,000	£64,812

- 11.2. The Town Forum Small Grant scheme received applications from a variety of organisations across all five town wards. The number of applications was higher than in 22/23, with 22 applications received and 15 grants awarded totalling £9,094. The seven unsuccessful applications did not meet the eligibility criteria so could not be considered.
- 11.3. Despite holding two rounds of the Project Grant scheme, applications were lower than expected in 23/24. Eight applications were received in total and five awarded, totalling £15,718, with the remaining three applications not meeting the eligibility criteria.

- 11.4. A summary of the 2023/24 allocations compared to the previous years is given in the table below.

	2022/23	2023/24
Small grants		
Number of applications	15	22
Number of awards	12	15
Total value of awards	£10,800	£9,094
Project Grants		
Number of applications	8	8
Number of awards	6	5
Total value of awards	£26,510	£15,718

Contribution to Strategic Funded organisations 2023/24

- 11.5. Winchester Town Forum made a £20,000 contribution to each of the Strategic Fund core grants to Play to the Crowd and Citizens Advice in 2023/24. These grants are monitored through submission of six and twelve-month reports to update on achievement of expected outcomes, and annual review meetings involving officers and members. Highlights for the work that these core grants enabled are given below:

a) Citizens Advice

The £20,000 Town contribution to Citizen Advice's Strategic Fund grant of £195,000 for 2023/24 enabled continuation of their vital service delivery. An increased number of clients were supported compared to previous years and a continued rise in cost-of-living issues experienced, which was recognised through additional council funding. Income gained for clients across the whole services was £2,560,041, due in part to an increase in applications for Personal Independence Payments (PIP), one of the most time-consuming areas of advice outside debt casework.

Metric	22/23	23/24
Number of advice issues	16,602	18,062
Income gain for clients	£1,320,625	£2,560,041
Number of clients supported (district-wide)	5,321	5,948
Number of people helped with financial advice	2,897	2,546
Number of people supported with debt	678	728

b) Play to the Crowd

The £20,000 Town contribution to Play to the Crowd's Strategic Fund grant of £147,000 for 2023/24 enabled people to connect with and participate in live performance. This was a record year with 342

performances at the theatre, including 54 community performances enabling nearly 20 local organisations to present on a professional stage. Approximately 150 performances were staged as part of Hat Fair and over 250 participatory activity sessions were held as part of Playmakers – including in Wickham and South Wonston.

Metric	22/23			23/24		
	Town	Wider district	Total	Town	Wider district	Total
Winchester district residents						
People engaged with Theatre Royal performances	29,578	25,641	55,219	30,955	27,434	58,389
People engaged with Hat Fair performances	45,871	15,749	61,620	37,140	13,050	50,190
Number of participants in Playmakers activities including youth theatre	6,075	1,888	7,963	4,805	2,793	7,598
Average ticket revenue			£17.19			£17.41

Community Grants programme for 2024/25

- 11.6. The Town Forum budget for 2024/25 (WTF328) includes continued contribution of £40,000 to the Strategic Fund 2022-2025 grants for the final year of the current three-year funding agreement:
- a) Citizens Advice Winchester - £20,000
 - b) Play to the Crowd - £20,000
- 11.7. The 2024/25 budget for small/project grants was reduced by £10,000 to £30,000, which will fund the new Winchester City Community grant scheme for grants of £500 - £3,000. This funding scheme is designed to provide small, one-off grants to local groups and organisations working in the city of Winchester, empowering them to make improvements to their local community or neighbourhood in line with Town Vision outcomes. Grants are available for projects that help to bring communities together and provide activities that enrich local life for people living in the city, as defined by the Winchester town wards.

- a) This scheme opened on 1 August 2024 and will remain open until the budget is fully allocated, or 28 February 2025, whichever is sooner.
- b) Eligible applicants will be invited to attend a brief grant panel including members from the relevant ward and the Chairs of the Town Forum and the Grants and Community Empowerment Informal Group.
- c) The first grant panel of the year will be held in Autumn 2024.

TC25 grant review and 2025/26 Town Account forecast

11.8. The Town Forum noted the Mid Term Financial Projections on 12 September 2024 (WTF331) which detailed further reductions over future financial years in the grants and Vision delivery budget:

- a) Reduction of £10,000 for the year of 2025/26 to leave a budget of £60,000
- b) Reduction of £10,000 for the year of 2026/27 to leave a budget of £50,000

11.9. There are options as to how the £10,000 reduction in grant budget is achieved for 2025/26. These are set out in the table below and can be summarised as follows:

- a) TF1 – A reduction of £10,000 to the Winchester City Community grant scheme for grants of £500 - £3,000.
- b) TF2 - A reduction of £5,000 to the Winchester City Community grant scheme for grants of £500 - £3,000, plus a reduction of £2,500 each in core grant contribution to Citizens Advice and Play to the Crowd.
- c) TF3 - A reduction of £5,000 each in core grant contribution to Citizens Advice and Play to the Crowd.

	GF: 24/25	TF: 24/25	TF1: 25/26	TF2: 25/26	TF3: 25/26
Citizens Advice	175,000	20,000	20,000	17,500	15,000
Play to the Crowd	127,000	20,000	20,000	17,500	15,000
Other grants		30,000	20,000	25,000	30,000
Total	302,000	70,000	60,000	60,000	60,000

11.10. It is recommended that the reduction of £10,000 for the year of 2025/26 will be achieved through a reduction of £5,000 to the Winchester City Community grant scheme for grants of £500 - £3,000, plus a reduction of £2,500 each in core grant contribution to Citizens Advice and Play to the Crowd (option TF2 in the table above).

12. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1. Alternative options exist for reducing the budget by £10,000 in 2025/26 shown as options TF1 and TF3 in the table, with either the small grants or the core funding grants taking the full reduction. A review of the district-wide community grant programme is currently in progress and will result in changes to core funding arrangements, but possibly not until 2026/27. The Town Forum should consider its core funding contributions further in light of any changes to the General Fund programme in due course, however for 25/26 it is recommended to spread the reduction across all recipients so options TF1 and TF3 are discounted at this time.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

[WTF331 – 12 September 2024: Winchester Town Account Financial Planning 2024-25.pdf](#)

[WTF324 – 8 November 2023: Winchester Town Account Medium Term Financial Position Draft budget options.pdf](#)

[WTF321 – 14 September 2023: Town Grants Programme.pdf \(winchester.gov.uk\)](#)

[WTF314 - 26 January 2023: Winchester Town Account Budget for 2023/24 \(to be recommended to Cabinet\)](#)

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Town Forum small/project grants report feedback 2023/24

Appendix 2: Equality impact assessment

Appendix 3: Community Grants Programme 2022/23 Impact Report