

REPORT TITLE: TOWN FORUM GRANTS PROGRAMME UPDATE

14 SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT OF CHAIR OF THE TOWN FORUM: Councillor Mark Reach

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WARD(S): TOWN WARDS

PURPOSE

The Town Forum operated a community grants programme in 2022/23 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 2022/23 and the programme for 2023/24 delivery.

Baseline reductions to the total town grants budget were proposed at the January 2023 Town Forum meeting (WTF314) for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 so this paper also outlines the options for making the £10,000 required reduction in 2024/25 and the process for how further reductions will be achieved in 2025/26 and 2026/27.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Town Forum notes:

1. The achievements and successes of the Small Grant and Project Grant programmes in 2022-23;
2. The important role of members in supporting the community engagement process and encouraging grant applications;
3. 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;
4. 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 (Town Vision) Informal Group; and

5. The allocated grant budget of £40k for small grants / project grants is used flexibly and the split is adjusted to meet the relative demand for these grants, as in previous years.

That Town Forum approves:

6. That the £10,000 budget saving requested by the Winchester Town Account informal accounts group is to be achieved by the reduction of the Project Grant budget by £10,000 for 2024/25.

IMPLICATIONS:**1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME**

- 1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District
- 1.2 The Project Grant scheme supports this outcome through the Environment funding priority.
- 1.3 Homes for all
- 1.4 The Project Grant scheme supports this outcome through the Homelessness funding priority. The Town Forum Small Grant scheme supports projects that contribute to this outcome through the Community Benefit priority.
- 1.5 Vibrant Local Economy
- 1.6 Core funding provided to Play to the Crowd addresses this priority.
- 1.7 Living Well
- 1.8 The Project Grant scheme supports this outcome through the funding priorities of mental health, isolation, low income and physical inactivity. The Town Forum Small Grant scheme supports projects that contribute to this outcome through the Community Benefit priority.
- 1.9 Core funding provided to Citizens Advice Winchester addresses this priority.
- 1.10 Your Services, Your Voice
- 1.11 The funding programmes aim to be open, transparent and inclusive. Applicants to the Small 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 form part of the Town Forum grant budget for 2023/24, which remains the same as the previous year and as noted in budget paper WTF313 and WTF314:

<b>FUND:</b>	<b>2022/2023 Budget</b>	<b>2023/2024 Budget</b>
Strategic Fund:		
Citizens Advice Winchester District	£20,000	£20,000
Play to the Crowd	£20,000	£20,000
Project Grant scheme (including Crowdfunder match funding grants in 22/23 only)	£33,000	£33,000
Small Grant scheme	£7,000	£7,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£80,000</b>	<b>£80,000</b>

- 2.2 The Town Forum considered the town account budget on 23 January 2023 (WTF314) and set an expectation for reductions in the grants and Vision delivery budget. In accordance with this, the 2024/25 budget for Project Grants will be reduced by £10,000 to £23,000, bringing the total budget to £70,000. Further detail is provided elsewhere in the report at paragraph 11.11.

### 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.

### 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

#### Grant fund information and promotion

- 6.1 A grants information pack for members was created and circulated in October 2022 to ensure members had all the information required to enable them to speak with confidence to local organisations about the programme. Renewed information was distributed to members via the DSU e-newsletter in May 2023 following the local elections. In addition, two community grants webinars have been held for members in June 2023 to give an overview of the 2023/24 grants programme.
- 6.2 Three Town Forum grants panels were conducted between November 2022 and March 2023, bringing together applicants and members of the Winchester Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group.
- 6.3 Four drop-in grants surgeries have been held over the last month to inform potential applicants about community grants (two in-person and two on-line).

- 6.4 There is an ongoing programme of publicity for Town Forum grants including promotion of schemes in newsletters, social media and at funding events.

#### Review of the funding programme

- 6.5 The Winchester Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group were consulted on the proposal to replace the Crowdfunder match funding grants with a new Project Grant scheme and members were notified of the new scheme at the January 2023 Town Forum meeting (Chairperson's announcements).
- 6.6 At the Town Forum meeting in March 2023 the Chair discussed with Members and it was agreed that the Small Grants and Project Grant schemes would reopen in June 2023 with Cllrs Batho and Becker continuing the work of the Town Vision Informal Group through and into the new financial year. This resulted in a much earlier opening of the schemes than has been the case in previous years.
- 6.7 Report WTF316 to Town Forum in March 2023 included a summary of grants awarded that have contributed to the delivery of the Winchester Vision.

#### Consultation on options for savings

- 6.8 The proposal was discussed with the Chair of the Town Vision Informal Group in July 2023 and agreed with the Winchester Town Accounts informal group on 23 August 2023.

### 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.
- 7.2 The environment was one of the funding priorities for the Crowdfunder Town Community Fund and is a funding priority for the Project Grant scheme.

### 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. Applicants are asked to explain how they ensure their activities and services are open and inclusive when they apply for a grant.
- 8.2 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 ensured that all sections of the community could benefit from the services/activities provided by the grant.
- 8.3 An Equality Impact Assessment is attached in appendix 3.

## 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

10.1

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<u>Financial Exposure</u>		
<u>Exposure to challenge</u> 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.
<u>Innovation</u> Risk that organisations are not innovative with the funding provided.	Innovation encouraged through dialogue at grant panel meetings.	
<u>Reputation</u> Council funds an organisation or activity which is not well received by certain members of the community.	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.  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.	Endorsement of worthwhile projects enhances the council's reputation.

<u>Achievement of outcome</u> Funding does not result in expected outcomes that align with council criteria and priorities.	Clear application criteria, grant allocation process and monitoring will ensure grant scheme outcomes are met.	
<u>Property</u>		
<u>Community Support</u> Local organisations and communities do not respond to the grant opportunities.  Community opposition to decisions that are made.	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.  Clear and transparent grants processes.	
<u>Timescales</u>		
<u>Project capacity</u>		

## 11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

### Small Grant and Project Grant schemes in 2022/23

- 11.1 Appendix 1 provides details of all the grant applications received and awarded from the Town Forum Small Grant and Project Grant budgets in 2022/23. Appendix 2 summarises some of the feedback received from grant recipients. In summary:

<b>FUND:</b>	<b>2022/23 Budget</b>	<b>2022/23 Actual Awards</b>

Strategic Fund: Citizens Advice Winchester District Play to the Crowd	£20,000 £20,000	£20,000 £20,000
Crowdfunder Grants (available Sept-Dec22) / Project Grants (available Jan-March 23)	£33,000 total budget for two schemes	£0 £26,510
Small grant programme	£7,000	£10,800
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£80,000</b>	<b>£77,310</b>

- 11.2 The Town Forum Small Grant scheme received a good number of applications from a variety of organisations across all five town wards. Overall, 16 applications were received and 12 grants were awarded totalling £10,800. Three of the unsuccessful applications did not meet the eligibility criteria, whilst one was awarded the grant but declined to accept it due to changing circumstances.
- 11.3 The temporary relaxation of rules for small grants meant that many applicants were able to secure grants of up to £1,000 in recognition of the increased cost of living.
- 11.4 The other temporary relaxation allowed applicants to include up to 50% of core costs in their application, if impacted by the cost of living crisis. This was only taken up by one applicant.
- 11.5 The Town Community Fund through Crowdfunder did not receive any applications, although it was only open for a relatively short period from September to December 2022. A review of the Crowdfunder match funding scheme was discussed at the Health and Environment Policy Committee in December (HEP029) which supported the decision to cease crowdfunding and stop offering this fund. It was subsequently replaced by a new Project Grant scheme, which was well received and awarded six grants totalling £26,510 in 2022/2023
- 11.6 A summary of the 2021/22 allocations compared to 2022/23 allocations is given in the table below.

	2021/22	2022/23
<b>Small grants</b>		
Number of applications	24	15
Number of awards	18	12
Total value of awards	£8,565	£10,800
<b>Project Grants</b>		
Number of applications	scheme closed	8

Number of awards	scheme closed	6
Total value of awards	scheme closed	£26,510
<b>Crowdfunder Grants</b>		
Number of applications	no applications received*	no applications received **
Number of awards	0	0
Total value of awards	0	0

\* scheme open Sept 21-Mar 22. Three awards to town-based organisations totalling £3,750 were made from the General Fund during May-Sep 21.

\*\* scheme only open Sept-Dec 22

### Contribution to Strategic Funded organisations 2022/23

- 11.7 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 2022/23. 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 2022/23 enabled continuation of their vital service delivery. An increased number of clients were supported compared to previous years and the core funding enabled the organisation to invest in capacity to bring in income and deliver projects through a Business Development Manager resource.

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>
Advice issues	15,118	16,602
Clients supported (district-wide)	4,739	5,321
Number of people helped with financial advice	2,520	2,897
Number of people supported with debt	621	678

b) Play to the Crowd

The £20,000 Town contribution to Play to the Crowd's Strategic Fund grant of £147,000 for 2022/23 enabled people to connect with and participate in live performance.

Metric	2021/22			2022/23		
	Town	District	Total	Town	District	Total
People engaged with Theatre Royal performances	21,972	26,655	<b>48,627</b>	29,578	25,641	<b>55,219</b>
People engaged with Hat Fair performances	49,234	8,376	<b>57,610</b>	45,871	15,749	<b>61,620</b>
Number of participants in Playmakers activities including youth theatre	7,366	560	<b>7,926</b>	6,075,	1,888)	<b>7,963</b>
Number of volunteers supported						<b>155</b>
Number of 'Pick you price' events						<b>9</b>
Average ticket yield			<b>£16.52</b>			<b>£17.19</b>

#### Community Grants programme for 2023/24

- 11.8 The Town Forum budget for 2023/24 (WTF314) includes continued contribution of £40,000 to year two funding of the Strategic Fund 2022-2025 grants:
- a) Citizens Advice Winchester - £20,000
  - b) Play to the Crowd - £20,000
- 11.9 Town Forum Small Grant scheme 2023/24 budget of £7,000
- a) This scheme opened on 1 June 2023 with the continuation of the £1,000 maximum award but no longer allowing core costs, which were introduced as a short term support measure with regards to the COVID relaxation of rules. This is consistent with the district Small Grant programme.
  - b) The scheme for 2023/24 was opened up earlier than in previous years, in response to a request made by the Forum during last year's annual review.
  - c) The first Small Grant panel of the year will be held in September 2023 and the scheme will remain open until the budget is fully allocated, or 29 February 2024, whichever is sooner. The virtual nature of grant panel meetings involving the Forum's (Town Vision) Informal Group members works effectively and will remain unchanged.
- 11.10 Town Forum Project Grant scheme 2023/24 budget of £33,000

- a) Round 1 application window was 1 June 2023 – 7 July 2023. Six applications totalling £27,464 were received and three initial awards have been made totalling £12,500 with decisions deferred on a further two awards totalling £9,964 pending additional information. A second round is anticipated later in the year.
- b) A published scoring process is used to select grants for award and proposed awards are discussed with Town Forum (Town Vision) Informal Group members.

#### TC25 grant review and 2024/25 Town Account forecast

11.11 The Town Forum considered the town account budget on 23 January 2023 (WTF314) and set an expectation for the following reductions in the grants and Vision delivery budget:

- a) Reduction of £10,000 for the year 2024/25 to leave a budget of £70,000.
- b) Reduction of £10,000 for the year 2025/26 to leave a budget of £60,000.
- c) Reduction of £10,000 for the year 2026/27 to leave a budget of £50,000.

11.12 The proposal is to make the initial £10,000 reduction from the Project Grants budget, as a reduction from £33,000 to £23,000 would still allow for a viable scheme. The other options considered but discounted are set out in section 12.1.

11.13 The council's Transformation Challenge programme (TC25) includes a review of the district-wide community grants programme as per Cabinet report CAB3374 and will include a full options appraisal and cost benefit analysis of all community grants and explore further options to meet required reductions in future years. This will inform decisions on future funding of the Strategic Fund partners to which the Town Forum currently contributes £40,000 per year so, once this work is complete, we will better understand the implications of reductions in funding for those organisations. This work will be completed next year so future decisions on options for reductions to the grant budget for 2025/26, and beyond, will be considered when the findings of work are available. In the meantime, taking a £10,000 reduction in the project grant budget is the most straightforward and preferred option.

<b>FUND:</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>
Strategic Fund:				
Citizens Advice	£20,000	£20,000	TBC	TBC
Winchester	£20,000	£20,000		
Play to the Crowd				
Project Grants	£33,000	£23,000	TBC	TBC
Small grant	£7,000	£7,000	TBC	TBC

programme				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£80,000</b>	<b>£70,000</b>	<b>£60,000</b>	<b>£50,000</b>

## 12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 Alternative options exist for reducing the budget by £10,000 in 2024/25, including

- a) A reduction in the core grants awarded; rejected as such a reduction would be premature as the impact of core grant reductions will not be known until a full review has taken place as part of TC25 process so this option has been rejected at this point in time.
- b) Elimination of the small grants scheme; rejected as this would reduce the grant options available to applicants and mean that no funding would be available for projects in the town area costing less than £1,000.

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

#### Previous Committee Reports:-

[CAB3374 General Fund Budget Options and Medium Term Financial Strategy.pdf \(winchester.gov.uk\)](#)

[Winchester Town Account Medium Term Financial Position \(WTF313\)](#)

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

[Town Forum Grant Programme \(WTF311\)](#)

#### Other Background Documents:-

None

### APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Town Forum all grants awarded 2022/23

Appendix 2: Town Forum small grants report feedback 2022/23

Appendix 3: Equality impact assessment