



CABINET – 15th JULY 2014

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PROVISION AND REFOCUSING OF GRANTS TO COMMUNITY GROUPS – SHIRE PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY GRANTS SCHEME

PART A

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of the report is to seek approval to implement a new SHIRE Participatory Community Grants programme in line with the agreed refocusing of grants to community groups which was agreed by the Cabinet on 5 March 2014.

Recommendations

2. The Cabinet is recommended to :
 - (a) Agree that a new SHIRE Participatory Community Grants scheme complementing the SHIRE Community Solutions Grant be implemented at the earliest opportunity;
 - (b) Agree that the SHIRE Participatory Community Grants scheme will be implemented on a countywide basis, with funding made available on the basis of themes and involving an allocation process that will take place twice a year, in line with the proposals outlined in paragraphs 22–37 below;
 - (c) Agree that the independent Panel that is currently being established to oversee the SHIRE Community Solutions Grant will also oversee the SHIRE Participatory Community Grants.

Reason for recommendation

3. To achieve the savings agreed in the County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for a £430,000 service reduction in 2014/15 with regards to the provision and refocusing of grants to individuals and community groups.
4. The proposed scheme will build on the strengths of the previous Community Forum Budgets, whilst ensuring it is fit for purpose in the light of the new focus for community grants provision. Adding the oversight of the Participatory Community Grants scheme to the independent Panel for the SHIRE

Community Solutions Grant will create a strategic Panel to oversee the entirety of the Shire Community Grants programme.

Timetable for decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The Scrutiny Commission was consulted on the Medium Term financial Strategy (MTFS) savings line S71 with regard to provision and refocusing of grants to individuals and community groups at its meeting on 29th January 2014.
6. On 5th March 2014 the Cabinet approved the focus, aims and objectives for a new SHIRE Community Grants programme, consisting of a SHIRE Community Solutions Grant Fund of £260,000 per annum and a SHIRE Participatory Community Grants Fund of £160,000 per annum.
7. The Scrutiny Commission was consulted on the implementation of the SHIRE Community Solutions Grant on 26th March 2014 (its comments are referred to at paragraph 33 below)
8. Subject to the Cabinet's approval, the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member for Shire Grants will agree, at the earliest opportunity, the implementation of the SHIRE Participatory Community Solutions Grant, including detailed criteria, guidance for applicants and the approval process to enable implementation in the autumn of 2014.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. On 19th February 2014 the Council approved the MTFS including the 2014/15 revenue budget and capital programme. The MTFS includes a £430,000 service reduction in 2014/15 with regards to the provision and refocusing of grants to individuals and community groups.
10. On 5th March 2014 the Cabinet approved the focus, aims and objectives for a new SHIRE Community Grants programme, consisting of a SHIRE Community Solutions Grant Fund of £260,000 per annum and a SHIRE Participatory Community Grants Fund of £160,000 per annum. It was agreed that the SHIRE Community Solutions Grant be implemented at the earliest opportunity and that proposals for implementation of the proposed SHIRE Participatory Community Grant scheme be developed for future consideration by the Cabinet.

11. The County Council's draft Communities Strategy was approved for public consultation by the Cabinet on 17th June 2014. The Communities Strategy sets out how the County Council will:
- (a) Help people and communities to support themselves and vulnerable people, reducing the demand on public services;
 - (b) Devolve services – increase the ability of community groups to take over, or work more closely with, services currently delivered by the council;
 - (c) Ensure voluntary groups support the council to deliver its priorities on service devolution and help for vulnerable people.

The SHIRE Community Grants programme would directly support the delivery of this Communities Strategy.

Resource Implications

12. The proposals in this report are in line with the County Council's MTFS and 2014/15 Revenue and Capital Budgets. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

13. A copy of this report has been circulated to all members of the County Council under the Members News in Brief service.

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PART B**Background**

14. On 5th March the Cabinet agreed that Community Grant schemes would be refocused in line with the ambitions of the MTFs to help deliver the County Council's strategic imperatives for transformation. The allocation of funds for 2014/15 and each year of the remaining period covered by the MTFs is as follows:

Community Grants programme	Annual Budget	
	Capital	Revenue
SHIRE Community Solutions Grant Fund	£100,000	£160,000
SHIRE Community Participatory Grant Fund		£160,000
Total	£100,000	£320,000

15. The agreed revised focus for the funding is on:
- a. enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to identify and deliver solutions that enable them to support both themselves and other vulnerable individuals and families, thus reducing demand on public services;
 - b. supporting the ability and appetite of community groups, social enterprises and the voluntary sector to take over relevant services currently delivered by the County Council and/or or to work alongside the public sector to deliver services.
16. In line with this focus, the key aims and objectives for the provision of grants to communities are therefore:
- a. Building the capacity of voluntary and community groups to provide sustainable services and activities to help vulnerable people and reduce demand for specialist services;
 - b. Actively enabling communities to provide preventative and early intervention activities and services that help reduce the need for and dependency on high cost County Council services;
 - c. Raising community expectations about the potential and ability of communities to help themselves;
 - d. Gaining insight into the ways in which communities are able and willing to help themselves and how the Council can encourage, enable and facilitate communities to provide effective prevention and early intervention activity;
 - e. Supporting communities to explore options for, and test the feasibility of taking over council services.
17. The agreed SHIRE Community Grants Programme involves:
- a. A SHIRE Community Solutions grants scheme for match funding contributions up to £10,000 to support new initiatives to provide and

develop preventative and early intervention services that help reduce demand for high-cost services and to support communities wishing to develop alternative services to compensate for service reductions or wishing to take over services that the County Council is no longer able to provide.

- b. A SHIRE Participatory Grants Scheme for grants up to £2,500 to support smaller community projects and build capacity and raise aspirations in communities to deliver sustainable preventative and early intervention activity and services.

Aims of the SHIRE Community Participatory Grant Fund

- 18. Operating alongside the SHIRE Community Solutions Grant, the SHIRE Community Participatory Grant fund will be particularly aimed at:
 - a. Easy access for applicants - including through a straightforward application process and an opportunity for project proposers to present their project in person;
 - b. Transparency – an open and transparent participatory decision making process;
 - c. Building Capacity – embedding learning and access to information, advice and support for participating groups in the process.
- 19. This grant fund would provide a financial contribution (up to £2,500) to enable community groups and small local charities to provide community services and activities, in particular with regards to vulnerable people in the community.
- 20. The participatory Community Forum Budgets programme has been a popular community grant fund, which has worked well as a capacity building entry-level fund and supported a high level of projects that supported relevant outcomes around prevention and early intervention. The proposed SHIRE Community Participatory Grant funds process builds on the strengths of the Community Forum Budgets process, whilst ensuring it is fit for purpose in the light of the new focus for community grants.

Implementation of the SHIRE Participatory Community Grants Fund

- 21. It is proposed that the SHIRE Community Participatory Grants will be awarded twice a year and that it will be a countywide process that is based around a number of key themes. Applicants will be invited to submit a bid in relation to one of these themes, demonstrating how their project proposals will help achieve outcomes in relation to that theme.
- 22. It is proposed that the following four themes would be fixed for a three-year period:
 - a. Supporting vulnerable people in the community
 - b. Encouraging young people to achieve their potential
 - c. Supporting older people to live independently

d. Getting active in the community

23. In addition, it is proposed that each funding round will include a one-off theme, which would be agreed annually by the Chief Executive, in liaison with the Cabinet Lead Member for Shire Grants. The proposed two themes for 2014-15 are:

- a. Eating healthily for less;
- b. Supporting carers.

24. The proposed annual allocation of funding to these themes is as follows:

Theme	Round 1	Round 2	Annual Total
Supporting vulnerable people in the community	£15,000	£15,000	£30,000
Encouraging young people to achieve their potential	£15,000	£15,000	£30,000
Supporting older people to live independently	£15,000	£15,000	£30,000
Getting active in the community	£15,000	£15,000	£30,000
Annual Theme 1	£20,000	0	£20,000
Annual Theme 2	0	£20,000	£20,000
Total	£80,000	£80,000	160,000

25. To ensure eligible groups across the County are aware of the funding opportunities and encourage innovative bids to come forward, further consideration will be given to the most effective and efficient way to promote the Grant Fund and the related themes. This may involve holding special events and meetings to explain the funding process and bring potential bidders in contact with each other and with sources of support. Specific attention will be given to encouraging bids from community groups in areas with relatively high levels of deprivation and groups who may need additional support to develop their proposals.

26. For each theme, applicants will be invited to submit bids matching that particular theme by a set date. Bids received for a particular theme will then be taken through the following stages:

Initial selection Stage (1)	An officer based selection will aim to filter out proposals that are ineligible, lack substance or do not align sufficiently with the theme.
Assessment & Prioritisation Stage (2)	This participatory stage will involve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Making projects available on a website to enable people to see the projects and comment on them; ○ Sharing projects with a virtual 'Expert Panel' to get feedback on each proposal. This feedback will be shared with applicants and a summary made

	<p>available via the website;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Holding a 'decision night' where project proposers come together to listen to and discuss each other's proposals and score projects and/or vote for their favourites.
Formal Approval Stage (3)	Officers will ensure prioritised projects meet all criteria for public funding and formalise the offer of funding.
Learning Stage (4)	Officers will monitor the delivery of projects to identify if and how the project is adding value.

Stage 1 - Initial selection

27. The officer-based initial selection (Stage 1) will ensure that all projects that enter the participatory stage are eligible and relevant to that theme. Where officers consider that projects would fit better with a different theme, project proposers will be contacted to discuss the options.
28. Projects that appear not to have sufficient substance behind them and would therefore struggle to be delivered can also be taken out of the process. Where relevant, applicants will be advised to re-submit a revised bid as part of a future funding round. This process will ensure that time is not wasted on inappropriate projects, whilst also providing clarity to community groups at an early stage about projects that are not deemed to meet the criteria. All remaining projects will go forward into a participatory allocation process (Stage 2).

Stage 2 - Assessment and prioritisation

29. The existing leicestershireforums.org website will be transformed to provide a platform to support the scheme. All projects that have passed the first stage will be made available on this website to enable people to view the projects submitted for each particular theme and comment on them over a set period of time.
30. All projects will also be shared with relevant officers from across the County Council and key partner organisations. This virtual 'Expert Panel' will provide feedback on each proposal. This feedback will be shared with applicants and a summary made available via the website.
31. There will be a Decision Night for each theme to bring together project proposers. They will be able to present their projects and be encouraged to listen to and discuss each other's proposals. Ultimately, they will also prioritise the projects by scoring them and/or vote for their favourites. The decision night will produce a prioritised list of projects with a provisional allocation of funding.

32. It is proposed that there would be a maximum number of representatives that can take part in the scoring/voting from each project (i.e. 4 or 5). Although the Decision Nights could be open to the wider public for transparency reasons, scoring/voting would not be open to all.

Stage 3 - Formal Approval

33. Following the themed Decision Night, officers in the Communities and Places Team will ensure priority projects meet all criteria for public funding and that any key issues identified via the Expert Panel process are addressed before formalising the offer of funding.

Stage 4 - Learning

34. The main aims of this stage are:
- a. To monitor that the funding awarded is spent in accordance with the agreed project proposals;
 - b. To demonstrate how the projects funded are adding value and are helping the Council to reduce demand for its services.
35. The progress monitoring and liaison during this stage will be set up so as to ensure that the Council gains useful insight from the projects it supports. It is proposed that findings will be reported regularly to a strategic panel that oversees the SHIRE Community Grants Programme (see paragraphs 38-40 below).
36. To encourage other community groups to learn from successful projects, successful groups may also be asked to present their projects to relevant forums and to be involved in promoting further rounds of the grant scheme. It may also be appropriate to hold update events where successful projects can share their progress with each other and with relevant officers and decision makers.
37. Where appropriate, projects may be encouraged to apply for further funding from the Community Solutions Grant fund.

SHIRE Community Grants Panel

38. The Cabinet report on 5th March 2014 proposed that the allocation of funding for the SHIRE Community Solutions Grant will be overseen by an independent panel of representatives of funding organisations and community and voluntary sector organisations. The Panel will be chaired by a Cabinet member and will meet several times throughout the year.
39. It is now further proposed that this Panel will oversee the SHIRE Participatory Community Grants. This will provide strategic oversight and challenge with regard to the full SHIRE Community Grants Programme.

40. To ensure this Panel fulfils its wider strategic role in ensuring the Council learns from the grants programme, it is proposed that senior managers of relevant County Council services are invited to sit on the Panel as appropriate.

Consultations

41. The Scrutiny Commission was consulted on 26th March 2014 about different options for implementing the SHIRE Community Participatory Grant Fund (these are set out in Appendix A). The Scrutiny Commission resolved that the implementation options for a Shire Participatory Grants Scheme that involve delivery on a countywide basis and that are based around themes linked to the County Council's strategic and transformational priorities be broadly supported.
42. A range of partners have been consulted informally following the Scrutiny Commission meeting about the implementation options for this grants scheme, including District Councils, the Leicestershire and Rutland Sports Partnership, and Voluntary Action Leicestershire. These proposals have been further developed in light of and incorporate the feedback from this informal consultation.

Background Papers

Report to the County Council 19th February 2014 "Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 – 2017/18"

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=3961&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet 5 March 2014 "Provision and Refocusing of Grants to Community Groups".

[http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003988/AI00037204/\\$8provisionandrefocusingofgrants.docxA.ps.pdf](http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003988/AI00037204/$8provisionandrefocusingofgrants.docxA.ps.pdf)

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 26th March 2014

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=3934&Ver=4>

Appendices

- Appendix A - Options for the implementation of the SHIRE Community Participatory Grants, as used for consultation with Scrutiny Commission on 26th March 2014.
- Appendix B - Equalities Impact Assessment report.

Relevant Impact Assessments

Equal Opportunities Implications

43. An Equalities Impact Assessment with regard to the provision and refocusing of community grants has been completed and agreed by the County Council's Departmental Equalities Group on 25 March 2014. The key findings were that

reduced funding availability will inevitably lead to reduced access to grant funds for community and voluntary groups across the county. If implemented without mitigating changes to the aims, objectives, criteria and assessment processes of replacement schemes, this would disproportionately disadvantage groups representing young people, older people, vulnerable people as well as rural and disadvantaged communities in terms of access to funds to achieve benefits for these groups. Mitigation of this potential differential impact has been considered carefully in the development and design of the aims, themes and assessment processes for the new SHIRE Participatory Community Grants scheme.

Partnership working

44. The virtual 'Expert Panel' process will include officers from a range of partner organisations, including District Councils, the Leicestershire and Rutland Sports Partnership and Voluntary Action Leicestershire. This will ensure they will have a full oversight of applications that are relevant to the aims of their organisation and that they are able to provide feedback to applicants as appropriate. These proposals therefore have a positive impact on partnership working.