

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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REFERENCE **ACCL -001-11**

AREA BOARD GRANT GUIDANCE 2011/12

Purpose of Report

1. During 2011/2012 the 18 Area Boards will have a budget of £1 million for distribution across 20 community areas, much of which will be available to community and voluntary groups through the Area Boards. Since the establishment of Area Boards in June 2009 Councillors and Area Board Managers have identified the need to make some improvements to how Area Boards can distribute their budget (excluding the proportion allocated to Community Area Partnerships). A small group was established, made up from Councillor Chris Williams and officers to revise and improve (where necessary), the Community Area Grants Scheme and Councillor/Area Board led funding schemes.

Background

2. The Coalition Government's Localism Bill places emphasis on community and voluntary sector involvement and it was considered important to reflect this shift when considering funding criteria for 2011/12.
3. Area Boards allocate the majority of their funding to the Community Area Grants scheme, which is managed by community area managers with decisions being made by the unitary members of the Area Boards, frequently in consultation with the wider membership and the community. Grants are linked to local priorities, frequently those identified in the community plan.
4. Councillor/Area Board led projects, introduced in 2010/11 enabled councillors to pursue and resolve 'sticky' issues' brought to the attention of the Area Board through the Community Issues Process, where it was not possible for them to be resolved through the Community Area Grants Scheme.
5. It is important that grants criteria are clear and the application process easy and accessible, whether this is made available in hard copy or via the Council's website. It was recognised that criteria, councillor guidance and presentation of information to the public could be improved.

Main Considerations

6. Improvements to the Community Area Grants Process

The application process and funding criteria for the Community Area Grants Scheme has been minimally revised (see Appendix 1-3), based on observations received from councillors, officers and applicants during 2010/11. These changes seek to improve the application process for those seeking funding, assist consideration of applications by officers and to provide clarity for decision making by members of the Area Boards (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3). This year, greater emphasis has been placed on the need for clarity around responsibility for functions funded from the County and local parish and town precepts.

7. Support for Community and Voluntary Groups

It was considered important to acknowledge the emphasis in the Coalition Government's Localism agenda when considering the funding criteria for 2011/12 and support the ethos of volunteering and community involvement. With this in mind Community Area Grants should be encouraged from and awarded to these groups (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3).

8. Town and Parish Councils

There has been a lack of clarity around paragraphs (b) and (h) of the Community Area Grants Criteria insofar as they apply to the functions of parish and town councils. To avoid this in future, this report clarifies the situation and the original intention of the grants criteria. Town and parish councils may raise funds through their local precept to deliver local services, undertake projects and promote schemes for which they have a statutory duty or legal power to provide. For this reason, it is considered that area boards should not consider applications from town/parish councils for purposes that relate to such local powers and functions that may be funded more appropriately from the local precept. (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3). However, this will not preclude bids from parish and town councils for projects or schemes that have a benefit to the wider community area or in relation to functions that are not the sole responsibility of the local council – such as community safety or transportation.

9. Councillor Led Projects

During 2010/11 Area Board/councillor led projects appeared to be working reasonably well. Councillors are reminded that these schemes should not be used to avoid complying with the Community Area Grant criteria, but to enable an area board to tackle 'sticky' community issues identified by the community or a project identified in the Community Plan. An application form for these projects has been revised and is contained in Appendix 4.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

The decentralisation of decision making and community governance arrangements is in accordance with the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for Wiltshire 2007-2016.

Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal

Improvements to the funding process adopted by the Area Boards should ensure that it is open and transparent and as accessible to the community of Wiltshire.

Risk Assessment

The risks associated with making minor changes to the process and procedures to the distribution of Area Board budget, are minimal and outweigh the risk to retaining the current scheme, which is causing minor irritation and confusion.

Financial Implications

There are no budgetary implications associated with this report. No financial changes have been made to the process from 2012/11 when officers within the finance department were consulted on any changes to ensure that the process of administering the Area Board budget falls within the Council's financial regulations.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications directly related to this report.

Options Considered

The group considered a number of options to bring about the suggestions contained in this report, the majority of which arose from user feedback.

Conclusion

The adoption of the recommendations set out in this report will ensure improved mechanisms for the distribution of the Area Board budget and in so doing advance the satisfaction levels of those engaging with the process as well as providing greater opportunities for Councillors to enhance their community leadership role.

Proposals

1. The emphasis in 2011/12 will be that the Community Area Grants will support the ethos of volunteering and community involvement.
2. Area boards shall not consider applications from town and parish councils for purposes that relate to the statutory duties or powers of such councils that may be funded from the local parish precept.
3. That there should be no change to the guidance for Councillor led projects, other than to request that the revised application form should be used.

4. That the funding process and criteria for the distribution of area board funding outlined in Appendices 1- 4 of this report are approved.

Reason for Proposals

These proposals seek to ensure the smooth delivery of Area Boards grants through the adoption of funding criteria and guidance to ensure an easily accessible and transparent process for both the community and voluntary sector and members of the Area Boards and that greater emphasis is put on activities and projects led by the community and voluntary groups

Appendices

Appendix 1: Community Area Grants Funding Criteria

Appendix 2: Community Area Grants Application Form

Appendix 3: Sources of Advice and Other Funding

Appendix 4: Application form for Area Board/Councillor led projects