

CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT CARE, COMMUNITIES AND HOUSING

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REFERENCE

AREA BOARD GRANT GUIDANCE 2012/13

Purpose of Report

1. During 2012/2013 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 Christopher Williams and officers to revise and improve (where necessary), the Community Area Grants Scheme and Area Board and Councillor Led Initiatives. To further support strong, more resilient local communities in Wiltshire a Small Grant is proposed to encourage local people to undertake community projects and activities near to where they live.

Background

2. The Coalition Government's Localism Bill places emphasis on community and voluntary sector involvement and it was considered important to continue to reflect this when considering the funding opportunities and criteria for 2012/13.
3. Area Boards allocate the majority of their funding to Community Area Grants and Small Grants, which are managed by Community Area Managers who make recommendations to the area boards. Decisions are 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, including those identified in the local Community Plan and the community priorities identified at the Local Area Joint Strategic Assessment events.
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. In 2012/13 they may also arise from community priorities identified at the Local Area Joint Strategic Assessment event. This funding is not to be used to provide a local subsidy to council services or make up for budget shortfalls. In 2012/13 some minor changes have been made to ensure clarity and public transparency.
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.

6. Since the inception of Area Boards in 2009/10, the council has agreed the following funding of Area Board Grants:

2009/10	£0.750m
2010/11	£1 million
2011/12	£1 million

In both 2009/10 and 2010/11 the funding was provided through the Council's base revenue budget and in 2011/12 remaining grant funding from the Performance Related Grant (PRG) was set aside to fund Area Boards. The £1 million has been allocated across the 20 Area Boards based on population, scarcity and deprivation factors. Area Boards have been able to carry forward unspent grant budget at the end of each financial year, providing additional budget in the following year above the £1 million. In 2010/11 a further £0.144m was carried forward and was available to be allocated during 2011/12.

Main Considerations

7. Improvements to the Community Area Grants Process

The application process and funding criteria for the Community Area Grants Scheme has been minimally revised (see Appendices 1-3), based on observations received from councillors, officers and applicants during 2011/12. These changes seek to improve the application process for those seeking funding, assist consideration of applications by officers and provide clarity for decision making by members of the Area Boards (see Appendices 1-3). This year greater emphasis has been placed on the need for all applicants to adhere to funding criteria and councillors will rely on Community Area Managers to ensure that only eligible applications are considered by the area board.

8. Introduction of the Small Grants

In order to support stronger, more resilient local communities a Small Grant is being introduced in 2012/13 to enable informal groups of people working in the community undertake community initiatives near to where they live. This new Small Grant will offer groups a maximum of £350 to pump prime good ideas. Details of the scheme can be found in Appendix 4 and 5.

9. Support for Community and Voluntary Groups

Once again it was considered important to acknowledge the emphasis in the Coalition Government's Localism agenda when considering the funding criteria for 2012/13 and support the ethos of volunteering and community involvement. With this in mind Community Area Grants and Small Grants should be encouraged from and awarded to these groups.

10. Town and Parish Councils

There will be no changes to the decisions made in 2011/12 in respect to town and parish councils. 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. 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.

11. Area Board Projects and Councillor Led Initiatives

During 2011/12 Area Board/councillor led projects continued to be working reasonably well, although it was felt that in 2012/13 further clarity would be helpful in terms of funding guidance and improving the application form. The purpose of this scheme is to enable councillors to tackle issues in their area, including projects and initiatives which have been identified by the community. It should not be used to fill gaps where there are service shortfalls or where it is possible for them to be resolved through use of the Community Area Grants scheme. Funding criteria and information has been revised and is contained in Appendix 6 and 7.

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

In 2012/13 the budget proposal is to continue funding Area Boards to £1 million, with £0.5 million funded through the revenue budget and £0.5m through the capital budget. If Area Board Grants are to continue into 2013/14 growth items will have to be included in revenue and capital budgets as appropriate.

Legal Implications

In developing the area board funding criteria for 2012/13 officers have sought to demonstrate being fair open and transparent and complying with principles of best value in all grants awarded by the area board.

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 2012/13 will be that the Community Area Grants will support the ethos of volunteering and community involvement.
2. That in 2012/13 Small Grants will be introduced to support local people to undertake projects near to where they live which will contribute towards building more resilient communities.
3. Community Area Managers will provide area boards with recommendations in respect to Community Area and Small Grants.
4. That there should be no change to the guidance in respect to funding to parish/town councils. Area boards should 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.
5. That there are improvements to the guidance and application form for Area Board Projects and Councillor Led Initiatives. The purpose of this scheme is to enable councillors to tackle issues in their area, including projects and initiatives which have been identified by the community. It should not be used to fill gaps where there are service shortfalls or where it is possible for them to be resolved through use of the Community Area Grants scheme.
6. That the funding process and criteria for the distribution of area board funding outlined in Appendices 1- 7 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 Grant Funding Criteria and Information

Appendix 2: Community Area Grant Application Form

Appendix 3: Sources of Advice and Other Funding

Appendix 4: Small Grant Funding Criteria and Information

Appendix 5: Small Grant Application Form

Appendix 6: Application form for Area Board/Councillor Led Projects - Funding Criteria and Information

Appendix 7: Application form for Area Board/Councillor Led Projects Application Form