

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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REFERENCE: ACCL-001-10

AREA BOARD GRANT GUIDANCE

Purpose of Report

1. During 2010/2011 the budget proposal for the 18 Area Boards is £1 million for distribution across 20 community areas, much of which will be available to community and voluntary groups and town and parish councils through the Area Boards grants scheme. 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 distribute their budget (excluding the proportion allocated to Community Area Partnerships). A small Grants Reference Group was established, made up from Councillors (from each of the three Area Board localities) and officers to revise and improve the Community Area Grants Scheme and also consider other opportunities for Councillor led funding schemes, the key elements of which are outlined in this report.

Background

2. To date the scope of Area Boards to allocate their grant has been largely confined to the Community Area Grants scheme, which is managed by community area managers with decisions being made by the 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 community plan.
3. Historically, there were a range of funding processes used by the former district councils and understandably unitary councillors, officers and applicants have sometimes found the new Community Area Grants scheme challenging to get to grips with; suggesting that there may be value in providing briefings and/or familiarisation sessions in the coming year.
4. It is important that grants criteria is clear and the application process easy and accessible, whether this is made available in hard copy or via the Council's website. It has been recognised that criteria, councillor guidance and presentation of information to the public can be improved.
5. The Community Issue System has enabled local people to raise issues directly with their local Area Board and many have pursued 'sticky' issues in this way. Consequently, councillors have been keen to take up such issues on behalf of constituents and seek funding from the Area Board. The main

approach for solving local issues however, is to engage local service providers and partner organisations to use their extensive resources to tackle local problems.

Main Considerations for the Cabinet

6. Improvements to the Process

The application process and funding criteria for the Community Area Grants Scheme has been revised (see Appendix 1-3), based on observations received by the Grants Reference Group, including feedback from Councillors. 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.

7. Area Board Projects

It has become clear during the last six months that in addition to the Community Area Grant Scheme, Area Boards may wish to use a proportion of their funding for projects which fall outside the criteria of the Community Area Grant Scheme. These projects would be initiated by Area Board members for consideration and approval by the Area Board. The Grants Reference Group considered this proposal carefully and recognised that this could impact significantly upon the amount of funding available to support applications from community groups and organisations. It was felt that Boards may wish to limit the amount of money used in this way in order to retain a viable grants pot. Following consideration by the Chairmen of the Area Boards it was considered that this limit should be a matter for each Area Board itself to consider in the light of local circumstances. Consequently, it is considered that the following guidance should be provided to the Boards:

Any project initiated by a member of the Board outside of the Community Grants system will require the approval of the Board and should set out clearly one or more of the following:

- *evidence of community need;*
- *clear links to the community plan*
- *evidence that it addresses an ongoing issue that has been logged via the Community Issues System*

In considering such requests, the Board will need to bear in mind the impact this will have on the amount of funding available to support applications from local community groups and organisations.

8. Familiarisation

From feedback received by the Grants Reference Group and officer observation since the introduction of the current Community Area Grants Scheme, it has become evident that there is some inconsistency in the

application of the existing funding criteria by applicants, officers and Councillors when making decisions. In view of this, it is suggested that:

- i. Charities Information Bureau is invited as part of its Service Level Agreement with the Council - to provide support to any applicant seeking funding advice or help to complete application forms.
- ii. Community Area Managers are provided with additional training to ensure they are fully conversant with the funding criteria.
- iii. All Councillors be offered a briefing on the new funding criteria through the Area Board Co-ordination (ABC) meetings.

9. Request for roll-over of un-spent Area Board Budget

The Grants Reference Group considered that Area Boards should in exceptional circumstances be permitted to carry forward budgetary under spends where funds were committed but not yet paid to the grant recipient at the end of the financial year.

In conjunction with the Finance Department it was agreed that in future Area Board awards will be guaranteed for one calendar year from the time of the award being made by the Area Board (this is to accommodate larger capital projects which may take some time to accumulate the balance of their funding).

Roll forward of any non-committed unspent budget over £1,000 would require the approval of the Cabinet.

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. Improvements have been made to Community Area Grants application form in consultation with the Council's Equalities and Diversity Manager.

Risk Assessment

This report seeks to address risks associated with the existing Area Board grants scheme. 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. Officers within the finance department have been consulted to ensure that the process of

administering the Area Board budget falls within the Council's financial regulations.

Legal Implications

The Council is empowered to make community grants under the provisions of Section 2 (wellbeing) of the Local Government Act 2000.

Options Considered

The Grants Reference Group considered a range 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. That the funding process and criteria for the Community Area Grants Scheme outlined in Appendix 1-3 of this report are approved.
2. That Area Boards be permitted to allocate funding from the Area Board budget, to support projects initiated by members subject to the conditions set out under paragraph 7 below.
3. That a programme of familiarisation related to Area Board grants outlined in section 8 (sections i - iii) of this report be approved.
4. All grants awarded by Area Boards are guaranteed for a period of 12 months from the date of approval with any consequent funding commitments rolled forward at the end of the financial year as necessary.
5. That the Director of Communities, Libraries, Heritage and the Arts be authorised to ensure that all necessary arrangements are made to implement the recommendations in readiness for the first Area Board meetings in April 2010

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.

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Background Papers

Notes of the Grants Reference Group

Name Appendices

Appendix 1: Community Area Grants Criteria

Appendix 2: Community Area Grants Application Form

Appendix 3: Sources of Local Funding, support and Advice