

CABINET LEAD MEMBER DECISION MEETING - 18TH OCTOBER 2018

**Report of the Monitoring Officer
Lead Member: Councillor Taylor**

Part A

ITEM MEMBER GRANTS SCHEME

Purpose of Report

To bring forward recommendations for awards under the Member Grants Scheme where the Ward Councillors have declared personal interests that might lead to bias.

Recommendations

- i. That £576 be awarded to Thurmaston Action Group for opening up a footpath and a view from Melton Road through the recreation ground to the cemetery and on to the new housing estate of the Dales, subject to confirmation of permission from the owners of the site.
- ii. That £250 be awarded to Thurmaston Action Group for a new noticeboard on Mill Lane car park at the entrance to Watermead County Park, subject to confirmation of permission from the owners of the site.
- iii. That £350 be awarded to Anstey & Glenfield Cricket Club for end of season, out of season and pre-season cricket square work.

Reasons

1to3. To approve awards under the Member Grants Scheme where the relevant Ward Councillor has declared a personal interest that might lead to bias in connection to the organisation receiving the funding, and in the cases of recommendations 1 and 2, subject to permission being obtained from the owners of the relevant sites for the works to go ahead.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

The Member Grants Scheme was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 12th April 2018 (minute reference 116).

Under the scheme each Councillor is allocated £1,000 to fund local community projects within their ward.

Situations are now arising where Ward Councillors are considering awarding grants under the scheme to organisations they have a connection to, which under the provisions of the Member Code of Conduct may result in them having a 'personal interest which might lead to bias'.

The Member Conduct Committee considered this matter at its meeting on 17th September 2018, and of the view that in cases where a Ward Councillor has a conflict of interest that the grant application should be referred to the Cabinet for decision.

The Leader of the Council on 2nd October 2018 allocated this Executive function to the Lead Member for Communities, Safety and Wellbeing.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions and Scrutiny

The Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board has been consulted and has agreed that these decisions be exempted from call-in, given their nature and low financial value.

Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report.

Financial Implications

The grants can be funded from within existing identified budgets.

Risk Management

There are no specific risks associated with this decision.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

The Lead Member is being requested to make the final decision on the award of the grants in question because the Ward Councillors have declared personal interests that might lead to bias, and therefore the advice of the Monitoring Officer is that they should not be the final decision makers.

Key Decision: No

Background Papers: None

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Part B

Background

1. Councillor Seaton is one of the Ward Councillors representing Thurmaston, and wishes to support the award of two grants to Thurmaston Action Group (TAG) from the money available to her under the Member Grants Scheme. However, she has declared that she has a personal interest that might lead to bias as she is the Treasurer of TAG. Therefore the Lead Member is being requested to act as the final decision maker in respect of the award of the grants.
2. In both cases at the time of writing this report confirmation of ownership of the two sites in question is still being sought, and therefore any grants awarded would need to be subject to this being finalised and permission being received from the site owners for the works to go ahead.
3. The first proposal is for £576 to be awarded to Thurmaston Action Group for opening up a footpath and a view from Melton Road through the recreation ground to the cemetery and on to the new housing estate of the Dales.
3. In their application form TAG have indicated that:

'Before the A607 bypass was built in the 60's there was a direct and beautiful chestnut tree lined footpath from Melton Road through the recreational ground to the cemetery and on to the new housing estate of the Dales.

This was the main path connecting the old village with the new housing and may facilities including the schools. The dual carriageway split the path and ended the direct connection by extending the path leading to a footbridge further down the road and connecting with another footpath at Redhill Lane.

However, two visual triangular green splays were created so that the trees could still be a focal point for users of the bypass and residents using the now longer footpath towards the footbridge.

Whilst the Parish Council maintained the chestnut trees within the recreational ground and the trees leading to the cemetery the newly created splays became the responsibility of the Council meaning that the grass would only be cut twice a year the same as the bypass.

Following numerous complaints about the untidy appearance for visitors to the cemetery and for funerals the parish council took over the maintenance of the splay leading to Cemetery Road and over the years they have enhanced the area with seating and hanging baskets whilst in stark contrast the splay opposite deteriorated to the point of becoming an unruly jungle.

This splay has a footpath leading from the park and is heavily used and remains to be the main route for pedestrians to cross the A607 to the footbridge crossing the A607 to 3 primary schools, a secondary school, shopping centre, doctors as well as the many sports and community events held at Elizabeth Park.

The area is not pleasant to walk through and is now so overgrown it is dark and intimidating even following the two minimal cuts carried out by the County Council each year.

These cuts only serve to stop the tall grass from overhanging the ever narrowing footpath. The one chestnut tree that is within this splay has not been maintained like the others and has been left with excessive growth from its trunk. The low foliage growth has killed the grass from the lack of light and the once grassed area is now littered with self-set shrubs and invasive weeds.

The appointed heritage member of Thurmaston Action Group committee recognises that this is an area that needs to be brought back in to community use by creating a pleasant visual splay from the bypass showing the tree lined path through the park and making it a pleasant walk for Thurmaston residents’.

4. TAG have applied for the grant of £576 to cut the branches of trees to head height and to mow and strim the area, and have indicated that the work will be undertaken by the same contractor used by Thurmaston Parish Council.
5. Councillor Seaton supports the award of the grant and has stated that:

‘This is a well used path that has been seriously neglected by County. The village is separated from the 3 primary schools by a dual carriageway. This important footpath extends from Melton Road through Garden Street park along the bypass to a footbridge and at the moment the overgrown path and surroundings make the route dark, dismal and uninviting for children walking independently to school or for parents/carers walking their children to school. The tidy up and pruning will be sustainable as Thurmaston Action Group was able to secure a commitment from the parish council to take over the future upkeep of this important link’.

6. The second proposal is for £250 to be awarded to TAG for a new noticeboard on Mill Lane carpark at the entrance to Watermead County Park
7. In their application form, TAG have indicated that:

‘On Mill Lane carpark at the entrance to Watermead Country Park for as long as the committee members can remember there is a notice board with no known owner or original installer.

The board is headed ‘WHATS ON’ and is used by many groups. There is a large footfall on Mill Lane from residents of the marina, walkers, cyclists and visitors to the park using the car park.

The notice board is made of plywood, very worn and splintering.

The posts are solid and will be not need replacing.

The notice board is open and available to everyone who wants to inform the public of events in Thurmaston, Birstall, Wanlip and Syston as well as events being put on in Watermead'.

8. TAG have applied for the grant of £250 to manufacture and fit a new noticeboard.

9. Councillor Seaton supports the award of the grant and has stated that:

'This project replaces a well used but scruffy notice board that is no longer fit for purpose. The board is well placed to service the local community and visitors to the Watermead Country Park. Renewing the notice board using a joint branding art work will be a small step towards the Watermead Regenerations objective to improve the signage'.

10. Councillor Sutherland who sadly passed away recently was one of the Ward Councillors representing Anstey, and wished to support the award of a grant to Anstey and Glenfield Cricket Club (the Club) from the money available to him under the Member Grants Scheme. However, he declared a personal interest that might lead to bias as he was the President of the Club. Therefore the Lead Member is being requested to act as the final decision maker in respect of the award of the grant.

11. The proposal is for £350 to be awarded to the Club for end of season, out of season and pre-season cricket square work.

12. In their application the Club have indicated that:

'The content of the project is partly dependent on weather conditions for the upcoming Autumn, Winter and Spring but will have the overall aims and objectives of allowing the club to produce high quality, durable and sustainable cricket pitches for the 2019 season.

The volunteer ground staff involved will use the materials purchased with the grant to complete the required work on the ground before the end of 2018.

End of season work in relation to a cricket pitch is an investment for the following seasons and beyond. This work allows the club to produce high quality, durable pitches that are rated amongst the highest in the whole Leicestershire and Rutland Cricket League. This work has allowed both our First and Second teams to achieve promotion in the last two seasons. In addition, it has allowed us to play more games during the season due the better quality of the pitches, therefore widening community participation in sport'.

13. At the time Councillor Sutherland stated that he was happy to support the application.