

CABINET - THURSDAY, 7 MARCH 2024

Report of the Director Housing and Wellbeing Lead Member: Executive Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods

Part A

SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Purpose of Report

To enable Cabinet to consider the arrangements for voluntary and community sector grants for the year 2024/2025.

Recommendations

1. That the budget for the Community Grants scheme be increased by £75,000 for 2024/2025.
2. That the Member Grants scheme be closed, and that for 2024/2025 £13,000 revenue and £13,000 capital budget elements be added to the Community Grants and Facilities Grants schemes respectively.
3. That the number of Community Grants rounds be increased from two to three per year.
4. That up to £30,000 be ring fenced from the Community Grants pot in 2024/2025 for grants up to a maximum of £750. That these be fast tracked to community groups, with delegated authority given to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to refine the final terms of grants and issue them following a recommendation from the Grants Panel. Grants over £750 will continue to be approved by Cabinet.
5. That the grants criteria be refined to include explicit reference to projects that support communities with the rising cost of living and the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Strategy, and to set out the arrangements for grants that are under £750.
6. That the Citizens Advice Bureau be funded to the value of £25,000 for 2024/2025 to provide debt and advice to residents of the borough.
7. That the Director of Housing and Wellbeing in consultation with the Lead Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods be given delegated authority to make minor amendments to grants criteria.

Reasons

1. To put more money into our Community Grants scheme this year to support and grow our voluntary and community sectors.
2. To streamline the number of grants pots.

3. To provide greater opportunity to the voluntary and community sector to access the funds, maximising potential grants spend and the benefit to communities.
4. To enable groups to access smaller sums of money quickly following a positive decision by the grants panel.
5. To reflect the current context and the position around smaller grants.
6. To support residents of the borough with the cost of living.
7. To enable minor changes to be made.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

At its meeting on 11th March 2021, Cabinet agreed the revised Charnwood Community Grants, Community Facilities and Member Grants schemes.

The Council's new Corporate Strategy 2024-2028 states the Council will support local community projects through our outreach officers and community grants.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions

The grants programme will be delivered during 2024/2025, commencing on 1st April 2024 and completing on 31st March 2025. Cabinet reports relating to awards will be brought forward throughout the year.

Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report.

Risk Management

The risks associated with the decision Cabinet is asked to make and proposed actions to mitigate those risks are set out in the table below.

Risk Identified	Likelihood	Impact	Overall Risk	Risk Management Actions Planned
Grants issued do not support delivery of the Council's objectives.	Remote (1)	Minor (1)	Very low (1)	Grants Panel in place. Grants criteria defined and applications assessed against that criteria.

Equality and Diversity

The increase in grants funding will have a positive impact given more activities that benefit a diverse range of groups will be delivered.

There is a requirement in the grants criteria for each organisation that applies to either have their own Equal Opportunities Policy or provide a statement that the organisation will abide by the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Crime and Disorder

The grants programme will positively contribute towards the achievement of the Council's responsibilities under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) to undertake reasonable action to improve community safety in the borough. Community, sporting, wellbeing, and economic support activities are likely to be funded, and these have the potential to reduce the likelihood of offending behaviour. Funded activities are likely to improve community cohesion and balance.

Climate Change and Carbon Impact

Grants that have a positive impact on the environment are expected to be funded, and this will continue to be the case.

Financial Implications

Grant Type	Current 2024/25	Proposed 2024/25	Comment
Community Grants (revenue)	50,000	138,000	Now includes an additional £13k revenue from member grants and a one off £75,000 increase The £75k is funded from a one off item as part of the 2024/25 budget process. A further £13k is to be transferred from member grants C304 D0854.
Charnwood Community Facilities Grants Z348 (capital)	50,000	63,000	Now includes an additional £13k capital from member grants.
Member Grants revenue C304 D0854	13,000	0	
Member Grants capital Z427	13,000	0	

Wards Affected

All Wards.

Publicity Arrangements

Grants opportunities will be publicised on the Council's website.

Consultations

Not applicable.

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Caring for the Environment	Yes
Healthy Communities	Yes
A Thriving Economy	Yes
Your Council	Yes

Key Decision: Y

Date included on Forward Plan 07/02/2024

Background Papers: None

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Part B

Community Grants

- 1.1 In recent years the budget available for Community Grants has been £50,000. Applications can be for a maximum of £5,000 for organisations currently running projects with community benefit in Charnwood, including organisational running costs (for up to one year), environmental projects and one-off contributions for equipment costs. The budget for Charnwood Community Facilities Grants is the same at £50,000, albeit with a maximum award of £20,000 (match funded).
- 1.2 In recent years the grants programmes have funded a wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations and projects. Cost of living projects include children's summer camp and grub club, Age Concern support for elderly residents and targeted debt advice. Other projects include mental health support projects, young people's life skills sessions and positive environmental projects including a community garden and aquaponics project, bicycle recycling and lessons for families, and repair and reuse projects.
- 1.3 Facilities Grants have contributed toward a wide range of community facilities including access improvements to a community centre, solar panels for a local library, and a new kitchen for a Scout hut.
- 1.4 Recent announcements by several funders include changes to criteria and reductions in community funding. This includes the Leicestershire County Council Shire Grants which will not continue next year. This is expected to lead to an increase in demand on the next rounds of Charnwood Community Grants. Charnwood projects accounted for 25% of the successful applications in the previous year's Shire Grants.
- 1.5 The increase in the Community Grants fund in 2024/25 will help increase the voluntary and community sector capacity to support residents across several areas including the impact of the cost of living and support for those struggling with mental health.
- 1.6 It is anticipated that even with the increased funding pot, this year's grants will be oversubscribed as in previous years. During the last couple of years some rounds saw application totals over 3 times greater than the grants pot.

Member Grants

- 2.1 Member Grants enable Members to provide grants to a wide variety of community and voluntary organisations within Charnwood to further the Council's aims and actively assist the community to enjoy a better quality of life.
- 2.2 Each Borough Councillor has been allocated a budget of £500 which can be used to support projects that bring benefits to their ward. The

recommendation on how to allocate their grants budget within the eligibility criteria is the responsibility of each individual Councillor.

- 2.3 The Grants have been awarded to a wide range of community groups including gardening clubs, summer fayres, community hub events, sports clubs including swimming and bowls and uniform group activities.
- 2.4 Unlike Community Grants, there has often been an underspend on Member Grants.
- 2.5 The Member Grant process is administratively intensive, and the Grants team encourage Members to spend their Grants throughout the year. This year the team had 9 grant applications in the last week, 4 of which were ineligible.
- 2.6 By reallocating this grant money into the wider grants, it will support full allocation of funds and broader access - i.e. sums ring fenced on a ward basis will now be available borough wide.

Community and Facilities Grants Rounds

- 3.1 Due to the increased budget for Charnwood Community Grants it is proposed to hold 3 rounds during 2024/25 to help with administration capacity and to give applicants options to apply throughout the year. Facilities Grants rounds will continue as before with two rounds.
- 3.2 All eligible organisations will only be able to apply twice in one year and not for the same project. There is no guarantee that they will be successful in both rounds.

Ring Fencing for Grants for Small Groups

- 4.1 With the proposed closing of Member Grants there is an identified need to offer small projects and grass roots groups with an opportunity to apply for funding of up to £750. It is also proposed that these projects do not require Cabinet approval so that they can be funded in a short turn around, enabling funds to get to organisations and communities faster. Up to £30,000 will be ringfenced for these projects for 2024/2025.

Funding for the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

- 5.1 The CAB provides free, independent, good quality advice to anyone living and working in Charnwood to give them the confidence they need to find their way forward. The advice offered covers a wide range of issues with over 60% of their work related to debt and welfare benefits. The CAB plays an essential part in helping anyone living or working in Charnwood by providing information, directing them to the best source of help for their issues and giving advice through trained generalist advisers and specialists.
- 5.2 During that last 2 years CAB have been funded to provide additional capacity to support the many issues associated with the rising cost of living being faced by an increasing number of residents. They have been the leading organisation locally for signing up and referring eligible households for the

Government's House Support Fund, alongside identifying any other potential benefits including tax credits, pension credits, disability allowances, warm homes, charitable support, and food banks.

- 5.3 Over the last 2 years CAB have seen a month on month increase in the number of households requiring support for one or more issues.
- 5.4 With the additional funding CAB will continue to increase its capacity through its team of both volunteers and employees to help ensure that as many people as possible will be seen within a timely manner, aiming to reduce waiting lists for support, and in turn the anxiety caused to some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough.

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment.