

Area North Committee - 28 March 2012

10. South Petherton Parish Group Lengthsman – Service Transition Grant (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

To seek a **one-off** financial contribution from SSDC Area North towards the South Petherton Parish Group Lengthsman Scheme.

Public Interest

The South Petherton Parish Group, which includes the parishes of South Petherton, Lopen, the Seavingtons, Shepton Beauchamp, Merriott and Hinton St George are seeking the support of South Somerset District Council to a Parish Lengthsman Scheme during the next financial year (2012-13).

Parish Lengthsman schemes were originally established as a joint partnership between parish groups, Somerset County and South Somerset District Councils. Funding to schemes has been cut to zero from the budgets of both Somerset and South Somerset councils, leaving the whole cost to be met from parish precepts.

This report provides the details of the scheme for the Area North Committee to consider whether to make a one-off financial contribution to next year's costs, in order to provide further time for scheme to be self-funded from the local communities involved.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (1) consider and approve one of the following options:
 - a. Provide no direct financial support.
 - b. Approve a one-off grant of £2,000 for 2012-13 towards the South Petherton Parish Group Lengthsman Scheme from the Area North budget for service transition, subject to the standard SSDC grant conditions, including acceptance of the comments made by the SSDC Streetscene Manager attached in Appendix A.
 - c. Approve a one-off grant of £4,500 to replace the funding cut from the SSDC corporate budget for Streetscene services for 2012-13 subject to the standard SSDC grant conditions, including acceptance of the comments made by the SSDC Streetscene Manager attached in Appendix A.
- (2) Note that a grant of £500 has been awarded from Area West with respect to the parish members of the group in Area West.

Project Name

South Petherton Parish Group Lengthsman scheme 2012-13

Organisation applying / contact name and address

South Petherton Parish Council (as the accountable body for the parish group of six parishes)

Project description

South Petherton Parish Group, which consists of six parishes run a successful Parish Lengthsman Scheme covering South Petherton, Lopen, the Seavingtons, Shepton Beauchamp, Merriott and Hinton St George. The funding required will allow the continuation of a self-employed contractor for the coming year while adjustments are made to local precepts or the contract. The contract is held by South Petherton Parish Council, on behalf of the parish group.

Evidence of need for this project:

A Parish Lengthsman completes work required over & above current service levels by SSDC and SCC. In a rural area the build up of debris and soil can quickly lead to drainage problems. Maintaining clean pathways, litter free open space and clearing back overgrowth all affect local resident satisfaction. Small improvements can make a great deal of difference to people's satisfaction with the local environment, and the safety and accessibility of different public facilities.

One particular advantage of a Parish Lengthsman is the ability to develop and use local knowledge, and act rapidly to address small problems from becoming worse. One example is the need to keep roadside grips clear, to help minimise the risk of flooding events.

In particular the Lengthsman will often collect small-scale fly-tipping and carries out litter picking – both falling within the remit of the Streetscene service of SSDC. On average the Lengthsman collects two flytips and carries out six hours litter picking per week.

Please see appendix A for further details of a Lengthsman scheme and criteria established by the Streetscene Manager for its success.

Project timescale, costs & funding

This funding application from the South Petherton Parish Group is to provide a transition period between the loss of SSDC funding from the corporate budget to the next round of precept setting by parishes.

Following the withdrawal of SCC partnership grant (c.£5,000 pa), members of the parish group have maintained the scheme at its current levels, and where required have raised the local precept. The cost of the scheme is £20,725 for 2012-13, with the parishes contribution £15,000. This is in keeping with the ratios used in the two other South Somerset Schemes, and at around £90 per day, is considered good value, providing up to 220 days per year of service.

Parish and contribution to the Lengthsman	Allocation of time	Precept 2011/12 £	Precept 2012/13 £	2012-13 Band D charge £
Hinton St George - £1,500	= 2 days per month	8,100	8,375	37.71
Lopen £1,500	= 2 days per month	4,650	4,882	41.77
Merriott £3,000	= 4 days per month	21,000	21,000	28.29
Seavingtons £1,500	= 2 days per month	10,000	12,000	53.17
Shepton Beauchamp £1,500	= 2 days per month	10,258	10,770	36.98
South Petherton £6,000	= 8 days per month	79,078	122,489	86.05
Total £15,000	20 days per month			

Although parishes were advised of a potential cut by the Streetscene Manager in late November, this was not certain until February 2012 when Full Council approved the budget. South Petherton's precept was increased by £43,402 for 2012-13 – a significant rise – including a provision for youth services of £20,000 and £10,000 provision for Libraries.

The requested amount is for £5,725 to retain the scheme at current levels. This is the amount which would have been provided by SSDC. Therefore it may be assumed that if alternative funding is not found, each parish would be required to contribute an additional £280 for each day 'purchased'.

The Area North budget cannot provide more than a one off grant, in order to maintain flexibility to support local priorities across the area, as and when they arise. The Turn Hill Parish Lengthsman Scheme has had a reduced grant for 2012-13 (£2500) and no further awards will be made.

Conclusion

Parish Lengthsman Schemes have a history of operating successfully in the South Petherton, Turn Hill and Cokers areas, and offer SSDC considerable benefits, not least increased local satisfaction with the environment.

The Parish Lengthsman is not intended to be a replacement or duplication of core services, but an enhancement, however it is apparent that should the scheme fail or be reduced there would be additional costs to SSDC – based on the records for fly-tips and litter picking.

In the past year or so, Parish Councils have had a series of service cuts by SSDC and SCC to contend with resulting in increased precepts. It may be considerable reasonable in view of a limited amount of time to plan for the cut of the SSDC, to provide some assistance to ensure the continuity of the scheme and time to adjust against local priorities for services.

Alternatively, for a relatively small sum parishes may be expected to use a reserve fund or seek alternative grants for projects within the existing precept.

Three options are proposed for councillors to consider:

- A straight forward replacement for the loss of funding, for one year only, allowing time for the parish group to adjust their precepts and / or the scheme contract.
- A reduced grant, to assist with transitional costs.
- No grant.

In each case there is likely to be continued 'in kind' support from Streetscene services to Lengthsman schemes operating in South Somerset. For example advice and guidance, and assistance with the disposal of flytips.

Financial Implications

There is currently £17,500 in the Area North service transition budget.

Council Plan Implications

Focus 2 – Environment:

“We want an attractive environment to live in with increased recycling and lower energy use”

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Local collections and work may help reduce carbon emissions by reducing visits by the SSDC streetscene service to the parish area.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None

Background Papers: *None*
