

Area West Committee – 16th January 2013

8. Report on the Community Grants Programme

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Purpose of the Report

To review the delivery of the Area West Community Grants Programme between September 2011 and December 2012.

Public Interest

This report will provide the Area West Committee with details of the community grants programme between September 2011 and December 2012. The report also raises awareness of the availability of the grants.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the remaining budget allocation of £21,457 is retained to fund future community grants.

Background

Between September 2011 and December 2012 I managed a specific piece of work to raise awareness of the availability of community grants and to make a concentrated effort to channel grant funding to community groups and organisations across Area West.

To raise awareness, I undertook a publicity programme during September 2011 to highlight the availability of area west community grants. This resulted in 31 project enquiries. Leading on from this response, a programme budget was allocated by the Area West Committee in January 2012. The budget level was determined to ensure sufficient funding would be available should all 31 initial enquiries lead to the award of full grants.

My intention was to bring up to four completed applications to committee each month from January 2012 up to a projected end date of October 2012.

Delivery of the Community Grants Programme

January 2012 – December 2012

Following an initial round of projects that were ready for assessment, it became apparent that the intention to bring up to four projects to each monthly committee was unrealistic. Applications often required longer to work up than anticipated and some community groups proved to have greater capacity to bring forward their projects than others.

From the initial 31 enquiries, 16 applications were assessed and approved by members at Area West Committees throughout the year. Two proposals proved ineligible, one was referred to alternative funding sources and one proposal was withdrawn. Six enquires did not proceed to applications.

However, a further nine new applications were received during 2012 and all were successful. These projects which requested grants of £750 or less were assessed under delegated authority by SSDC Officers and awarded from the allocated budget.

The programme delivery did not proceed precisely as projected and lessons have been learnt. Nevertheless it has achieved its principal objective of raising awareness of the grant scheme and ensuring that most of the allocated budget was awarded to community projects across Area West.

A summary table of grants awarded can be found at Appendix 1.

The results and benefits of this programme

The programme has supported a broad range of projects which have made a lasting difference to many communities across Area West. These are some of the examples of what has been achieved.

Hall and Play Facilities

With the help of community grants eight villages have been able to improve their halls and play facilities. These include Combe St Nicholas Village Hall, Chaffcombe Village Hall, Clapton and Wayford Village Hall, West and Middle Chinnock Village Hall, Chiselborough Village Hall, Ashill Village Hall, Misterton WI Hall and Hinton St George playing field. Chard methodist church was also able to replace its hall kitchen.

For many projects the benefits have had an immediate impact. Village hall committees like Combe St Nicholas with a village population of 1,200, have already reported an increase in booking enquiries based on the improved kitchen facilities and West and Middle Chinnock Village Hall will at long last be able to bring their kitchen back into use. Increased income from the hiring of these facilities will contribute towards the long term viability of these village halls.

Community Events

Community events have also been supported including Chiselborough Village Hall community photographic exhibition which over 250 people attended aged from 8 to 80. Home Grown Art in Hinton St George also ran an arts week workshop attracting over 300 visitors to a range of workshops and events for all ages. These are occasions that bring people together, providing the social contacts which are the lifeblood of villages.

Sporting Activities

Over 170 members of Chard cricket club have benefitted from additional funding to improve their wicket and extend their playing season and over 600 children and young people are expected to use the new skate park in Ilminster.

Feedback and lessons learnt

Many applicants in this programme have demonstrated wide community engagement to bring their projects forward. Funding for community projects is not always easy to access and the grants approved by members have helped to pump-prime projects and assist groups who are seeking additional funding from other sources. The community grants programme has proved a welcome lifeline at a time when other grant programmes have closed.

During delivery of the programme, two parts of the assessment process were reviewed. These were the timing of contributions from Town or Parish Councils and the timing of assessment and reports to Committee.

Parish /Town Council contributions to the programme

Council policy for the community grants programme requires that applicants receive a contribution from their Town or Parish Council, 'except in very exceptional circumstances'. Members will recall that the options available to members were discussed in detail at the February 2012 Area West Committee.

Some community groups found that the next chance to request a town or parish council grant was such that they could not apply to Area West Committee for a grant and still meet the above condition. For example Chard Town Council at present invite applications from April / May close their scheme in July, assess applications in August and present awards in November. Crewkerne Town Council in contrast open their scheme for applications in October / November, assess their applications in December inform the applicants in January and award their grants in April / May. However, members felt that difficulties in the timing of applications should not be treated as "very exceptional circumstances".

Whilst it is impractical to ask all councils to align their timetables there are alternatives which members may consider in future.

Applicants could be advised that no community grant application will be considered until the Town or Parish Council have made a decision. However bearing in mind the time critical nature of some applications, a simpler approach may be to award a conditional community grant subject to a Town or Parish Council award at a later date.

Assessment timetable

The initial intention to bring forward up to four applications per month to the Area West Committee proved impractical. Grant proposals varied in detail and the capacity within community groups to bring forward projects was also mixed. This resulted in applications taking longer to bring to committee than I originally envisaged.

Unless members object, future programmes are likely to be based on a quarterly assessment timetable. This option may also help to address the question of aligning town, parish and district timetables for awarding their grants. Applicants may be able to approach their Town or Parish Council for a contribution at the most appropriate time of the year, without being unduly disadvantaged.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the remaining budget allocation of £21,457 is retained to fund future community grants.

Council Plan Implications

Focus Four: Health and Communities – We want communities that are healthy, self reliant and have individuals who are willing to help each other.

Financial Implications

The community grant programme budget is £107,000. To date £85,543 of grant funding has been approved. The remaining balance in the budget is £21,457.

Background Papers:*Community Grant Criteria*

(www.southsomerset.gov.uk/communities/funding-for-your-group-or-project)

Grant applications on File

AW Committee March 2011 Capital Grants

AW Committee January 2012 Request for Community Grants
