

## 9. Frontline Councillors Grant Scheme

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### Purpose of the Report

To update Members on the results of the pilot of the Frontline Councillor Community Scheme

### Action Required

- Members note the report
- Members to make a recommendation to District Executive based on the results of the pilot, as to whether to submit a revenue and capital bid for £150,000 to continue the scheme in 2009/10.

### Background

At District Executive and Council in December 2006, Members considered ways in which the Council could further develop area working and the role of Frontline Councillors. SSDC has been particularly strong at valuing the role of the Ward Member as community leader and champion. This has been reconfirmed nationally by our Beacon status for *Neighbourhood & Community Champions: The Role of the Elected Member*.

SSDC currently offers a range of different grants programmes both at local area and district-wide level. Enhanced area working proposals suggested that we should “extend the ability of ward members to effect improvements at the very local level on an individual basis, recognising that some projects or initiatives sit at a ward level and the granting of small amounts of money can actually deliver big changes at that grass roots level”.

In July 2007, it was agreed at Full Council that, as a pilot in 2007/08, the Council provide each individual Member with a budget of £2,500 to support local community initiatives under the Frontline Councillor Community Scheme (FCCS). £150,000 was allocated from revenue balances and capital funds. It was agreed that the success of the grants scheme would be evaluated at the end of the 1-year pilot before any bid for future funding is considered.

### The scheme

Guidelines for the scheme were developed through consultation with members at Area workshops during early 2007 and then agreed at Full Council in July 2007. The guidelines used to operate the scheme are attached at **Appendix 1**. The scheme was administered and supported by Area Development Teams, but was distinctive from other SSDC grants programmes in that Ward Members were the lead SSDC contact for the group/project, and will also be responsible for evaluating the success of the projects they

supported (as opposed to most other SSDC Community Grants where officers lead on the assessment and consult with ward members). Quarterly updates on grant expenditure were reported to Area Committees during the year for information.

## Consultation

The brief for the review was signed off by the Leader and ran as follows:

- Overall analysis of grants awarded, by councillor
- Total project costs and types/themes of projects supported
- Questionnaire survey to all Members
- Questionnaire survey to Area Development & Admin staff involved in the scheme
- Informal feedback collected at Member workshops etc.
- Analysis of potential gaps filled by the scheme

## Results summary

Total amount spent	<b>£147,405</b>
Number of councillors awarding grants	<b>60</b>
Number of grants awarded	<b>269</b>
Number of projects supported	<b>221</b>
Total costs of projects supported	<b>£1,700,684</b>
Average size of award	<b>£548</b>

The full list of grants awarded is attached in **Appendix 2**. Graphs to show spend on different funding themes and the revenue/capital breakdown are shown at **Appendix 3**.

## Member feedback

41 Councillors returned their questionnaires. The quantitative results are as follows:

	Yes	No	N/a
Have you found the scheme useful in your role as a Frontline Councillor?	38	3	
Have you found the scheme easy to understand and use?	39	1	1
Has the scheme enabled you to fill gaps in grants/funding?	35	6	
Do you think the scheme was effective in supporting local groups?	36	4	1
Have you had positive feedback from groups supported?	35	2	4
Do you think the scheme should continue?	30	10	1

Qualitative answers and other informal feedback/responses are listed in **Appendix 4**.

The majority of comments from Councillors in the feedback questionnaires were positive. There was particular emphasis on the way in which these grants provide them with opportunities to engage with community groups with whom they may otherwise have had little contact, and fulfilled a significant gap in terms of their community engagement role as Frontline Councillors.

The Councillors who did not want the scheme to continue felt that there were adequate SSDC grants in place and that Area Committees were a more accountable means of allocating funding to community groups.

## **Other feedback**

Officers were also consulted about the administration of the scheme and suggested a number of improvements if the scheme is to continue. The original proposal suggested the scheme could be administered in approx 2 hrs per week per area. Results show that Area Community Development and Regeneration Officers spent generally approx 1 hr pw on the scheme. The Voluntary Sector Development Officer spent an average of 1-2 hrs pw on the scheme. However, area admin staff spent anything from 3-10hrs pw on a regular basis, with some staff spending 15 pw during concentrated periods. In Feb/March, 3 area admin staff were working full time on the scheme as many applications came in during these months.

Many councillors have received positive feedback from community groups receiving grants (comments included in Appendix 4). Officers dealing with the grants have also had some positive feedback, as well as some helpful suggestions about how the scheme could be improved. Groups have indicated that it was useful to have a simple, quick process to access funding for their project.

In addition, evaluation forms will be returned to councillors at the end of each project.

## **Gap analysis**

One of the objectives of the scheme was to “extend the ability of ward members to effect improvements at the very local level”. It is important to assess whether or not the FCCS has filled gaps in other funding sources available to local community groups. 85% of councillors felt the scheme had filled gaps in other grants at their disposal.

## **Groups**

The majority of groups receiving FCCS funding would have been eligible for grants under our SSDC Community Grants Scheme, although it is unusual for churches and schools to apply for community grants as they are only eligible in very limited circumstances. Other agencies such as SCC, Childrens Centres, Housing Associations and the police would not have been eligible under our normal community grants. These make up approx 15% of groups supported.

## **Capital items**

A number of capital items have been supported which would not normally be eligible under our community grants scheme eg. Christmas Lights, bus shelter, highways improvements, signs, boilers, planters, dog bins, plaques, clocks and small environmental improvements. These make up about 17% of projects supported

## **Projects**

There are a number of projects which would not normally be a high priority for our community grants scheme, for example anniversary events, insurance/legal fees, xmas parties, citizen of the year award, carnival events, school dinners, twinning etc. These make up approx 8% of the projects supported.

## **Other relevant issues**

- Somerset County Council (SCC) operates a Members grants scheme (£5k for each member). In 2008/09 they are launching a new scheme whereby each member will have an additional £15k to support local community projects which meet LAA targets

- SCC has recently announced the closure of the Community Chest – this scheme provided up to £750 for small community groups/projects
- Foundation for Sports & Arts – these grants will terminate in 2012
- SSDC agreed cuts of £5k to each of the Area Community Grants budgets for 2008/09

### **Financial Implications**

Capital funding (to continue the FCCS) of £75,000 was approved for 2008/09, however the £75,000 revenue funding was scored against other priorities and was not approved. The £75,000 capital funds will therefore be returned to capital balances for 2008/09. If members wish to continue with the scheme a bid will have to be made for revenue and capital funding in the 2009/10 budget process.

### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

- Improve the health & wellbeing of our citizens
- Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities

**Background Papers:** *District Exec Agenda & Minutes December 2006*  
*Full Council Agenda & Minutes July 2007*  
*Frontline Councillor Community Scheme guidance notes & application forms*  
*Frontline Councillor Community Scheme feedback questionnaires*

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