

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	2 September 2015
Subject:	Community Grants Review
Report of:	Simon Dix, Finance and Asset Management Group Manager
Corporate Lead:	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Councillor Mrs K J Berry, Lead Member for Community
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

With capital resources depleting, the Council made a decision in February 2015 to replace the current use of capital monies to finance community grants with revenue monies made available from New Homes Bonus. This change of finance allows the current grant scheme to be widened to include the support of activities and other revenue costs as well as providing monies to support the development of physical facilities.

In addition, although the scoring criteria used by the Working Group was updated in October 2012 to reflect the new Council priorities, a full review of the whole grants scheme criteria has not taken place since October 2011.

This report suggests an amended criteria that reflects the financing changes and deals with a number of the issues encountered under the current criteria.

Recommendation:

To approve the new Community Grants Information Guide.

Reasons for Recommendation:

To update the community grants criteria to reflect the new financing available and ensure that the criteria meets future requirements.

Resource Implications:

None associated directly with the report. The Council has made £150,000 per annum available from New Homes Bonus to support the community grants scheme. In addition, a Funding Officer has been employed to bring external funding into the Borough which should mean organisations are less dependent on the Borough for grant funding.

Legal Implications:

None.

Risk Management Implications:

None associated directly with the report.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The requirement for applicants to submit a written report on the success of their project measured against the objectives set out in the original application forms part of the criteria and will be reviewed by the Council's Funding Officer.

Environmental Implications:

None associated with this report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** In Autumn 2009 the Executive Committee decided to form a Working Group to specifically review grant funding requests in a systematic manor and therefore replace the ad-hoc arrangements which saw individual applications presented to Committee. The new Grants Working Group, consisting of four Members, was established in December 2009 and given an initial budget of £250,000 from capital balances.
- 1.2** Over the last six years, the Working Group has approved 55 grants totalling £1.38m. Due to the use of capital reserves to fund the grants scheme, all of the grants awarded are to support projects of a physical nature. Examples of projects funded include new and refurbished village halls and community buildings, skate parks, sporting facilities such as changing rooms, vehicle purchase, play equipment and solar panels. Grants of this type range in value from a few thousand to over £100,000 in one particular case with average grant level of around £25,000.
- 1.3** The original criteria of the grants scheme was reviewed in October 2011 and further updated with the Council's new priorities in October 2012.
- 1.4** The Council has had a heavy capital programme in recent years with investments in new leisure facilities, the Roses Theatre and the Public Service Centre as well as ongoing commitment to both community and disabled facilities grants which has led to a substantial reduction in capital reserves available. The Council therefore agreed to refinance the grants scheme from New Homes Bonus, a revenue stream, with effect from 1 April 2015.
- 1.5** In addition, the Council also agreed to the employment of a Funding Officer, again utilising New Homes Bonus, with the aim of supporting organisations across the Borough in finding and applying for grants from regional, national and European sources which will reduce the burden on the Borough Council to fund large grants.

2.0 REVISED COMMUNITY GRANTS CRITERIA

- 2.1** The use of revenue monies to finance the grants scheme allows the Council to consider extending the remit of the scheme to allow grant applications which would not have been eligible for a capital grant. The type of additional grant that can be now be met includes one off running costs for an event or organisation, feasibility or survey work at an early stage of a project, hiring of a venue for an event, small equipment purchase such as sports equipment or kits, general repairs and maintenance of facilities, start up funding or trips for disadvantaged or elderly residents. Grants of this nature tend to be limited in size, usually attracting awards of no more than a few thousand pounds.
- 2.2** The Council can still offer grants of a capital nature even though it is utilising revenue financing. This offers the opportunity to revisit the current criteria in order to strengthen the criteria and reinforce some of the requirements of applicants. Given the distinct differences between capital type grants and revenue ones, it is necessary to have two different grant schemes both operating under the 'Community Grants' umbrella.
- 2.3** The direction of travel the Council wishes to see for its grants programme is for there to be

less direct financial dependence on it and an increased enabling function which aims to draw external funds into the area. This direction therefore needs also to be reflected in the new criteria.

2.4 The current criteria is shown at Appendix A while the proposed new criteria, in the form of a Community Grants Information and Guidelines document, is shown in Appendix B.

2.5 The main amendments to the capital grants and the new detail of the revenue grants are highlighted below:

- New maximum for capital grant awards - £30,000 or 50% of project costs;
- Minimum lease period for a building type application amended to 10 years;
- New revenue grants limited to £3,000 and 80% of project costs;
- Revenue grants to be awarded on a yes/no basis. Capital grants continue to be awarded against a scoring matrix based on Council priorities;
- Revenue grants to be paid as a one off advance. Capital grants to be paid in arrears based on applicants expenditure;
- Further clarification on the types of grant the Council will and will not support and also the types of organisation who can apply to the Borough;
- Successful applicants cannot reapply for further grants until two years have passed between the completion of the original project and submission of another application; and
- Discretion to support applications in excess of the scheme limits will rest with the Executive Committee.

2.6 The proposed Information Guide has been discussed with the current Grants Working Group at its meeting in July. The proposals were well received with only a couple of amendments proposed. These amendments are incorporated within the document at Appendix B.

2.7 In order to allow the transition between the old criteria and new criteria, it is proposed that application forms already sent to applicants are honoured and judged under the current criteria. Applications issued after the call-in period has finished for the Executive Committee will be done so under the new criteria. This will lead initially to a mixture of applications received but this will be managed by both officers and the Member Working Group. To aid the transition, a temporary moratorium on issuing application forms has been put in place from the middle of August.

3.0 CONSULTATION

3.1 The current Community Grants Working Group has been consulted on the proposed amendments. In addition officers from Community, Finance and Legal, who are all involved in the current scheme, have had input into the design of the new guidelines.

4.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

4.1 None.

5.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

5.1 None.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

6.1 None.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

7.1 None.

8.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

8.1 None.

9.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

9.1 Grants criteria review – Executive Committee – October 2011.

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: A – Current Grants Criteria
B – Proposed Community Grants Information Guide