



Policy and Resources Committee – 5 September 2016

Voluntary Sector Grants

Purpose of report

This report asks Members to consider the recommendations of the Member Panel appointed to review the current Voluntary Sector Grants scheme and how it could operate from 1 April 2017. The recommendations also cover the process for awarding the grants.

Attachment

Appendix 1 – Notes of the Member Panel meeting 2 August 2016

1.0 Background

- 1.1 A Voluntary Sector Grants scheme has been in operation since 2011. Three grants support the delivery of key services across three thematic areas. All three grants will expire 31 March 2017.
- 1.2 At its meeting 11 July 2016, Policy and Resources Committee confirmed its support for the grants scheme to continue from 1 April 2017 (minute 88). Approval was given for the Leader to appoint a Member Panel (the Panel) to review the current arrangements and make recommendations to Committee on the structure of the scheme and the awarding process. Committee will approve the final awards of the grants later this year.
- 1.3 The Panel has carried out a review and its findings and recommendations are set out below.

2.0 Review findings

- 2.1 The Panel considered the performance and delivery of the current grant providers as an initial part of its review. The providers have achieved the targets set and in many cases exceeded them across the three thematic areas. The results of the quarterly monitoring meetings have been published on our website.
- 2.2 The panel looked closely at the current state of the sector and the wider services provided across the county. It was noted that several changes had occurred with commissioned work since the current round of grants was awarded; these include the decommissioning of detached youth work by County Council and an increase in early help and prevention services. The panel felt that these were influential factors in making their recommendations on the next round of our grants scheme

3.0 Thematic areas

3.1 Advice and information

- 3.1.1 The current service delivery of this theme focuses on specialist debt advice and dealing with personal debt. The high level outcomes achieved in this theme are: over £7M of debt managed for residents to date and just under £2.5M of additional benefits secured for residents to date.
- 3.1.2 The panel noted that outreach provision in this theme had increased. They also noted that the type of work and advice provided by this theme could rarely be sourced on-line and required one-to-one support from a specialist worker.

3.1.3 The panel took into consideration the uncertainty around the roll-out of Universal Credit and the current and predicted economic climate. They believed it was highly likely that the demand for specialist debt advice and services will increase. The panel members were satisfied that this theme needed to be retained. They also felt that the title 'Debt Management' was far more appropriate than advice and information as it focused more clearly on the specialist work provided.

3.2 Counselling and support

3.2.1 The panel noted the wide and diverse area of this theme and felt it had a key influence on families and mental health. It was acknowledged that mental health is an area of concern to many.

3.2.2 The panel also noted the uncertainty around commissioned services in this field in the future and felt this theme should be retained with a stronger focus on mental health.

3.3 Community transport

3.3.1 The panel felt that transport deprivation remained an influential factor with people's access to services. The Scrutiny Committee has been undertaking a review of public transport and a report is due to be presented to it later this month.

3.3.2 It was noted that the consortium approach to this theme had worked successfully and had achieved increased medical-related trips in the Thrapston and Islip areas. These were two target areas following the closure of Nene & Ouse Community Transport, which at one time was part of the consortium.

3.3.3 Although the current arrangements provide for medical trips as the first priority, consideration has been given to widening this out to wellbeing and leisure-related journeys. It was noted that NCC was developing a business case for a social enterprise for car schemes and the panel felt this may have relevance to this theme going forward.

3.3.4 In conclusion, the panel felt this theme should be retained and that we should be mindful of any future developments. This could be around the NCC social enterprise project if that comes to fruition.

4.0 Funding levels

4.1 The current grants are based on a £90K per annum funding allocation, split £50K for advice and information and £20K each for counselling and support and community transport.

4.2 The panel considered whether the current levels would be relevant and appropriate for the next round of grants and whether the split between each of the themes was proportionate. In conclusion, the panel felt the overall level of £90K per annum should remain and the thematic splits be retained on the same basis. The panel also discussed the Community Transport funding and the need to consider more funding in the future as per paragraph 3.3.3. The Scrutiny review findings will inform their recommendations on future funding for community transport. It is therefore recommended that, as part of the process of awarding the grant for this area, the applicants would need to include detail of what they could achieve if additional funding was available in the future.

5.0 Grant scheme name and theme descriptions

5.1.1 The panel gave consideration to the name of the scheme and the individual themes. In terms of the scheme name: Voluntary Sector Grants, the panel felt the words voluntary sector were outdated and overall did not depict the type of services provided

by these grants. The sector itself is now widely referred to the 'third' or 'community' sector. In conclusion the panel felt that 'Community Support Grants' would be more appropriate.

5.1.2 As noted above, the panel felt the title for the advice and information theme needed to be more focused and specific to the work being provided, this being Debt Management.

6.0 Panel's recommendations

| Component | Panel's Recommendations |
|------------------|---|
| Themes | Retain the three themes as per the current grants scheme, naming them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt Management (currently Advice and Information) • Counselling and Support • Community Transport. Specific provisions for these themes are:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling and support has a focus on mental health • Community transport has provisions for development around the NCC proposals for a social enterprise around car schemes. |
| Financial values | Retain the £90K per annum funding stream apportioned as:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £50K for Debt Management • £20K for Counselling and Support • £20K for Community Transport As per para 4.2 above, Committee is asked to note that there are a number of reviews and studies taking place regarding transport across the county; the findings of which may influence our future approaches to community transport. |
| Scheme name | Change from Voluntary Sector Grants to Community Support Grants |

7.0 Application, evaluation and awarding process

7.1 The panel gave consideration to the application, evaluation and awarding processes. The panel noted that considerable work had been done to develop a structured and rigorous application and evaluation process for this current round of grants. It was felt appropriate to utilise this again and make any necessary modifications in the light of the panel's recommendations set out above.

7.2 The next stages of the process are set out below. This will include the Member Panel working with officers to develop the service delivery specification, including the outcomes to be achieved in each thematic area.

7.3 The indicative timetable for the next stages are:-

| Stage | Timeframe |
|--|----------------------|
| Consideration of the panel's recommendations | P&R 5 September 2016 |
| Application packs developed and finalised | By 16 September 2016 |

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| VCS Grants Scheme 2017-20 launched | Week commencing 19 September 2016 |
| Member Panel to undertake evaluation and prepare recommendations on award of grants | Completed by 11 November 2016 |
| Member Panel presents recommendations on awards to Committee | P&R 5 December 2016 |
| Grant Agreements completed with new providers | By 28 February 2017 |
| Grants commence | 1 April 2017 |

8.0 Equality and diversity implications

- 8.1 The grant scheme aims to secure positive impacts for all our residents, including those that fall into any of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2000.
- 8.2 Members were made aware at the previous meeting of this Committee that an Equality Impact Assessment had identified only positive impacts, importantly in the areas of rural isolation and socio-economic exclusion. The three current grants contain provision for outreach work across East Northamptonshire, particularly in those areas of the district where people have difficulty accessing services.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Whilst the Council does not have any legal or statutory duties to provide voluntary sector grants, the Local Government Act 2000 gives local authorities the power to promote wellbeing.
- 9.2 As part of the awarding process, each provider will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement with us that bind all of the legal requirements associated with employment, insurances and similar statutory undertakings.
- 9.3 In so far as the current grants are concerned, the Grant Agreements specifically state that the Council gives no undertaking whatsoever to continue with funding or voluntary sector grants beyond 31 March 2017.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 Members are asked to keep in mind that withdrawing support for voluntary sector grants could impact negatively on the Council's reputation and potentially reduce services to residents in East Northamptonshire.

11.0 Resource and Financial Implications

- 11.1 The current voluntary sector grants will terminate 31 March 2017 and provision exists in the 2016/17 budget for the full amounts required.
- 11.2 As set out in section 6 above, the panel is recommending that the next round of grants is set at £90K per annum over the three-year period. Provision will need to be made in the budget-setting process for each of those financial years.

12.0 Constitutional Implications

- 12.1 No constitutional implications have been identified.

13.0 Customer Service Implications

13.1 Customer services should have an awareness of the grant awardees and their services to be able to signpost residents to the relevant services. These services provided to our residents would not be available without our funding; as such any reduction in funding would have a negative impact on our residents.

14.0 Corporate Outcomes

14.1 Currently, voluntary sector grants contribute to our corporate outcomes as follows:-

- **Good quality of life:** Specialist support is available to local people affected by debt problems, family and relationship breakdowns and accessing key services. This helps them to enjoy a better quality of life now and in the future.
- **Good value for money:** Investing in one organisation per grant theme avoids funding duplicate services and reduces the pressure on officer resources required to monitor the grants.
- **Good reputation:** Supporting the voluntary sector that has the skills and people able to provide quality and specialised services to our local communities.

11.0 Recommendation

11.1 The Committee is recommended to

- (1) Receive the notes of the Member Panel meeting held 2 August 2016.
- (2) Approve the panel's recommendations as set out in section 6 above.
- (3) Endorse the indicative timeframe for the application, evaluation and awarding processes.

Reason: to support key services provided by community and third sector organisations that contribute to the achievement of our Corporate Plan outcomes.

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|--|
| Legal | Power: Local Government Act 2000 | | | | |
| | Other considerations: | | | | |
| Background Papers: None | | | | | |
| Person Originating Report: Mike Greenway, Community Partnerships Manager ☎ 01832 742244 ✉ mgreenway@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk | | | | | |
| Date: 18.8.16 | | | | | |
| CFO | | MO | | CX | |

Voluntary Sector Grants Member Panel

Date: 2 August 2016

Venue: East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

Time: 3.00 pm

Present: Cllr Wendy Brackenbury (WB)
Cllr Tony Boto (TB)
Cllr Marika Hillson (MH)

Julia Smith – Head of Customer and Community Services (JS)
Mike Greenway – Community Partnerships Manager (MG)
Shaun Sannerude – Community Development Officer (SS)

ITEM NO.

1. Introductions and declarations of interest

1.1 MG opened the meeting and outlined what the panel needed to achieve following approval by Policy and Resources Committee 11 July 2016 (committee), to continue with voluntary sector grants from 31 March 2017.

1.2 It was noted the TB was the observer on the Community Law Service Board and now MH is the observer. WB gave early indications that being a County Councillor she may be aware of some of the future applicants to the scheme being holders of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) contracts.

2. Appointment of Chair

2.1 It was agreed that WB be appointed Chair of the panel.

3. Update on the position of the voluntary sector in East Northants

3.1 MG gave a presentation to the panel on the role of the Member Panel, the current themes and providers and latest position of the voluntary sector. It was stated that there has been major changes to NCC and NHS contracts. Detached youth work has been decommissioned with a focus on early help and targeted services instead.

3.2 With regards to debt and benefit universal credit roll-out is still in affect but there are now tighter controls on lending and regulation of pay day loan companies.

3.3 Scrutiny committee has been reviewing transport with potential opportunities around car schemes and NCC is developing a business case for a social enterprise around a Total Transport project. With both of these we still don't know the full picture.

4. Time frame for the voluntary sector grants process

4.1 The panel considered a draft project plan and time frame for the process. The panel was asked to note that this was based on the process used to award the current voluntary sector grants. If the panel was minded to recommend a change to that process and use a tendering contract process the time frame would need to be revised. The panel was also asked to keep in mind that there would be significant risk of not having grants in place by April 2017 if that change was pursued.

4.2 The panel noted that the previous process had worked well. Following discussion the panel agreed to recommend to committee that the process be followed for the 2017-20 grants.

5. Discussions on themes and values

5.1 Thematic issues

5.1.1 The panel had been asked to consider whether the current themes – advice and information, counselling and support and community transport should be retained or different ones pursued.

5.1.2 The panel believed that the present economic climate still called for specialist support in helping people with debt problems. This also helps alleviate homelessness and mental health issues.

5.1.3 The panel discussed the importance of counselling and support and felt it was still a very relevant theme in supporting residents to overcome a variety of different issues. It was stated that there should be a specific outcome in the new round of grants in regards to mental health support.

5.1.4 The panel felt that transport deprivation was still an issue particularly in the north of the district and with an ever aging population. The panel noted that the community transport consortium had been successful at increasing medical related trips, especially in the Thrapston and Islip area and that Scrutiny were interested in the scheme being widened out to cover wellbeing and leisure trips too. Given the challenges associated with public and community transport across the district, it was felt that this theme should remain.

5.1.5 The panel agreed that its recommendation to committee on the themes would be to retain the same ones as with the current grants, those being:-

- Advice and information
- Counselling and support
- Community transport

5.2 Financial values

5.2.1 The panel considered whether the current allocation of £90,000 per annum should remain. The panel were reminded that provision had been included in the current (2016/17) revenue budget of £90,000 for the final year of the current grants. The panel also considered whether the balance of funding between the three themes (£50K advice and information, £20K counselling and support and £20K community transport) was appropriate.

5.2.2 Following discussion the panel felt that the scheme should remain at £90,000 and there should not be a reduction in funding.

The panel felt that £20,000 per annum for community transport was supporting the achievement of the outcomes and targets of that grant and was an appropriate level of funding for that theme, however, if the provider was to widen the scheme to cover wellbeing and leisure trips too there would need to be potential for an increase in the grant award pending the Scrutiny review and NCC Total Transport project outcomes. The application form should therefore ask providers to state what they could offer for a potential increase in funding if there is future provision.

5.2.3 The panel discussed the funding allocations for advice and information and counselling and support. The panel all agreed to keep the funding the same for both these themes.

5.2.4 The panel agreed to recommend to committee that the financial values for each theme be:- advice and information - £50,000 per annum, counselling and support - £20,000 per annum and community transport – £20,000 per annum.

5.3 Application and award process

5.3.1 The panel were reminded of its earlier discussion in the meeting about the process.

5.3.2 The panel agreed to the recommend to committee to retain the same application and award process as used previously.

6. Naming of the grant scheme and themes

6.1 The panel had been asked to consider whether the current name of the grant scheme and themes were still appropriate.

6.2 MG stated how the scheme being called Voluntary Sector Grants could be misleading in having expectations that providers should be using volunteers. The term 'voluntary sector' is also outdated and is more prevalently known as the 'third sector' or 'community sector'. The panel agreed that the name of the scheme should be made more appropriate and decided on Community Support Grants.

6.3 The panel felt that Counselling and Support and Community Transport were still relevant names for two respective themes, however, that the Advice and Information theme needed to be more specific. As the theme is focussed on debt and benefit support the panel felt that Debt Management is more appropriate name for this theme.

6.3 The panel agreed to recommend to committee that the name of the grant scheme should be changed to 'Community Support Grants' and the name of the Advice and Information theme should be changed to 'Debt Management'.

7. Next stages

7.1 It was agreed that the next stages of the process would be to report the recommendations of the panel to Policy and Resources Committee meeting 5 September 2016. The time frame and the minutes of the panel would be appended to the report.

- 7.2 The panel agreed to comment on the draft of the report prior to it being signed off for publication.
- 7.3 The next meeting of the panel to look briefly at the application stage of the process would be on the 5 September 2016 prior to the Policy and Resources Committee.