

Scrutiny Committee

Report of Head of Corporate Strategy

Author: Jayne Bolton

Telephone: 01235 422437

Textphone: 18001 01235 422437

E-mail: Jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk

Cabinet member responsible: Elizabeth Gillespie

Tel: 01865 341398

E-mail: Elizabeth.Gillespie@southoxon.gov.uk

To: Scrutiny Committee

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Proposed new individual councillor grant scheme

Recommendation

To ask scrutiny committee for its views on the draft policy for the new individual councillor grant scheme, attached at appendix one.

Purpose of Report

1. To ask scrutiny committee for its views on the draft policy for the new individual councillor grant scheme, attached at appendix one.

Strategic Objectives

2. Introducing individual budgets that councillors can use to support community projects in their area will contribute to the council's corporate priority 'To build Thriving Communities'.

Background

3. In February 2017 the council approved its budget, which includes £5,000 for each district councillor to award in grants to community projects.
4. Following discussions with the leader and the cabinet member for grants, officers have developed a draft policy for an individual councillor grant scheme that can

support community projects but also keeps the decision making process simple, clear, transparent and justifiable.

5. The intention is to operate the scheme as a pilot in 2017/18 and then evaluate its success before committing to continue it in the future.
6. To launch the new scheme in July we need to approve the policy in mid-April to give officers sufficient time to employ the additional resources needed to set up the application and decision-making processes, offer training to councillors and to promote the scheme.

Financial Implications

7. Full Council approved an annual revenue growth bid of £189,000 to fund this scheme from 2017/18 - £5,000 per councillor (£180,000) and £9,000 for administration costs.

Legal Implications

8. Section 236 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for decision making for councillors in respect of their own ward and bringing improvements to their wards.
9. The head of service with responsibility for grants will need delegated authority to award grants up to £5,000 in accordance with the decision(s) of the relevant ward councillor under the Councillor Community Grant Scheme.

Risks

10. There is a reputational risk that the council could receive criticism if it funds organisations that councillors have interests in. To mitigate this risk councillors will have to declare any interests when they evaluate and consider each application and be responsible for monitoring the funding they allocate. In addition, details of all grant applications will be published on the council's website together with the details of any interest in the organisation declared by each councillor.

Conclusion

11. The council has approved the budget for a councillor grant scheme and the next step is to consider and approve a detailed policy for delivering one.
12. We would like scrutiny committee's views on the draft policy (attached in appendix one), which would enable each councillor to award up to £5,000 to fund community projects in their areas.
13. Cabinet will consider scrutiny committee's comments before approving the final policy at its meeting on 6 April 2017.

Appendix one - Councillor Community Grant Scheme Policy and Procedures

Councillor Community Grant Scheme

Every South Oxfordshire District Councillor has a grant budget of £5,000 to award for projects or services that will offer community benefits in their own ward area.

The council is committed to promoting equality and diversity and welcomes applications from all sectors of the community, regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, status, religion or belief.

Basic rules of the scheme

- Projects must benefit the community in the councillor's ward area
- The minimum grant is £500 and the maximum £5,000 for each councillor (budget permitting)
- A councillor can fund up to 100 per cent of the total cost of a project (budget permitting)
- The project must be completed within 12 months of the grant award decision
- Any unallocated budgets at the end of the financial year will return to the council's general reserves
- Councillors should make their decisions within eight weeks of receiving an application.

Who is eligible?

- Town and parish councils and parish meetings
- Local constituted 'not for profit' organisations whose primary purpose is to **benefit** the residents of South Oxfordshire, this can include Parent Teacher Associations, League of Friends, Community Speed Watch groups who must have:
 - a signed constitution (or memorandum and articles of association)
 - a bank account in the organisation's name
 - detailed financial records (at least one year's accounts)
 - named officers, members or trustees on a management committee.

Who is not eligible?

- Other local authorities/public sector bodies (for example Oxfordshire County Council, NHS trusts)
- Individuals (this includes making any payments to individuals on behalf of community groups)
- Profit-based businesses (private businesses)
- Political and lobbying groups

- Organisations who give grants or fund other not-for-profit organisations
- Nationwide organisations

What kind of work/services can we fund?

Applications should focus on projects that deliver a clear and demonstrable **benefit** to the people of South Oxfordshire, specifically in the ward area of the district councillor considering the request.

South Oxfordshire District Council accepts no liability or responsibility for any of the projects funded by this grant scheme now or in the future.

Appropriate projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Replacement equipment or improvements to community centres/halls
- Initial design/creation of a community newsletter, walking routes/tourist trails, community website or digital archive (but not ongoing publishing, maintenance or hosting costs)
- Improvements to community facilities for older people and minority groups (for example accessibility improvements and hearing loops)
- Buying and installing community play and exercise equipment
- Buying equipment the community can use like anti-flooding equipment, marquees/gazebos, defibrillators, equipment banks or IT equipment. (All equipment must remain the property of the organisation funded)
- One-off hire costs (for example, excavator hire for a project or coach hire for a specific, one-off trip)
- One-off revenue costs, like feasibility studies, consultancy fees and seed funding for new organisations
- One-off major repairs, like repairing a section of flat roof or major boiler repairs (but not routine servicing) to community buildings

Applicants should make sure they have all necessary permissions in place **before** applying for funding including; planning, listed building, licensing, landlords etc.

What we will not fund?

- Retrospective funding for work/projects already commenced or that will complete before our decision is made
- Statutory activities/requirements that either the council or another public sector organisation is responsible for delivering
- Recurring revenue costs, like salaries, rent, rates and maintenance (like boiler servicing)
- Ongoing or regular hire fees (for example, weekly hire of a cricket pitch roller or regular hire/lease of vehicles for a community transport scheme)
- Community festivals and event costs

- Hospitality costs (catering and refreshment costs)
- Clothing, including uniforms, sports kit, and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Projects that specifically benefit private businesses
- Political activities, lobbying or campaigning
- Projects that, in the assessment of South Oxfordshire District Council, show actual or potential unlawful discrimination within the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

Opening and closing dates

The scheme will usually open in April and close in December each year (budget permitting), unless there is a district wide council election that year, when we will not open until after the election. To allow initial set up of the scheme in 2017 the scheme will open in June/July. Councillor budgets will only be released following completion of appropriate training.

In the event there is an unexpected ward election, we will put any applications for that area, on hold during the purdah period. This will include requests already in consideration and any new applications submitted.

Application and Award Process

1. Organisations apply using the council's online grants management system ('the system'), accessible from our website www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants. Applicants should read the guidance notes on our website before completing an application.
2. Once submitted, the appropriate district councillor will receive an email notification that they have a new application to determine using the system.
3. The district councillor will use the system to complete their grant evaluation to confirm the application's eligibility, their decision, any additional grant conditions and noting any declarable interests. The councillor may contact the applicant to complete their evaluation.
4. Once the councillor submits their completed evaluation, the grants officer will either;
 - a. send a grant award offer to the applicant that will include our standard (and any additional) conditions
 - b. inform the applicant that they were unsuccessful
5. The grants officer will publish all decisions for this scheme on our website.
6. The applicant must sign and return the grant award offer to the grants officer, confirming they will meet all our conditions and the bank details for their organisation.
7. On receipt the grants officer will release the grant payment. **The grants officer will only make payments by BACs to accounts in the name of the applying organisation.**

Standard conditions

- The organisation will only spend the grant on the project listed in their application and must do so within 12 months of the award date or they will return the funding.
- The organisation will return a proportionate amount of the grant if the project costs less than expected or they receive excess funding towards the project.
- The funding is non-transferrable and must be spent on the project/costs listed in the application, any unspent funds will be returned to the council.
- The organisation will comply with all relevant statutes and regulations related to its status, objectives and delivery of its core activities.
- The organisation agrees to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults. This includes the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.
- The organisation will consult the grants officer before making significant changes to the project/work covered by the grant.
- The organisation will acknowledge the council's support in any press, publicity or promotion of the project (consulting our communications team beforehand).
- The organisation acknowledges the council accepts no responsibility or liability for this project or the facilities it provides now or in the future.

Monitoring the grants

- Ward councillors will have an annual budget of £5,000. The system will record all applications, awards and remaining balances.
- The ward councillor will monitor every grant awarded to ensure spending is appropriate. The ward councillor will use the system to complete their grant monitoring reports following receipt of automatic email reminder.
- The ward councillor will be required to produce sufficient evidence to show that the grant award has been spent appropriately.
- If the awarded project has not started by the grant expiry date (12 months from the award date), the organisation must repay the grant in full to the council.
- All grant repayments will return to the council's general reserves.
- Any ward councillor budget not awarded by 31 March will return to the council's general reserves. Carry forwards will not be allowed.
- If repayments are necessary, the grants officer will liaise with the organisation to recover the funds, keeping the relevant ward councillor informed.

For more information about the scheme, advice on potential projects and other possible funding sources please contact the grants officer on or 01235 422405 or grants@southandvale.gov.uk.