

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAMME EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Cabinet Member: Cllr Dennis Knowles – Community Well-Being

Responsible Officer: Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Reason for report: To report back on the recommendations from the Grants Working Group.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Community PDG considers the recommendations made by the Strategic Grants Working Group at paragraph 2.4 before making its own recommendations to Cabinet.**

Financial Implications: The budget allocated for the combined grants during the 2020/21 financial year was £148,150. The funding available for 2021-22 and subsequent years will be dependent on the Council's annual budget setting process. The available funding for the 21/22 budget is yet to be established through the budget setting process. Accordingly the PDG has the opportunity to make recommendations on that aspect to Cabinet should it wish.

Budget and Policy Framework: The 20/21 budget for strategic grants was set at £148,150 but is still to be confirmed for 21/22. Grant payments to external organisations (the strategic grants review process) forms part of the Council's policy framework.

Legal Implications: If proposals come forward which would result in organisations receiving substantially less or no funding an equality impact assessment should be considered before the final decision is made.

Risk Assessment: An agreed procedure for determining grant levels will minimise risks with regard to any potential change to the grants.

Equality Impact Assessment: The grants provided by the Council are intended to fund organisations that offer strategic benefit to the district either through their support to vulnerable residents, or their contribution to the local economy. If substantial reductions in grants are considered, the impact of these reductions on equality groups would need to be assessed.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The allocation of grants provides support to external agencies delivering services that advance the Council's Homes, Community and Economy priorities.

Impact on Climate Change: It is not considered that the grants in question have any significant impact upon climate change.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Under the Strategic Grants Programme 2017-2020 the Council offered three-year funding to five external agencies whose services were seen to be of importance in supporting Mid Devon's vulnerable residents and complementing the Council's own services.
- 1.2 In addition, the Council has provided funding under its Economic Development budget to support the running of the Grand Western Canal, and Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life, including the Tourist Information Service as community assets / initiatives which contribute to the local economy.
- 1.3 For the years 2017-2020 grants amounting to £148,150 annually were distributed to these seven organisations in the following manner.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Age UK Mid Devon	9,650	9,650	9,650
Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT)	12,500	12,500	12,500
Citizens Advice	15,500	15,500	25,500
Involve – Voluntary Action in Mid Devon	12,000	12,000	12,000
Mid Devon Mobility ¹	22,000 ²	22,000 ²	22,000 ²
Strategic Grants Programme	71,650	71,650	71,650
Grand Western Canal	45,000	45,000	45,000
Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life	27,500	27,500	27,500
Tourist Information Service	4,000	4,000	4,000
Economic Development Grants	76,500	76,500	76,500
TOTAL GRANTS	148,150	148,150	148,150

¹ formerly Tiverton and District Community Transport Association, TDCTA

² Of which £5,600 is deducted at source to pay for rental of Shopmobility Office in MSCP

- 1.4 At a Cabinet meeting on the 19th December 2019 it was agreed to extend the strategic grants programme for a further year to March 2021 in order to undertake a thorough review of the grants programme, and to include in the review the two organisations funded through economic development budget. All of the Council's community grants were therefore brought within the same budget area. The detailed resolutions at this meeting were as follows:

- That recipients of all grant agreements in place as part of the council's strategic grants programme are offered a single year extension (to end 31st March 2021) to ensure continuity of service provision.

- That recipients of the two grants not currently included within the council's strategic grants programme (Grand Western Canal and Tiverton Museum and Tourist Information Service) are also offered a single-year extension (to end 31st March 2021) to ensure continuity of service provision.
- That in future years all grants are considered as part of one budget and decision-making process, and that these sit within the Community Well-Being portfolio.
- That officers are instructed to commence work early in the financial year 2020/21 to initiate a full evaluation and review of the grants programme; to carry out the same process as was undertaken previously to establish the 3-year programme; and to bring forward recommendations on a new 3-year programme with reference to the Community PDG as appropriate.

2.0 Strategic Grants Working Group

2.1 The planned for review of grants was unavoidably delayed by the outbreak of Covid19 in March 2020 and the consequent national lockdown. Following the easing of the first lockdown, the Community PDG on the 18th July 2020 sought to progress the future approach to the strategic grants programme via convening a working group to look at funding priorities for 2021/22. The Strategic Grants Working Group has subsequently met three times.

2.2 The working group considered the following issues:

- The pandemic has created a challenging situation for the Council and all the Council's partners, both financially and in service provision, with decreased income, increased costs and reduced volunteer support. Despite this, the majority of the Council's strategic partners have found new ways to deliver services, and meet the increased needs of vulnerable residents.
- CHAT, INVOLVE, Citizens Advice, Mid Devon Transport and Age UK Mid Devon have been key partners in the community response to the pandemic and instrumental in helping the Council deliver the Shielding Hub for the clinically extremely vulnerable and providing support for those in financial hardship.
- At the same time, the pandemic has created a particularly difficult financial environment for all organisations over the last nine months. Indeed, Age UK Mid Devon has recently closed, with the financial difficulties caused by Covid being one of the main contributing factors.
- Tiverton Museum was seriously effected by the loss of the 2020 holiday season to the pandemic, and is likely to continue to be impacted by any restrictions still in place over the holiday period 2021.
- Looking ahead, the effects of the pandemic are likely to continue at least for the next six months. Financial hardship amongst residents is likely to increase as the economic consequences of the pandemic are realised. CHAT and Citizen's Advice in particular are likely to continue to be important partners in the local response to hardship.

- 2.3 The working group also recognised that the Council is itself facing a difficult financial situation, and will need to identify savings to reduce the substantial budget deficit in its own finances. They therefore also considered the potential for savings on the grants budget and the resultant potential impact on partners.

Issues considered included:

- With the closure of Age UK Mid Devon, there is a potential saving of £9,650 on the grants budget.
- The effect on strategic partners of any reductions in core funding at this time.
- Any proposals to reduce funding substantially would need to be made with an understanding of the impact upon strategic grant partners and equality impact assessment.
- There may be a need to introduce any funding reductions over a period (three years?) to allow organisations time to restructure and find alternative sources of funding.

- 2.4 The Strategic Grants Working Group, at its meeting on the 16th December 2020, made the following recommendations:

- A one year grant award be made for 2021-2022, with a review in the autumn 2021.
- That going forward, the grants should be made on a 1 year settlement basis, to be reviewed annually each autumn.
- That the £9,650 previously offered to Age UK Mid Devon should be identified as a saving.
- The grant payments for 2021-2022 to the Council's other strategic partners should remain at the same levels as 2020-2021,
- The levels recommended are:

Organisation	2021-2022 Grant
Churches Housing Action Tam (CHAT)	£12,500
Citizens Advice	£15,500
Involve – Voluntary Action in Mid Devon	£12,000
Mid Devon Mobility	£22,000
Grand Western Canal	£45,000
Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life	£27,500
Tourist Information Service	£4,000
Total Grants	£138,500
Savings	£9,650

- If the Cabinet were minded to reduce the grant payment awards in 2021-2022 the Working Group would recommend that the organisations which directly supported vulnerable residents should have their grant payments protected, namely:
 - Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT)
 - Citizens Advice

- Involve – Voluntary Action in Mid Devon
- Mid Devon Mobility

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Circulation of the report: Cllr Dennis Knowles

List of background papers:

- Minutes of Strategic Grants Working Group 10th August 2020
- Minutes of Strategic Grants Working Group 16th September 2020
- Minutes of Strategic Grants Working group 16th December 2020