

GRANT AID
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery))

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery), 3rd April 2007, decided to undertake a study on capital and revenue grant aid schemes operating across the Council. The suggestion for the study emerged from the Panel's previous investigations into the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Schemes, where the recommendations arising from the study had been endorsed by the Cabinet and implemented by the Council.
- 1.2 Members of the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Working Group were therefore re-appointed to undertake the study on grant aid; that is Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, P G Mitchell and J S Watt. In addition, former District Councillor D A Giles was appointed on to the Working Group and assisted with the investigations until April 2008. Councillor P G Mitchell was nominated *rappporteur* for the Working Group.
- 1.3 Discussions have been held with a number of relevant District Council Officers and the Working Group is grateful to them for the support provided during the course of their investigations.

2. AIMS OF THE WORKING GROUP

- 2.1 The Working Group was tasked with examining the following:-
- the purpose of the scheme having regard to the Council's priorities contained in Growing Success;
 - the criteria for assessing applicants' eligibility under each scheme;
 - the methods adopted to publicise the availability of grant funding;
 - the application process; and
 - Officer / Member involvement during the approval process.
- 2.2 In addition to the above, the Working Group decided to investigate external sources of funding, specifically, the level of funding attracted by the Council and the application procedure. Further information on this is included within the Appendix.
- 2.3 One of the main objectives of the study at the outset was to develop a single website area for all grant applications offered by the Council. At present the different grant application schemes are listed on separate sections of the Council's website.

3. WORKING GROUP ACTIVITIES

- 3.1 The Working Group met on a number of occasions over the ensuing months and interviewed the following District Council Officers:-

Mr Steve Plant – Head of Housing Services
Mr Frank Mastrandrea - Policy and Enabling Officer
Mr Keith Tayler – Private Sector Housing Officer
Mr Steve Ingram – Head of Planning Services
Mr Richard Probyn – Planning Policy Manager
Mr I Leatherbarrow – Head of Policy and Strategic Services
Dr Sue Lammin – Head of Environmental and Community Health Services
Mr Dan Smith – Community Team Manager
Mrs Kathy Shaw – External Funding Officer

- 3.2 The Working Group based their deliberations on the evidence gathered from their investigations. The section below summarises the Working Group's findings.

4. WORKING GROUP FINDINGS

- 4.1 The District Council operates a number of capital and revenue grant aid initiatives, which are available to a wide range of stakeholders across the District. These include small voluntary community groups / organisations right through to large organisations who employ their own staff. Additionally, under some schemes individuals seeking support and assistance have the opportunity to apply for grant aid.

- 4.2 Further details of the types of capital and revenue grant aid schemes offered by the Council are attached as an Appendix hereto. The Appendix indicates the budget for the 2008/09 financial year, the objectives of each scheme, how each scheme is funded and the application and approval process.

- 4.3 The following sections identify a number of issues that arose in the course of the study.

(a) The Council's Corporate Priorities

The Working Group is satisfied that each of the schemes referred to within the Appendix has clear links to one or more of the Council's priorities identified in Growing Success. Members have, therefore, concluded that all grant aid schemes contribute towards the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan.

(b) The Criteria for Each Scheme

- 4.4 The Working Group has reviewed all the schemes' criteria. Members have concluded that in general terms, the specified criteria for each of the schemes available is clear for the type of grant that is available. The Working Group is, therefore, satisfied with the criteria specified for each scheme.

- 4.5 In addition, Members of the Working Group have noted the statutory obligations placed upon the Council to offer Disabled Facilities Grants / Loans to residents within Huntingdonshire.

(c) Methods Adopted to Publicise the Availability of Grant Funding

4.6 On the whole, the Working Group is satisfied that all grant aid schemes are appropriately publicised via a number of means, including:-

- District Council's Website
- Local Press
- District Wide Publication
- Council Tax Leaflet
- Mailings to Town and Parish Councils and Community Groups / Organisations
- General Advice from District Council Officers

4.7 The Working Group has identified a need to generate more awareness on the availability of the grants, particularly, amongst Ward Members. It was felt that this knowledge would help Members in their role as Ward Councillors. As highlighted previously within the report, this may be achieved through the designation of a single area on the Council's website where details of all grant schemes are made available.

4.8 The Working Group has discussed the range of services offered by the Voluntary Sector. Whilst not directly related to the Working Group's studies, a consensus amongst the Working Group was that Members are unaware of the range of work being undertaken by the Voluntary Sector. As a result a suggestion has been made that this information should be circulated to all Members.

(d) The Application Process

4.9 The Working Group has been advised that three processes exist by which funding is allocated to other organisations. It is by application, commissioning or automatically rolled over by the Council. Each of these now is discussed.

4.10 The Working Group has been provided with details of the recent introduction by the Cabinet of Voluntary Sector Commissioning (Minute No. 07/59 refers). This dispensed with much of the traditional discretionary grant aid schemes (revenue) and replaced them with five year commissioning agreements with the following organisations :-

- Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations
- Hunts Federation of Volunteer Bureaux
- Huntingdonshire Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Huntingdon Shopmobility
- Bedford Pilgrims Housing Association

A Service Level Agreement between the District Council and each of the above currently is in place. A traditional grant scheme still exists for capital projects.

4.11 The Working Group has examined the effects of the decision to terminate discretionary revenue grants in the form of the Leisure Grants and Other Community Grants, which previously were available to the local community. While the budget provision still exists, it is now used to commission organisations to carry out activities that meet the Council's objectives via

service level agreements. Members are of the view that there needs to be greater transparency in the way these service level agreements operate. This could be achieved if Members are able to review the returns submitted by the organisations covered by the service level agreements. The Working Group is willing to undertake this work as part of its follow up work on this study. Members also have registered concern that discretionary revenue funding is no longer available to local organisations (including parish councils) operating in parishes but they would like to review the position in light of evidence on the way the service level agreements have worked.

- 4.12 Having regard to the capital grant aid that is available for Local Leisure Projects, the Working Group has concluded that the time period of two months is not sufficient for applicants to submit their proposals to the District Council. A suggestion has, therefore, been made to extend this time period to three months.
- 4.13 In terms of the grants that are automatically rolled over (with inflation), the Working Group has revealed that, for example, applications for new transportation schemes are made in writing to the Head of Planning Services, who is responsible overall for determining their outcome. These schemes have an historical basis and, to date, have not been subject to review. It is suggested that the Working Group should extend its work and carry out a thorough review of these. The Head of Planning Services has concurred with this suggestion in respect of transportation grants, as there is currently no formal application process or scoring criteria. The Working Group is of the view that these should form parts of any grant scheme.
- 4.14 A study on Town Centre Partnerships was completed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) in March 2008. As a result of their investigations, the District Council has now entered into a three year funding arrangement with each of the Partnerships. Prior to the study, funding towards the Partnerships had been agreed on an annual basis.

(e) Officer / Member Involvement in the Approval Process

- 4.15 With the exception of Local Leisure Project Grants, which are determined by the relevant Executive Councillors, all other application based schemes are predominantly approved by Officers, often after consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor. The Working Group has been advised that, dependant on the scheme in question, applications are either assessed against selection criteria or through a points scoring system. Applicants for housing grants may undergo a means tested assessment and / or an Occupational Therapy assessment as part of the approval process.

(f) External Funding

- 4.16 In terms of external funding, the Working Group has examined the level of funding attracted into the District, which has been achieved through the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership and the District Council's External Funding Officer. Having regard to the former, it has been stressed that the funding attracted has been used for a variety of District-wide and County-wide projects. Recent local examples include funding for the St Neots Creative Enterprise Centre and the Saxongate Community Learning Centre.

- 4.17 In terms of external funding generated by the External Funding Officer, the Working Group has noted the extensive work undertaken with a number of community groups and outside organisations to target sources of funding for small local leisure based projects. Members are of the view that this work should be fully recognised. It has further been noted that responsibility for assisting outside groups / organisations currently is divided between the District Council's Service Development and Community Development Teams. The Working Group suggests that these areas of activity should be co-ordinated under a single Head of Service. While Members would wish to publicise the Council's success in obtaining significant levels of funding both for the Council and for outside groups / organisations, they are mindful that the External Funding Officer is operating at maximum capacity and that such an action is likely to create extra demand for her assistance. Moreover, under the Financial Strategy, her role in obtaining external income for the Council will become increasingly important. The Working Group is conscious of the Council's current financial position and so cannot make a definite recommendation on this point but, should future circumstances permit, it would be of considerable benefit to the District if the Council could dedicate more resources to assisting outside groups / organisations to obtain external funding.
- 4.18 The Working Group has been made aware that there are other opportunities to obtain funding to support the Council's current activities. Two are referred to in the table attached to this report. Funding is available from the East of England Regional Assembly to help the Council meet the cost of its Housing Repairs Assistance grants. A separate fund is available from the East of England Regional Assembly to contribute towards the cost of setting up and refurbishing gypsy and traveller sites in the District. Members are of the view that these opportunities should be investigated.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Working Group has undertaken a thorough review of all grant aid schemes operating within the Council and has concluded that overall, the process is working well, with some areas requiring further investigation. A number of recommendations have been made to improve the current processes. The recommendations have been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) and they are set out in the section below.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is

RECOMMENDED

- (a) that the availability of all grants be publicised more extensively, particularly to all District Councillors (para. 4.8);
- (b) that all grants be listed on a single section of the Council's website and regularly updated (para. 4.8);
- (c) that information on the services offered by the Voluntary Sector be circulated to Members and made available on the

Council's website together with links to the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations' website (para. 4.9);

- (d) that the Working Group be requested to review the returns submitted by organisations covered by service level agreements as a way of achieving greater transparency in the service level agreement process (para. 4.12);
- (e) that the time period for submitting applications for Local Leisure Projects be extended to three months (para. 4.13);
- (f) that a further review be undertaken on the grants that the District Council automatically rolls over (para. 4.14);
- (g) that work with community groups / organisations to obtain funding and community development work be co-ordinated under a single Head of Service (para. 4.18);
- (h) that consideration be given in the future to providing greater assistance for local communities in applying for grant aid for local projects (para. 4.18);
- (i) that investigations be carried out into the availability of funding from the East of England Regional Assembly to meet the cost of the Council's Decent Homes Grants (para. 4.19);
- (j) that investigations be carried out into the availability of funding from the East of England Regional Assembly to contribute towards the cost of setting up and refurbishing gypsy and traveller sites in the District (para. 4.19); and
- (k) that the Council's grant schemes be reviewed again in a year's time.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Notes of Meetings of the Grant Aid Working Group

Report and Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) on 4th November 2008.

Contact Officer: Miss Habbiba Ali, Democratic Services Officer - (01480) 388006

Depart ment	Description	2008/09 Budget	Actual to Date	Objectives / Type	Status / Funded by	Application	Selection	Approval
CAPITAL								
SP	Disabled Facilities Grants/Loans	1,284,000	0	Statutory - to help disabled people in their own home.	Annual. £335k Gov't funded (around 30%) with the remainder funded through HDC sources. Annual bid system.	All applicants are means tested and require an Occupational Therapy Assessment.	Selection criteria and means tested.	By Officers – HDC's Home Improvement Agency Team.
SP	Housing Repairs Assistance Grants/Loans	200,000	0	Not a statutory requirement. Made available to improve the standard of the District's housing.	Annual 100% HDC. Funds available from EERA via a bid scheme.	Via application to HDC. Anyone over 18, in social or market housing that meets the selection criteria.	Selection criteria and means tested.	By Officers – HDC's Home Improvement Agency Team.
SP	Social Housing Grant	1,834,000	0	Not a statutory requirement. The District Council has an obligation to meet the needs of the District.	Annual 100% HDC.	Schemes that have been agreed in the past. Rolled over automatically until funding has been used.	Varies from scheme to scheme.	By Officers and Portfolio Holders – Cllrs Mrs Reynolds and Rogers.
SI	Rural Renewal - Pump Priming	27,000	0	Ramsey Renewal	Finished this year. Now administered by Neighbourhood Management Groups.			
SI	Ramsey Shop Fronts	0	0		2 year project which has now been completed.	Via application to HDC.	Local businesses who wish to improve their shop fronts in accordance with the Conservation Policy for the Town Centre.	HDC's Conservation Team.
SL	Local Leisure Project Grants	162,000	0	Capital Grant to community Groups who's aim is to provide leisure facilities	Annual 100% HDC	March each year	Dan Smith	Portfolio Holders – Cllrs Mrs Reynolds and Rogers
SL	Shop Mobility	0	0	To improve disabled persons mobility	Capital Finished			
TOTAL		3,507,000	0					
Depart ment	Description	2008/09 Budget	Actual	Objectives / Type	Status / Funded by	Application	Selection	Approval
REVENUE								
SI	Planning Listed Buildings Grants	54,243	0	Survival of Listed buildings at risk	Annual 100% HDC	Rolling, reviewed quarterly, grants in the range of £5k to £10k	Points system, administered by the Conservation Team	By Officers after consultation with the Portfolio Holder- Cllr Bucknell.

SI	Ramsey Rural Renewal	0	0	Ramsey Renewal	Finished this year. Now administered by Neighbourhood Management Groups.			
SI	Community Transport Grants	89,709	0	Contributes to a range of community transport schemes/organisations.	Annual 100% HDC.	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
SI	Rural Transport Grants	0	0	To assist rural transport schemes.	Now finished. No longer in existence.			
SI	Cambs ACRE	0	0	To support the Rural Transport Officer post.	Now finished. Post is no longer in existence.			
Department	Description	2008/09 Budget	Actual	Objectives / Type	Status / Funded by	Application	Selection	Approval
IL	Town Centre Partnership Grants	79,032	0	Contribution to the Council's Local Economy Strategy	100% HDC. 3 year funding agreement to be introduced.	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
IL	Economic Development Grants	41,081	0	Contributes to the Huntingdonshire Enterprise Agency, East of England International and Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership.	Annual 100% HDC.	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
RW	Contribution to Waste PFI Team	9,583	0	Contribution to County to develop a County wide waste scheme	Annual 100% HDC	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
SL	Citizens Advice Bureau	145,580	0	Contribution to CAB to maintain the CAB	Annual 100% HDC	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
SL	Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations	39,989	0	Contribution to Hunts Forum To help all Volunteer organizations	Annual 100% HDC	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
SL	Hunts Federation of Volunteer Bureau	36,053	0	Contribution to Hunts Fed'n to help all Volunteer Groups.	Annual 100% HDC	Historical – automatically rolled over.		
SL	Shop Mobility	20,992	0	Contribution to Shop Mobility	Annual 100% HDC	Historical		
SL	Other Community Grants (See report para. 4.12)	29,674	0	Now amalgamated with Leisure Grants	Rolled up into the above 4 grants.			
SL	Leisure Grants (See report para. 4.12)	29,998	0	Community and charity projects such as Natural High, Moor Community Group & Cambridgeshire ACRE. Now amalgamated with Other Community Grants.	Rolled up into the above 4 grants.	Revenue funding – commissioning basis for 5 years. Capital funding – by application every year.	By Environmental and Community Health Services Division.	
TOTAL		575,934	0					

EXTERNAL FUNDING SOURCES								
Department	Description	Budget Set?	Actual Attracted	Objectives/Type	Status/Funded By	Application	Selection	Approval
IL	Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership (See report para. 4.18)	No Budget Set	Since the P'ship's existence £2,532m	The GCP is the sub-regional economic partnership covering a 25-mile radius around Cambridge. Enables access to funding streams that the District Council would otherwise not have access to. Funding used for a variety of both District-wide and County-wide projects.	The relevant external grant funder.	Via application – joint application with relevant parties.	Selection criteria – varies from project to project.	By the relevant grant funder.
IL	External Funding Officer (See report para. 4.18)	No Budget Set	Over 2007/08 year £3.5m	To assist community groups and external organisations with help in attracting external funding in to the District. Predominantly used for local projects. Service often used internally within the organisation.	The relevant external grant funder.	Via application – joint application with relevant parties.	Selection criteria – varies from project to project.	By the relevant grant funder.
SP	Regional Assembly fund to assist councils to establish locations for gypsy and traveler sites. (See report para. 4.19)				£9m grant money available via a bid system.			

RW Robert Ward
IL Ian Leatherbarrow
SP Steve Plant
SI Steve Ingram