



Report to: Environment Committee, 20th July 2021

Report of: Deputy Director for Policy and Strategy

Subject: ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY GRANTS

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Committee agrees a budget of £20,000 for the Environmental Community Grants programme as proposed in this report.**
- 1.2 That the Committee delegates authority to the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources to agree the process for assessment and approval of grants.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester 2020-2030 was endorsed by the Environment Committee on 27 October 2020 and subsequently adopted by Council on 17 November 2020.
- 2.2 The Action Plan for 2021-2022 was agreed by the Environment Committee on 16th March 2021. Within this action plan, a specific objective was to develop and deliver a small grants scheme to support community projects that help to deliver the strategy.
- 2.3 The Action Plan suggested an initial sum of £20,000 be allocated to this grants scheme, to be funded from the previously agreed £100,000 enabling budget for the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 It is proposed that Environmental Community Grants of between £500 and £1000 will be offered to community groups, charities and voluntary sector organisations operating in Worcester.
- 3.2 The aim of these 'environmental community grants' would be, as outlined in the Action Plan, to increase community involvement and engagement in environmental sustainability, and to seed fund small projects which will provide stepping stones to larger projects. As well as funding stand-alone projects, grants could also be used to match fund, supplement or show local support for larger grant applications.
- 3.3 These grants will complement the existing community grants scheme, which can fund higher value environmental projects. It is expected that through offering and promoting small grants, specifically dedicated to environmental objectives, smaller community groups such as 'friends of' groups will be encouraged to apply.
- 3.4 Grants must fulfil one of the following criteria in order to be funded from this scheme:

- Lead to a direct reduction in carbon emissions from any source (residential, businesses, transport etc)
- Enable a future reduction in carbon emissions
- Improve resilience to climate change
- Benefit the natural environment – eg. improved biodiversity, reduced pollution
- Reduce waste
- Increase environmental awareness amongst residents, businesses and visitors to the city

3.5 Applicants will also be required to demonstrate the following:

- The need for the project
- A way of measuring the success of the project
- That the people and resources required for success are in place
- That the project will represent value for money

3.6 It is proposed that environmental community grant awards will be between £500- and £1000, allowing for a maximum of 40 grants should all be of the lowest amount.

3.7 It is proposed that organisations will be able to receive up to two grants in a financial year, subject to demand, but only one grant per project. If an organisation applies a second time this must be for a separate project.

3.8 The application and decision processes will be as straightforward and streamlined as possible, allowing for those not familiar with making grant applications to be successful as appropriate for their projects.

3.9 Following initial officer checks on eligibility of an application, an officer grant panel will be established for the technical assessment of each grant application.

3.10 Relevant ward Members will be consulted on each approved application, giving them the opportunity to consider match-funding the grants from ward budgets.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Not to offer these grants. This would weaken the Council's support for grassroots community engagement to work towards becoming carbon neutral as a city and gain other vital environmental improvements, such as responding to the declared biodiversity emergency.

4.2 Grants at a different level. The value of the grants on offer has been specifically chosen so as to offer a route for smaller projects, which would not require the higher level of funding offered by the existing Community Grants. It is hoped that by providing a smaller amount of easy to access funding, projects would be successfully started and then able to apply for larger grants in the future. Grants of a lower amount will be administratively prohibitive.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The maximum spend to 31 March 2022 would be £20,000. After this, the success of the grants would be reviewed and a further paper brought before this Committee determining options.

There are no budget implications as the costs can be met from the previously approved Environmental Sustainability Strategy enabling budget of £100,000.

The full £100,000 allocated to the enabling budget remains and there are no current commitments for this funding. £10,000 match funding from the enabling budget for a heat networks feasibility study was approved by this Committee in July 2020, however the Heat Networks Delivery Unit (part of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy department) subsequently offered to fully fund this work.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

As described, the Council already offers community grants. These grants would operate on a similar basis but with lower grants available and specific criteria and outcomes identified. The application, assessment and award process, would be similar to and run alongside the existing Community Grants scheme.

As with the existing community grants, these grants would be available for groups and organisations but not for individuals.

5.3 Risk Implications

As with the existing community grants programme, there is a risk that the projects do not deliver against the agreed objectives. The terms and conditions for the community grants include a claw back mechanism, although implementing this for small sums may not be cost effective.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

This project emanates directly from the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan, which includes matters of biodiversity. The strategy recognises that it is only with the support of partners across the city that the Council can realise its goals. Encouraging grassroots actions from new and existing environmental community groups is a key part of this.

5.5 Equality Implications

Some communities and organisations may find it more difficult than others to identify and access potential grant funding. This can be mitigated by appropriate promotion and support.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

No human resource implications have been identified in respect of this report.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

No health and safety implications have been identified in respect of this report.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

Whilst the grants awarded will be relatively small, it is a condition that they will bring positive environmental benefits. Supporting community organisations to deliver will also bring positive social benefits.

Ward(s): ALL
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Background Papers: Environmental Sustainability Strategy Action Plan for 2021-22