

Report to: Policy and Resources Committee, 19th December 2023

Report of: Corporate Director – Finance and Resources

Subject: REVIEW OF SMALL GRANTS ARRANGEMENTS

1. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- 1.1 Approve the allocation of One Worcester Communities Grants (small grants) for the financial year 2024/25; and**
- 1.2 Approve the recommended option for defraying the remaining grant.**

2. Background

2.1 At its meeting of 25 July the Committee agreed to a change in the amount of small grants to be made available and the process of awarding the grants. In summary, the agreed changes were to:

- Reduce the Small Grants fund to £45,000, funded from UKSPF
- Open a call for bids in the months preceding the start of each financial year
- Assess applications on the basis of a scoring system
- Officers to assess all applications under delegated powers, using the scoring system, and present the results to the Committee
- Committee to receive the set of proposed awards for consideration and agreement.

2.2 At its meeting of 5 September, the Committee approved the methodology for awarding the grants, following the proposed timetable:

Stage	Date
Final approval of criteria and process	P&R Committee 5 September 2023
Call for bids announced on website and social media	22 September 2023
Call for bids closes	10 November 2023
Review of bids and scoring	By 30 November 2023
Approval of Awards	P&R Committee 19 December 2023

2.3 This report presents the results of the exercise and seeks agreement on the next steps for utilising the remaining funds.

3. Grants for approval

3.1 A total of 12 applications were received during the required time-frame. The grants were assessed by a panel incorporating the Corporate Director Finance and Resources, The Head of Homes and Communities and the Lead Projects and

Voluntary Sector Officer. The criteria for assessing grant applications was based on the seven key factors agreed at the September meeting, as follows:

	Criterion	Assessment
A	Fit with Council's strategic aims	Does the project support the Worcester City Plan 2022-2027 and other strategies and aims of the Council?
B	Project structures and outcomes	Does the project have a clear purpose, with measurable deliverables?
C	Need	Has evidence been provided of a local demand for this activity/project, including any specific consultation or research?
D	Benefits	How many beneficiaries are there of the activity, including volunteers, organisers and participants and will it strengthen or add to existing community arrangements?
E	Measurement and impact	Are there adequate mechanisms in place to allow assessment of progress, achievements and impacts of the project?
F	Capacity	Are there sufficient people, skills and resources in place to the deliver the project?
G	Value	Are the project costs reasonable and do they represent value for money on the basis of any quotes provided?
H	Sustaining impact and benefits	What action will be taken to ensure that the project will be sustained after the initial funding has ended and/or how will it support the organisation in future (e.g. by generating income/increased engagement?)

3.2 Further information was requested where the applicants had not provided sufficient information to assess the bid against each criterion and the panel reconvened to make a final assessment. The applications which met the criteria sufficiently and are submitted for approval are as follows.

Organisation	Project Name	Amount applied for £	Amount awarded £
Dinesfest community Group	Dinesfest	2000	2000
Bike Worcester	Bike Maintenance programme	1706	1706
Artist Clubhouse	Lights Camera Paint	2000	2000
Worcester play council	Play in the city	2000	2000
Community Boosts CIC	Boosting the community sector.	2000	2000
Arboretum Residents Association	Go wild at the ARBO	240	240
Total		9,946	9,946

4. Next steps

4.1 At the meeting of 25 July, it was agreed that in the event that there were insufficient applications, the balance on the fund would be carried forward and added to the

grant available in the following financial year. The total defrayed, subject to approval, is £9,9946 and there is therefore up to £35,054 still available for distribution. However, the option to carry forward is not viable as there is no guarantee of future UKSPF grant at this stage and it may not therefore be possible to vire funding between schemes to enable this. Four options are presented for consideration.

- 4.2 Option 1. Adhere to the existing agreed approach and carry forward the £35,054 to 2025/26. As noted above, this is not recommended at this point as there is no guarantee of UKSPF funding on 2025/26. The option of virement against other budgets and carry forward the amount outstanding may not be available.
- 4.3 Option 2. Undertake a further call for bids on the same basis as the current arrangements. It is proposed that this would be undertaken between the date of this committee and the beginning of the 2024/25 financial year so that organisations would know that the grant, if awarded, will be available for the full year. A variation to this proposal would be to increase the amount of grant available for each application, which would include asking the previously successful applicants to bid again for an increase in funding if they so wish.
- 4.4 Option 3. Add the remaining funding to the fund available for larger miscellaneous applications. At previous meetings an amount of £50,000 has been made available each year to support events or organisations which support the objectives of the Council. These have primarily been arts and culture orientated but this is not specified in the criteria. At the meeting of 25 July, it was agreed to continue this practice but to reduce the annual amount available to £25,000. Applications for these awards are in writing to the Managing Director who reaches a decision in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant policy Committee based on agreed criteria.
- 4.5 Option 4. Use the opportunity to defer reductions in existing grants. At the 25 July meeting the Committee agreed to a policy of reducing medium grants over the remaining life of the City Plan. The impact of this is to reduce these grants by a total of £11,500. Deferring this reduction would allow more time for the affected organisations to make adjustments to reducing grant in future. Under this option, the remaining funding could be defrayed as per options two and three.
- 4.6 The Committee is asked to consider these four options and resolve as to which approach to adopt. The recommended option is Option 4 as this enables the Council to continue to support organisations previously recognised as supporting the Council's objectives. The preferred option for the remaining funding is Option 3 as this enables it to be targeted towards organisations that the Council wishes to support.

5. Preferred option

- 5.1 To alter the previous Committee decision to carry forward unspent grant funding, on this occasion, and defray the remaining Small Grants funding during the financial year 2024/25, in line with Option 4. The remaining funding to be allocated in line with Option 3.

6. Alternative options considered

- 6.1 Four options are set out in the report. Option1 is not recommended as there is no guarantee that UKSPF grant will be available in 2025/26. Also, the opportunity to support community activities during 2025/25 will be foregone if the grant is carried forward to 2025/26.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The total of Small Grants funding has been allocated within the budget for 2024/25 and is to be funded from UKSPF grant.

7.2 Legal and Governance Implications

There are no legal and governance implications. The arrangements for deploying grant funding are developments of existing arrangements previously agreed.

7.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk that grant funds are not used for the purpose intended. This is mitigated by end of project reports required by the recipient detailing project outcomes.

There is a risk that there will be insufficient funding to meet the demand under options. The use of a scoring system is designed to ensure that the limited funding is directed towards proposals that best meet the Council's own objectives. Limits have been placed on eligibility criteria, and on the maximum amount of grant that can be applied for, to ensure that as many organisations as possible are supported by the fund.

7.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The grants are designed to support the aims of the City Council as set out in the City Plan. The revisions to the approach outlined in the report are designed to continue to strengthen the relationship between the City Plan and the grant funding provided

7.5 Equality Implications

No adverse equality implications have been identified as part of this report. The scoring criteria is set out to support the aspirations for meeting the aims of the city plan and will be applied equally to all organisations that apply for funding. There are no restrictions relating the identified characteristics in the applications process or eligibility criteria. However, organisations are required to demonstrate that they have appropriate safeguarding and equalities policies in place.

7.6 Human Resources Implications

There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

7.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report.

7.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

Following the recommendations in this report will support communities, voluntary organisations, and volunteers as well as health and other benefits. A varied criteria to support the outcomes will lead to stronger and connected communities as required by the City Plan.

Ward(s): All wards
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Background Papers: Review of Community Services Grants 2020/21; Policy and Resources Committee, 14 December 2021.