

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 September 2014

Report by Clerk

COMMUNITY GRANTS – PROPOSED SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To submit for consideration the proposed scope of the investigation that the Committee has agreed to carry out on community grants.

SCOPE

2. At the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 June 2014 the Chair reported that he had been made aware of some voluntary groups who had been frustrated by the Council's grant allocation system, with the suggestion made that the system lacked some clarity. It was also explained that grants to organisations had last been examined from a policy review perspective over 8 years ago by the Council's then Policy Review Committee.

3. Arising from a suggestion made by the Chair in June that it may be timely to revisit the related Council policy and how it is managed, and that discussion with the Chief Auditor on the outcome of appropriate grant related work she had undertaken might be useful as part of this work, the Committee agreed to progress a review of community grant issues.

4. Following the meeting, with a view to clarifying in more detail what the proposed focus of the Committee's review was to be, members of the Committee were provided with some background information on community grants for their review. This included a report considered and approved by the Cabinet on 24 October 2013 detailing findings of a review of the community grants scheme which proposed a number of recommendations. The Cabinet report highlighted that that review had taken account of the Scottish Government's public sector reform agenda including Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) requirements; the need to ensure robust arrangements are in place to monitor the use and impact of grants awarded; and the development of a process which is efficient for community groups, officers and Members. The main recommendations arising from the review related to the introduction of:-

- a revised application form and guidance notes;
- a financial threshold of £500 above which grant applicants applying to all grant funds would require to provide details of how their project linked to the Community Planning Partnership's SOA outcomes;
- new procedures for dealing with low-level grants (i.e. £500 and under); and
- an end of project monitoring form for projects over £500.

5. The report concluded that the proposed changes would provide a clearer, more transparent process for communities; that with regard to larger grants awarded there would be clear links to the outcomes of the SOA; and that officer time would be used more efficiently. The changes approved by the Cabinet in October 2013 have since been introduced.

6. Other background information provided to members of the Committee to date to assist them determine what they want to focus on included the current grant application form; the associated guidance notes; the final report prepared by the Policy Review Committee following its review of grants some years ago; and the associated Cabinet response prepared at the time.

7. Following consultation with Members of the Committee, it is proposed that the main issues to be reviewed should be:-

- By way of background and to help avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, the extent to which the recommendations made on grants by the Policy Review Committee in 2006 were implemented;
- The impact the changes approved in October 2013 have had;
- Adherence to the current administrative arrangements and procedures for processing grant applications from community organisations, including examining the extent to which criteria are adhered to; arrangements are effective and robust; and applicants comply with requirements, such as on providing receipts;
- Monitoring and evaluation processes, including the level of certainty that exists that grants awarded are used for their intended, agreed purpose and what happens to recover funds should a project not proceed as planned;
- To what extent is it known organisations applying to the council for a grant have been successful in applying to another organisation for funds for the same purpose and related issues, including the extent to which grants are being allocated on the basis of securing match funding from elsewhere and related policy and procedures;
- Considering a sample of grant applications and related circumstances, including some where a problem arose from the perspective of either the applicant or the Council; how the problems were identified and addressed; and more generally the extent to which applications are unsuccessful;
- The extent to which advice and/or assistance on potential alternative sources of funding is provided, if at all, if a local organisation fails to meet the criteria for a community grant;
- In the context of the total funding available, how widely grants are distributed amongst organisations over time and related issues, such as potential barriers to applying (e.g. lack of awareness; or lack of expertise on the application procedure);
- The extent to which the views of grant applicants are canvassed to ascertain these on the application procedure and the clarity of current guidance; and on a related issue, to what extent benchmarking is carried out against schemes elsewhere;
- Any conflict, or potential conflict, between alternative sources of funding (e.g. Whitelee Windfarm Fund grants and the community grant scheme);
- The outcome of any recent work by the Chief Auditor on grants.

METHODOLOGY

8. Amongst other things it is proposed that further background information on the scheme is reviewed and that comments are sought from and discussions take place with appropriate officers, both within and outwith formal meetings. As referred to previously, it is proposed that some focus is placed on reviewing a sample of applications and related issues. The possibility of requesting information on grant schemes in place in other local authorities may be pursued, if not already available within the Council. Comments will be sought from appropriate Conveners on grant related issues as considered appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION

9. It is recommended that the Committee considers the proposed scope of the review.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Report Author - Linda Hutchison, Clerk to the Committee

Tel: 0141 577 8388

e-mail: linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk