

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 JUNE 2015

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ANNUAL REPORT ON DISCRETIONARY COMMUNITY GRANTS
PROGRAMME 2014/2015

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This is an update and review of grants allocated between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY SCRUTINY:

That:

(A)	the allocation of grants according to agreed policy be scrutinised and any areas for specific discussion be identified; and
(B)	the following administrative changes be agreed: i) to relax Community Activities and Small Community Capital so that applicants' no longer have to contact their town or parish council for a grant. (Para 2.5) ii) to open the Community Activities pot to village halls and parish councils throughout the year with the condition that they can only apply for a grant to organise special events, and not used to support running costs (Para 2.15); and iii) to reduce the time period for claiming small capital grants from a year to 6 months (Para 2.33)

1.0 Background

1.1 In June 2014, Community Scrutiny agreed it would receive an annual grants report to coincide with the grant giving cycle rather than a twice-yearly report, as had been previously agreed in 2012.

- 1.2 The committee requested that a mid-year update be included in the Member's Information Bulletin and this was included in the 28 November edition.
- 1.3 The purpose of community grants is to help take forward the council's aims in people, place and prosperity. This is typically for non-statutory activities such as improved community facilities and increased economic and social activities in the community. A copy of the current policy can be found in **Essential Reference Paper 'B.'**
- 1.4 Managed by the Engagement and Partnerships team, the discretionary grants programme not only takes forward service priorities of enabling sports, arts and community providers to improve their cultural and leisure offer but also supports priorities in the East Herts Together Sustainable Community Strategy (2009 – 2024) and East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2013-2018).
- 1.5 Members are asked to note that the total community capital budget available for allocation in 2014/2015 was £80,000, a decrease of £10,000 from the previous year. An additional £8,989 became available for reallocation when a project funded in 13/14 could not go ahead.
- 1.6 The revenue budget available for allocation in 2014/2015 year was £58,390.
- 1.7 The Community Grants Programme was audited in 2014, as part of the Annual Audit Plan 14/15 for the council. Internal Audit provides the Council with an independent and objective opinion on the organisation's governance arrangements, encompassing internal control and risk management, by completing an annual risk-based audit plan. The audit confirmed full assurance for the programme and that there are effective controls in operation for those elements of the risk management processes covered by this review. A report was circulated to Members on 2 December 2014.
- 1.8 The Engagement and Partnership Team followed up this endorsement by conducting an external Service-Led review (19 and 22 May) to obtain feedback from the voluntary sector on their experience of the grants programme. In general, these 33 "critical friends" were happy with the application process, though it was felt that first-time applicants might find the paper work daunting.

The main areas for improvement included: website pages and more involvement from Members and parish councillors to promote grants to the wider community. A further focus group was held with officers and key partners on 5 June.

1.9 Members are invited to attend a focus group on 25 June from 12:30 to 2 pm. Officers intend to arrange a focus group for town/parish councillors and parish clerks later in the year.

2.0 Report

2.1 During 2014/15 financial year, 131 capital and revenue grants were awarded (105 to organisations and 26 to individuals). The table below provides a breakdown of awards

Theme	No. of requests	No. of grants awarded	Budget allocated
Summer Activities Fund	16	16	£25,000
Community Activities	78	63	£28,140
Performance for Excellence	26	26	£5,250
Community Capital 1 st round – rural projects only	13	10	£33,384
Community Capital 2 nd round – rural and town projects	19	16	£55,605
Total	152	131	£147,379

2.3 Both the capital and revenue grants budgets were fully spent. There was an overall applicant success rate of 87%.

2.4 The Council's preference in grant giving is to areas that have received little or no New Homes Bonus (NHB) money. As all five towns have been passed a significant amount of funds through the building of new houses, the Council's policy is to first fund projects in the rural areas. Projects in the towns may be considered later in the year if the capital budget is unspent.

2.5 Due to the NHB scheme, all grant applicants requesting more than £500 are required to contact their parish or town council for a grant. It was considered, at the time, that this would facilitate extra grant giving at a local level and aid sustainability – ensuring that applicants were not reliant on one grant source.

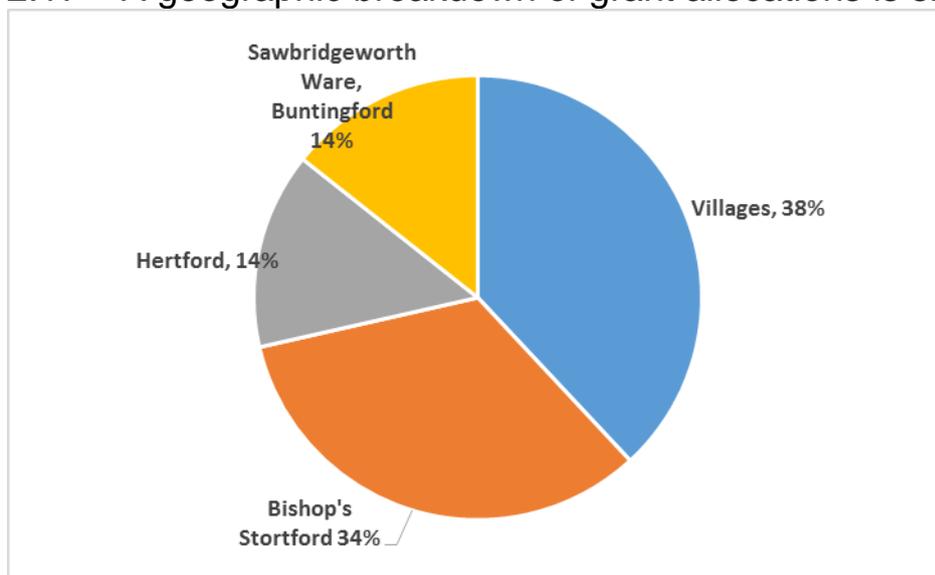
However, this process is not working as well as expected due to different grant deadlines and priorities. Members are asked to agree an administrative change so that this criteria is relaxed and applicants are instead signposted and strongly encouraged to make contact. At the same time, parish/town councillors will be encouraged to promote and publicise East Herts grants to all eligible organisations in their communities, ensuring that the information is included on their agenda and on their website, and parish clerks encouraged to offer applicants support to complete applications.

- 2.6 Applicants also must obtain an endorsement for their project from the Member representing the area being served. Generally, feedback on this process from applications has been positive with applicants stating that they received a prompt reply, helpful response, referrals to other grant funds, that the councillor was easy to speak to, resulting in an excellent experience. Members are asked to be proactive and identify eligible organisations from the wider community and sign post them to the grants programme.
- 2.7 Moving into 2015/16, officers have introduced a mini-grants Community Activities application (£50 to £200 grants) which was open to organisations run informally with no constitution. Applicants are still expected to have their own bank account and appropriate governance. It is hoped that this four-page application will encourage more applications from first-time applicants and older persons' groups.
- 2.8 The next section of the report addresses each area of funding in more detail.
- 2.9 **Summer Activities** – The intent of the fund is to provide fun and exciting activities for children and young people over the summer holidays that support their personal, emotional and adolescent development (Every Child Matters). The most common use of the grant was bringing in extra “specialised” staff with the added value of helping organisations build their reputation and increase membership.
- 2.10 Sixteen grants were awarded to registered charities, sports club, faith groups and school partnerships.
- 2.11 Participation figures fluctuate from year to year and are dependent on a combination of factors such as level of interest by

parents/children, weather, effectiveness of individual marketing and accuracy of reporting by project organisers. However overall attendance figures (new and repeat participants) have increased: 7,607 total attendances over all activities were reported in 2014 compared to 5,664 in 2013.

- 2.12 A mid-year report, which has more details of this funding area, was included in the 28 November Members Bulletin. A list of the grant-funded summer programme is available on <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=29696>
- 2.13 **Community Activities Grants** – The intent of this fund is to support voluntary and community groups whose work enhances the quality of life for residents in East Herts, especially those who are vulnerable or who need more support than others.
- 2.14 The total number of grants awarded in 2014/15 was 63. Awards ranged from £75 to £500. Forty-nine percent of successful applicants were voluntary/community groups; 32% registered charities. Notably, 37% of grants were to organisations that had never applied to the Council before. A full list of grants can be found on www.eastherts.gov.uk/grants and includes such groups as: Friends of Southern Country Park, Alzheimer’s Society, Home Start East Herts, and Bishop’s Stortford Visually Impaired Club.
- 2.15 Normally, this fund is only open to voluntary/community groups that have little capacity to generate income and are reliant on volunteers to raise funds and deliver activities. This year, however, with funds still remaining to be allocated late in the financial year, it was decided to relax the criteria and invite parish councils and village halls to apply. Members are asked to agree that parish councils and village halls be eligible throughout the year with the condition that they can only apply for a grant to put on a community event.
- 2.16 From information provided by applicants, it is estimated that more than 16,929 individuals benefitted from the Community Activities Grants pot.

2.17 A geographic breakdown of grant allocations is shown below:



2.18 Numbers of applications vary across the district. Measures will be put in place to address this. Members representing Sawbridgeworth, Ware and Buntingford are asked to promote the scheme to eligible groups and offer support to those applying. Officers will provide extra advice sessions in these areas.

2.19 Seventy-eight applications were submitted to this scheme and 63 were awarded a grant resulting in an 81% success rate.

2.20 The reasons funding was not approved varied but ranged from: the application was incomplete, the organisation had already received a revenue grant from the council or the activity/organisation was not a priority or not in financial need.

2.21 Of the activities funded, 17 supported older or vulnerable people/families by supporting community networks, enabling friendships or providing access to local sports and leisure opportunities.

2.22 Eight grants were awarded to groups delivering projects that improved sports or physical activity provision. In addition, £1,150 was used to support applicants to the Performance to Excellence Scheme which was oversubscribed. The two programmes are complementary in their purpose and process.

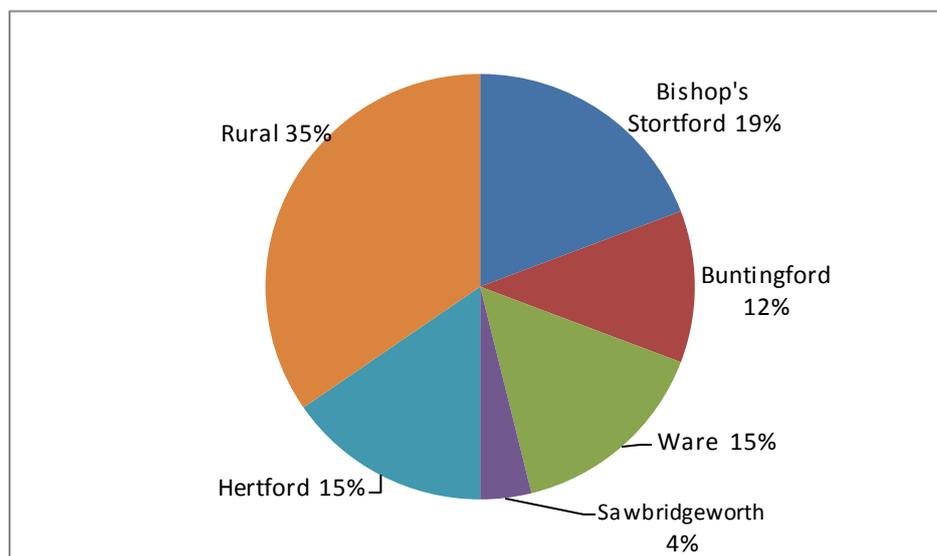
2.23 Grant giving in this area also contributes to the task of building resilient communities where the local authority works in partnerships with local communities and other agencies to

encourage volunteering (social capital) and building on communities' own strengths and assets.

2.24 **Performance to Excellence Grants (Sports and Arts)** - In total, 26 grants were awarded to young people aged 11 to 18 achieving excellence in their chosen area for such sports as athletics, canoeing, fencing, martial arts, triathlon and snowboarding and the entire budget of £4,100 allocated. The pot was oversubscribed and £1,150 from Community Activities and £500 from an Olympic Legacy pot was used to ensure all applicants who were eligible received funding. The total of 26 is the highest number of grants ever awarded. 57% were first-time applicants.

2.25 Members are asked to note that this grant pot supports exceptional sporting talent and it is not unusual for the council to support a young athlete over several years as many continue to develop and go on from county level to national and sometimes international competitions.

2.26 A geographic breakdown of grant allocations is shown below:



2.27 In line with other schemes, all applicants are now expected to contact the local EHC Member for an endorsement of their application.

2.28 **Community Capital (Large and Small)** - The intent of this rolling grant scheme is to support renovation/refurbishment of existing and well-used community facilities or the purchase of large items of equipment to improve these facilities. In 2014/15, the Council awarded 26 grants to projects benefitting residents in East Herts. Since this pot was oversubscribed, applications were assessed to

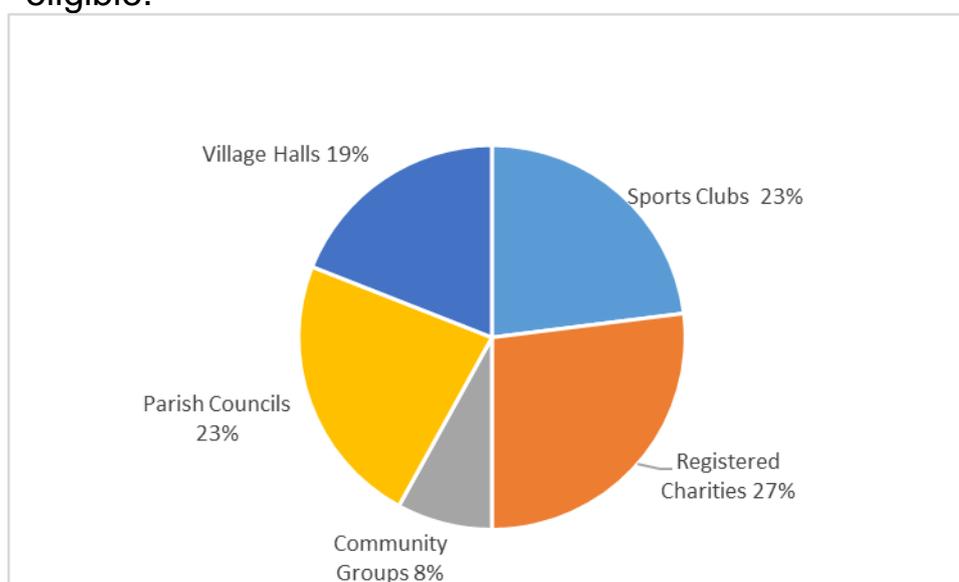
identify those that most closely met the council's strategic objectives, would make the most difference to participants or the community and could be achieved in the one year time frame. Organisations that had not applied before were a priority.

2.29 As per policy, applications for projects in the towns were deferred until after consideration of rural applications. This year seven grants were awarded to projects in the towns.

2.30 A full list of awards is on www.eastherts.gov.uk/grants and includes such groups as Stocking Pelham Cricket Club, Thundridge Parish Council, The Hailey Centre and Hertford District Scouts. Notably, 20% of grants were to organisations that had never applied to the council before.

2.31 Thirty-two applications were submitted to the Council under this scheme and 26 were awarded a grant resulting in an 82% success rate. Requests for grants were turned down either because applications were incomplete, the amount of money still to raise within the time frame was unrealistic, the project was not a priority for the Council, there was not enough evidence of need or the organisation had already received a capital grant from the council in the financial year.

2.32 The chart below shows the types of organisations that were awarded a grant. Members are asked to note that schools are not eligible.



2.33 Several years ago, the Council introduced the opportunity for small projects estimated to cost up to £2,000 to be fully funded. This was in response to feedback that some organisations found it difficult to find match funding and thus were not applying. This

year, 11 of the 26 successful applicants were awarded a small grant. Members are asked to agree an administrative change to reduce the time period for claiming small capital grants from a year to 6 months. This will ensure that applicants are more focussed and start things off sooner, resulting in claims being submitted earlier in the financial year.

In 16/17, officers also plan to introduce an earlier funding deadline (spring 2016) for capital grant applications so that the grant giving process ties in with the financial year.

2.34 Council policy states that applicants putting forward a bid for a project costing more than £2,000 must have at least one-third of the cost in the bank at the time of application. This financial commitment from the applicant is vital as the Council must be confident that the project will be completed one year from the time of the grants offer. This means that applicants providing a higher proportion of match funding and with less funds still to raise are more likely to be successful. Maximum of £8,000 can be awarded, no more than 50% of the cost.

2.35 Members might like to know that seven grants (£24,106) were awarded to sports organisations. The council's grants helped ensure easier access to a building or purchased new sports equipment. Six grants (£17,952) were awarded to organisations providing services for vulnerable adults (including those that need more support than others) and young children.

2.36 From information provided in applications, it is estimated that more than 9,000 residents of East Herts benefitted from these grant-funded projects.

2.37 **Monitoring and Feedback**

2.38 Since 2010, applicants have been required to submit a monitoring form detailing the outcomes of grant award. The following is a selection of feedback received.

“The archive now has a secure, dry home....work has begun on scanning the archives....this will protect fragile papers and will allow access via the village website.” Friends of Widford School for village archive project 13/14 Community Capital

“The grant has particularly helped us to clear Thorley Parish footpaths allowing walkers to enjoy the area and to broaden the amount of different walks. We have kept at least 5 footpath sections clear during the summer.”

Friends of Southern Country Park, £500 from Community Activities

*“SPCC is primarily funded by match fees from the players. It is very difficult to save for capital expenditureAfter 12 years our old mower had given up, and it was no longer possible to obtain spare parts. The Council’s very generous grant part-funded a replacement mower which is now in use. Without the grant it is entirely feasible that SPCC would have closed. It is unlikely that any other body would have had the ability to continue maintaining the ground and the village would have lost the use of this facility as well as the cricket club.” Stocking Pelham Cricket Club for mower 14/15
Community Capital*

“Our thriving Internet Café, started in 2012, provides a friendly and non-threatening service for residents of High Wych and the wider community..... The majority of people attending are aged between 60 and 93! Several have mobility difficulties and at least 2 had never used a typewriter before let alone a computer keyboard.Graded activities that introduce the Internet have enabled these capable people to widen their experience and reduced the anxiety of feeling ‘left behind’ in this technologically dependent age..... Having this service based in the centre of our village has proved both popular and worthwhile. We would be unable to continue without the active support of EHDC and their grant award.” High Wych Memorial Hall for new laptop for IT Café, £500 from Community Activities 14/15

“The grant made a big difference to our group. We host an annual lunch in Tewin Memorial Hall and we invite every resident aged 60 or over. On the day [in February] we had approximately 90 people in the Hall and we delivered 10 meals to the homes of people who were unable to attend. The additional money meant that we did not use as much of our funds as we usually do and has allowed us to host an extra event, an afternoon tea, for our senior citizens in July.” Friends of Tewin £500 from Community Activities 14/15

“I would like to thank East Herts Council for providing us with much needed funds to replace our windows and heating system. We are now nice and snugly warm and the children have already noticed the lack of condensation dripping from the windows. We will be saving financially too.” Hunsdon Ducklings Preschool Charity £2,604 from Community Capital 14/15

“The grant enabled Carers in Hertfordshire to choose the right venue for the event in a central location which in turn made attending the event easy ... We were able to invite 2,284 unpaid family and friend carers (many of whom have their own health issues). On launch day there were over 200 people in attendance including both carers and cared for; a number of the people attending the launch event had mobility issues, physical disabilities, mental health problems, chronic and long term illness. There was a complete cross section of age groups and a complete cross section of different nationalities and caring circumstances. 135 cards discount Carers Passports were produced on the day with over 150 being applied for in the following weeks.” Carers in Hertfordshire £500 from Community Activities 14/15

3.0 Fundraising Online

3.1 This scheme, set up two years ago, provided 29 free subscriptions to online fundraising charity www.Localgiving.com.

3.2 The purpose of this initiative was to encourage voluntary and community groups to explore other ways to raise money, awareness and support online, thus helping reduce their dependence on grants. All groups requesting a grant from the council and awarded a grant are informed about this opportunity.

3.3 To date, the total raised by groups in East Herts is £10,596.

4.0 East Herts Community Chest (formerly East Herts Fund for the Future)

4.1 In May 2014, the Executive agreed a recommendation proposing that a new operating partnership between East Herts Council and the Hertfordshire Community Foundation (HCF) be established to make this Fund more effective. This partnership ensures a closer involvement of the chairman and vice chairman of the council to aid in fundraising and assessment of grants.

4.2 Over the past year, the chairman of the council and others raised £1,362 for the Fund. As per policy agreed with a Member Steering Group, 25% went toward building up the endowment and the remaining 75% was made available for grant giving.

4.3 On 11 March 2015, an assessment panel of Members awarded £2,471 to five grassroots organisations that most closely met the fund's priorities. Funding guidelines and allocations can be found on HCF's website: <http://www.hertscf.org.uk/grants/funds-available/>

5.0 Communications

5.1 In the last half of 14/15 financial year, uptake from the media in regards to local grants was positive. In the period September 2014 to March 2015, seven press releases relating to grants were sent out and picked up online as well as on social media, with four of them being used in the relevant papers, giving a publication rate of 57%."

5.2 Information about the availability of grants was posted on the council's website and other partners' websites. Members were

informed about the various funding rounds via Members Information Bulletin and dedicated emails as well as to subscribers of the Network newsletter and subscribers to Grants/Press releases and Community News bulletins via Gov.Delivery. Two paid advertisements were also placed in local newspapers.

- 5.3 Link Magazine featured grant -funded WW2 commemorative events and various capital grants for play equipment in Autumn 2014. Grants provided for sports and summer activities were featured in the spring 2015 edition of Link magazine.
- 5.4 The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 came into effect on 6 August 2014 and, as per this legislation, information on grant decisions is made available on the website. This also meets requirements for the new Local Government Transparency Code

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None.

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