

East Herts Council Report

Full Council

Date of meeting: 2 March 2021

Report by: Member for Communities

Report title: Community Grants Policy and Priorities: 2021/22

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

The council's Community Grants Policy includes the provision for members to review the priorities for grant giving on an annual basis. This report sets out the updated priorities for 2021/22.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL:

- a) That the revised Community Grants Policy and priorities for 2021/22 be approved**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 Updated priorities for grant giving are approved.
- 1.2 The Small Grants pilot scheme be extended into 2021/22 and grant payments to individuals and groups with no formally constituted legal status be made once expenditure has incurred; with a further review in January 2022.
- 1.3 The East Herts Crowdfunding Match Fund is continued into 2021/22 with the process amended to allow applications at any time.

- 1.4 Proposed amendments to the grant policy as detailed in Table 4 of the Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) are agreed.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The council has allocated grants to the voluntary and community sectors and towns and parish councils for many years. The council does this to strengthen communities, enabling them to develop their infrastructure, bring about change and work collaboratively towards a common goal, leading to improved health and wellbeing for residents in East Herts. The existing policy and programme can be viewed here [HERE](#)
- 2.2 The council's grants policy is reviewed on an annual basis with the 2020/21 policy adopted by Council in December 2019. This included;
 - (a) a pilot scheme in 2020/21 to allow individuals and groups with no formally constituted legal status to apply for small grants up to £300, and
 - (b) the council's participation in Hertfordshire County Council's new Crowdfund pilot.
- 2.3 The Community Grants Policy is part of the council's policy framework and so it is determined by full Council.

3.0 Reason(s)

Updated priorities

- 3.1 The proposed updated priorities reflect issues resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and ensure that grant-giving is in line with the corporate SEED priorities (Sustainability, Economic development, Engagement and Digital).

Continuation of small grants pilot

- 3.2 Uptake of the small grants has been modest as the need to socially distance has put many projects and new ideas on hold. By continuing the pilot, it is believed that more individuals and informal groups will have the opportunity to start up a new project or activity.
- 3.3 Officers are confident that once lockdown eases and people can meet face-to-face to plan projects there will be an increase in applications.
- 3.4 To date, 20 small grants have been awarded. Successful applicants included four individuals and two unconstituted groups. The most common type of projects funded were cultural, art and sport experiences.
- 3.5 Feedback from successful applicants has been positive and it is felt that the pilot helped the Community Grants Programme be more inclusive. See the comment below from a small grant recipient:

"I think it is very important that this grant scheme is open to unconstituted groups and individuals because if someone has a good idea they need to have somewhere to find initial finance for this. It is not always easy for small groups to get themselves officers and a constitution together, especially if they are just starting out and if they have enthusiasm to start a project this should be supported." Hazel

A full list of feedback can be found in Appendix 3.

Continuation of East Herts Crowdfunding Match Scheme

- 3.6 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has evaluated its [Crowdfund Hertfordshire](#) pilot as being successful and is proposing to continue for three years, pending a Cabinet decision. East Herts Council was one of two district authorities that participated in this pilot and contributed £3,000 for implementation. The pilot offered an alternative to face-to-face fund raising which has not been possible during Covid restrictions.
- 3.7 By continuing the [East Herts Crowdfunding Match Fund](#) programme, the council is enabling the voluntary and community sector be less reliant on traditional grant programmes. The Match Fund is an incentive for organisations to consider online fundraising. Note a further financial contribution will be required. HCC has not confirmed the amount which is dependent on how many other district authorities come on board.
- 3.8 For every £1 pledged by East Herts Council as part of the Crowdfunding Match Fund, findings to date show an equivalent of £3.04 has been raised from the public.
- 3.9 Successful applications must have endorsement from the East Herts Ward Councillor representing the area where the project is located or where most beneficiaries are from.

3.10 Feedback from [The Hadhams Community Hub](#) to which the council pledged £2,000 in December 2020 is:

“This is my first Crowdfunding project and I have found it to be a very worthwhile and useful experience. It has not only enabled me to learn a whole new set of communication skills to encourage community giving, it has also focused my attention on clearly distilling and crystallising, into very friendly language, what it is we are trying to achieve for our community.It greatly increased our project’s visibility within our community and allowed us to reach out to other communities so they can connect what we are doing and how it might benefit their communities also.” Claire Uwins, The Hadham’s Project

Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)

3.11 The EQIA has been updated and endorsed by the Equality and Diversity Officer. As a result, Officers will be working with communications to create an inclusive publicity campaign around grant giving and raise awareness among individuals with protected characteristics and groups that support them. Table 4 in the EQIA (Appendix 2) lists further actions.

Operational

3.12 All grants with the exception of those to individuals and groups with no formal legal status and will be paid upfront.

3.13 Moving to upfront payments will reduce unnecessary work within the Finance team and thus will result in efficiency savings.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Do not update the priorities or extend the pilot or Crowdfunding scheme. NOT RECOMMENDED as it is important that the priorities are reviewed annually to ensure grant giving is addressing the most pressing community issues for that year and that the grants programme is inclusive. Officers believe that the needs which led Council to adopt these two schemes in 2020/21 still pertain.
- 4.2 Update the priorities and policy. RECOMMENDED to ensure grant giving is live and relevant and continues to enable residents to contribute in small ways to taking forward the council's strategic priorities at the neighbourhood level.

5.0 Risks

If the priorities and pilot was not updated

- 5.1 This would deprive the council of an effective grant giving policy and the opportunity to maintain a response means of kick starting innovative ideas. Adoption of the proposed 2021/22 policy mitigates this risk as does continued awareness raising of the East Herts Lottery in order to support projects that matter to residents.
- 5.2 There would also be a possible reputational risk as the council's reputation of being responsive, creative and forward thinking could be compromised.

If the priorities and pilot was updated

5.3 Should the priorities be updated and the pilot extended there is a risk that we would not receive applications. To mitigate this risk, we would post information on social media and use existing networks to get the message out.

5.4 The impact of these risks, in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.3, has been assessed and summarised in the table below. Overall, it considered that the risks would be minor in the wider scheme of things and carry little financial risk.

No.	Description	Likelihood of occurrence	Probability of occurrence
5.1	Probable	Annually	The event will probably occur
5.2	Possible	Within 1 to 5 years	The event may occur
5.3	Unlikely	Annually	The event may occur

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 This latest review of the Community Grants Policy was conducted by officers of the Housing and Health service in consultation with the Executive Member for Communities and the Members Community Wellbeing Forum.

6.2 As part of the evaluation of the Small Grants pilot, successful applicants were asked to provide feedback.

6.3 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found below.

Community Safety

Perception and fear of crime and maintaining good community safety is closely connected to the resilience and strength of a community. One of the actions under the grant priorities is to "Create safer and resilient neighbourhoods".

Data Protection

GDPR statement is included on grant applications.

Equalities

An EQIA has been completed and approved (Appendix 2).

Environmental Sustainability

East Herts Council's SEED priorities form the direction of travel for the grant policy and one of the headline priorities is: Environmentally sustainable and accessible community buildings and green spaces. It is important that grant giving enables the voluntary and community sector including community centres and villages halls to reduce their carbon footprint and consider more environmentally sustainable actions.

Financial

Internal funding support is likely to come under increasing pressure so it is vitally important that corporately the council continues to raise awareness about the [East Herts Community Benefit Lottery](#), which is an innovative way to generate income for the grants budget which replaces the need to use Council monies.

Health and Safety

Eligibility criteria state that the applicant has policies in place to ensure the safety of those taking part. Applicants must confirm this is the case and if officers have any concerns they will ask to view documents. Safeguarding policies must be submitted as part of the application.

Human Resources

No direct implications

Human Rights

No direct implications.

Legal

No direct implications

Specific Wards

Projects that take place in the top 10 wards for deprivation (according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation) are considered a priority and are considered first.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Community Grants Policy 2021/22.

7.2 A list of recently funded grants can be found [HERE](#).

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