

East Herts Council Report

Executive meeting: Tuesday 3 October 2023

Report by: Councillor Alex Daar – Executive Member for Communities

Report title: Community Grants Policy and Priorities 2023/24

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary

- The council's Policy Framework reserves for Council approval of the Community Grants Policy. In addition, the policy itself sees members reviewing the priorities for grant giving on an annual basis. This report sets out the updated priorities for 2023/24, within a slightly reworded policy.
- The total allocation for community grants is £40,000 in 2023/24 and so it is imperative that the council awards monies in a transparent and robust way.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE that:

(A) The revised Community Grants Policy including the priorities for 2023/24, incorporating amendments agreed by the Executive Member for Communities following consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be recommended to Council for approval.

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 That the community grants priorities are updated for 2023/24.

- 1.2 That the previous programme of small grants, *up to* a maximum of £300, be removed in recognition that in the 2022/23, only two grants below this level (£285 and £290) were awarded and in any case particularly small grants were of most value during the pandemic and the immediate recovery period. With the lower overall grant pot in 2023/24, it is arguably better to focus on larger grants that are better able to achieve a legacy beyond the council's financial input.
- 1.3 That the previous maximum grant limit of £5,000 be replaced with a grant range of £300 to £3,000. While, as noted above, it is proposed that there will not be a specific small grants fund, this range still allows organisations to bid for grants of as little as £300.
- 1.4 It is felt that this revised range will enable the council to still make a significant number of grants and thus have a positive impact of the health and wellbeing of local communities. Of note, in 2022/23 the council awarded 14 small grants up to £300 and 17 larger grants up to £5,000, although in fact eight of 17 larger grants were for £3,000 or less. So, as an example, with an average allocation per grant of, say, £2,500, this would enable 15 larger projects to benefit from support from the council's community grants fund this year, with the capacity for another eight smaller grants of £300 to be awarded. Added to this, voluntary and community groups will also be eligible for grants from the council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund funded cultural activities and environmental sustainability grants programmes which together total another £40,000 in 2023/24, affording another estimated 16 projects to receive an average grant of £2,500.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The council's community grants programme helps strengthen communities, enabling residents to work towards a common

goal, develop and maximise their community assets and bring about positive change, leading to improved health and wellbeing, community engagement and other outcomes.

2.2 The council's priorities for community grants are reviewed on an annual basis by Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft policy on 12th September and made comments and recommendations for the Executive Member for Communities' consideration prior to submission of the revised policy to the Executive. **Appendix A** lists issues raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with the Executive Member's response and, where agreed by the Executive Member, resulting changes to the draft policy. The remainder of this report, and the policy itself, includes the amendments made following Overview and Scrutiny's consideration. **Appendix B** presents the proposed priorities for grants being made in 2023/24, within the context of a slightly reworded overall policy.

3.0 Reason(s)

Updated priorities

3.1 The proposed priorities in the policy at **Appendix B** are built on the existing priorities. The following table compares the 2022/23 and proposed 2023/24 priorities.

Existing priorities, albeit with some amended wording, that it is proposed to retain in 2023/24	Proposed new priorities for 2023/24	Priorities it is proposed to delete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be in keeping with the council's commitment to celebrating equality and diversity and the council's Equalities Duty under the Equality Act 2010 (<i>note: this has been amended to be an</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> widen access to arts and culture through using health and wellbeing especially among those who haven't participated in the past involve residents in delivering community health and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recovery from Covid Queen's Platinum Jubilee

<p><i>eligibility criterion rather than simply a priority)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable young people and families to take care of their mental health, achieve a healthy weight and stay active • promote environmental sustainability activities which encourage individual and community changes of attitude and behaviour • help community buildings and venues to become more environmentally sustainable • focus on reaching residents in the pockets of relative health inequalities across East Herts • support residents experiencing loneliness, isolation, domestic abuse, cost-of-living or employability challenges, or those who find it difficult to interact with the community • are from organisations that have not received a grant from the council in the last two years <i>(note: previously five years)</i> 	<p>projects including food banks and similar projects which benefit those most in need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage communities to identify a local physical and/or mental health and wellbeing issue and address it together • bring different generations together • support those that the council doesn't typically engage with very well or those who prefer face-to-face contact • use outdoor spaces and community buildings more effectively, maximising their potential • provide activities to support Dementia Friendly East Herts • create safer and resilient neighbourhoods which promote community belonging • include evidence that the application has been developed with the involvement of the community / anticipated beneficiaries 	
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3.2 Of note, these amended and new priorities allow support for food banks and food outreach projects at a time of rising food costs. Also, there is a more explicit priority covering support for those experiencing or having experienced domestic abuse. The priorities also recognise that young people and families have been subjected to increased pressures across a range of health and wellbeing needs.

Amendments to the policy

3.3 It is proposed to make some amendments to various sections of the overall Community Grants Policy. These are summarised below:

- making the council's requirements clearer for the benefit of applicants
- making the eligibility criteria clearer
- giving clear instructions on meeting the new priorities and how additional weight will be given to some factors within the assessment of applications and updating the assessment scoring process to reflect this
- making the assessment process more transparent
- laying out in more detail how grants will be allocated between competing applications if the fund is oversubscribed, which is likely based on experience in previous years.

4.0 Options

4.1 Retain the existing policy and priorities without any updates – NOT RECOMMENDED as it is important that the priorities are reviewed and amended annually to ensure the council's community grants fund can best meet current and emerging needs in our communities.

4.2 Update the policy and priorities as presented in **Appendix A** – RECOMMENDED to ensure the community grants programme is reflective of the current issues our communities are facing and enables residents to continue to put their own solutions in place that creatively take forward the council's priorities at the neighbourhood level.

5.0 Risks

If the policy and priorities are not updated

- 5.1 Possible reputational risk if the priorities do not reflect the current issues our communities are facing. The council's reputation of being responsive, creative and forward thinking could be compromised.

If the policy and priorities are updated

- 5.2 Should the policy and priorities be updated, there is a small risk that there would be insufficient take up. To reduce this risk, officers would promote the new priorities on social media and use existing networks to get the information to the community.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 This latest review of the Community Grants Policy, including the priorities, was conducted by officers in consultation with the Executive Member for Communities. The amendments proposed have also been informed by ongoing discussions with partner agencies, such as Community Alliance Broxbourne and East Herts, previous recipients of grants and those who have made applications or considered making applications in the past.
- 6.2 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. Support for events and projects that bring people of different backgrounds together helps build civic pride, creates a

sense of belonging and more resilient neighbourhoods.

Data Protection

GDPR statement is included on grant applications.

Equalities

An EQIA, previously completed and approved in February 2022, has been updated in August 2023 in relation to Community Grants and is attached at **Appendix C**.

Environmental Sustainability

The priorities have been amended and expanded to encourage bids that address environmental sustainability along with other health and wellbeing outcomes.

Financial

The council's 2023/24 budget include £40,000 for community grants. The council has a well-established and audit process for ensuring the robust allocation of monies.

Health and Safety

Safeguarding and Health and Safety requirements of applicants are covered in the proposed amended policy

Human Resources

No direct implications.

Human Rights

No direct implications.

Legal

No direct implications.

Specific Wards

Projects that take place in the top eight wards for deprivation (according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation) will receive additional points within the assessment process. The wards concerned are listed in the appendix to the Community Grant Policy.

6.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

Appendix A Considerations of comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Appendix B Draft Community Grants Policy 2023/24.

Appendix C EQIA for the Community Grants Policy.

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