

Subject:	Grants Review (Rossendale Council and Neighbourhood Forum Grants)	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	23 rd October 2013
Report of:	Director of Customers and Communities	Portfolio Holder:	Leader of the Council and Communities and Partnerships
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	Yes	Attached: Yes
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Fiona Meechan	Telephone:	01706 252440
Email:	fionameechan@rossendalebc.gov.uk		
1.	RECOMMENDATION(S)		
1.1	That Cabinet acknowledges and recognises the consultation and feedback received in relation to grant allocation highlighting potential negative and positive impacts.		
1.2	That Cabinet requests Full Council to support the allocation of £6,000 per annum to LCC to contribute to the commissioning of Domestic Abuse support and prevention services in Rossendale.		
1.3	That Cabinet requests Full Council supports the allocation of £60,000 for the provision of grants for services to facilitate financial inclusion in Rossendale and that this be reviewed annually as part of the annual budget setting process to reflect the serious financial pressures the Council is experiencing.		
1.4	That Cabinet requests that Full Council agrees that the previous grant allocation process be adapted to support the allocation of target funding to support financial inclusion services.		
1.5	That Cabinet recommends to Full Council the existing general grant pot of £115,650 concludes in March 2014 and that all recipients be contacted confirming that there will be no general grant allocation beyond that.		
1.6	That Cabinet recommends to Full Council that a total of £20,000 be allocated to support the continuation of neighbourhood forum grants and that this be funded via Director's reserves and reviewed annually as part of the annual budget setting process.		
1.7	All future minor amendments to the grants process to be delegated to the Director of Customers and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.		

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the outcome of consultation around the future of the Rossendale Council and Neighbourhood Forum Grants and to make recommendations for the future approach.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **Regenerating Rossendale:** This priority focuses on regeneration in its broadest sense, so it means supporting communities that get on well together, attracting sustainable investment, promoting Rossendale, as well as working as an enabler to promote the physical regeneration of Rossendale.
 - **Responsive Value for Money Services:** This priority is about the Council working collaboratively, being a provider, procurer and a commissioner of services that are efficient and that meet the needs of local people.
 - **Clean Green Rossendale:** This priority focuses on clean streets and town centres and well managed open spaces, whilst recognising that the Council has to work with

communities and as a partner to deliver this ambition.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

Undertaking appropriate engagement and consultation on potential service changes is essential to help us understand the impact of potential changes and inform decision making. Importantly, this also reinforces a culture of engagement and empowerment, and will mitigate the risk of challenge.

There is a risk that results of engagement and consultation will be seen as a democratic vote. This is not the case. These results give us an indication of public opinion and help us to understand the impact of proposals on certain groups, so that we can mitigate the impact where possible, but residents agreeing or disagreeing with proposed service changes does not mean that they must or must not be implemented as a result.

Not reviewing the way that we currently run our services would leave The Council at risk of not being able to meet the challenges of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to make the £1.5m cuts required by 2015/16.

Not having a general grant funding pot will mean that a range of organisations are no longer able to bid to Rossendale Council for funding. These organisations will be signposted to contact other groups whom they could work in partnership with or present funding bids to.

Not contributing towards the commissioning of domestic abuse support and prevention services in Rossendale would demonstrate a lack of commitment to tackling one of the key priorities of the Pennine Community Safety Partnership, and would leave potential victims more vulnerable.

Not contributing towards the provision of financial inclusion services, at a time of economic hardship for many, would lead to a reduced ability to collect Council Tax debts owed, which is a statutory requirement.

5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

5.1 The background to this issue and options for consultation were presented to Cabinet on 12 June 2013 and Overview and Scrutiny on 24 June 2013.

5.2 In March 2011, Rossendale Borough Council announced that the Rossendale Council Grants pot of £115,650 per annum would be allocated with a commitment of three years funding which ceases in March 2014. All grant recipients have been informed of this and have been asked what the impact may be on them if they did not secure funding from Rossendale Borough Council beyond 2013/14. All groups have also been informed of the need for Rossendale Council to cut its budget by c£1.5m, in accordance with the medium term financial strategy.

5.3 Details of grants awarded for the period 2011/12 - 2013/14 are attached at appendix 2. A total of 53 organisations submitted applications for grant funding in April 2011, and 12 were awarded funding. The funding applied for greatly outweighed the funding available and the high quality of applications presented the Grants Advisory Working Group with a difficult task in allocating the funding. Those organisations that received grant funding were offered funding of 33% less than the amount requested.

- 5.4 The Grants Advisory Working Group found that reading through the 53 applications gave an insight into the tremendous amount of voluntary and community work that takes place throughout the Valley. The Council recognises the invaluable contribution that the third sector makes to society in Rossendale, and it's support to the third sector does not start and finish with the distribution of grant funding, which can only ever benefit a small number of organisations. Councillors and officers work in partnership with many community groups and seek to support them in a variety of ways.
- 5.5 In addition to the Rossendale Council Grants, in 2011/12 a sum of £70,000 was allocated to Neighbourhood Forum Grants annually for a period of three years, concluding in 2013/14. The Neighbourhood Forums are evolving and changing and discussions are taking place through the Neighbourhood Forums on how they will operate in the future. The allocation of grant funding will be part of these discussions and it is therefore recommended a smaller sum of £20,000 be funded via the Directors Reserve to support the Forums, and that this be reviewed annually as part of the Council's budget.
- 5.6 Given the scale of the savings challenge which faces Rossendale Borough Council, it is proposed that Rossendale Council Grants be replaced, with £60,000 being made available from April 2014, to be reviewed annually, for the provision of targeted grants for services to facilitate financial inclusion in Rossendale. This amount maintains current service levels for grants for financial inclusion services, as the current grants awarded include £59,200 for grants for services to facilitate financial inclusion in Rossendale, specifically debt and welfare benefits advice and credit unions. The previous grant allocation process will be adapted to support the allocation of this grant funding, with clear expected outcomes developed in conjunction with the Financial Inclusion Group.
- 5.7 Financial exclusion refers to the difficulty that many people have in accessing welfare benefits or using mainstream financial services such as bank accounts, savings, loans, insurance and other products. It is both a cause and a symptom of poverty. The overall purpose of the Rossendale Financial Inclusion group is 'To improve financial inclusion in the Borough through a more co-ordinated approach to debt recovery, access to welfare benefits, access to financial services, prevention of problem debt and the provision of money advice.'
- The Financial Inclusion Group is urging the Council to continue to support the sector with direct funding, and also by enabling the sector to secure public health funding in response to the positive impact on public health of a strong inter-connected advice sector.
- 5.8 Further evidence for the focus on financial inclusion is attached at Appendix 3.
- 5.9 Rossendale Borough Council has statutory duties in relation to tackling crime and disorder, and domestic abuse is a key priority for the Community Safety Partnership and the Children's Trust. A robust process for commissioning domestic violence services has now been developed by Lancashire County Council (LCC). It is therefore proposed that Rossendale Borough Council commit to the annual contribution of £6,000 to the LCC commissioning fund, which will facilitate the generation of c£210,000 of domestic abuse support services in Rossendale.
- 5.10 As a consequence of a more targeted approach encompassing financial inclusion and domestic abuse, the majority of the current grant recipients are unlikely to qualify for a grant in the future. Details of the impact of the proposals on current grant recipients are included in the attached Equality Impact Assessment (appendix 1), summarised in Section 8 of this report

- 5.11 Organisations in receipt of funding for services other than financial inclusion and domestic abuse can be directed towards alternative funding or partnership working opportunities, such as The Children's Trust, Working Together with Families project, Public Health Lancashire, 'Friends of...' parks groups and other voluntary and community sector groups already in existence.
- 5.12 A workshop, facilitated by officers from The Big Lottery will be arranged, to which current grant recipients will be invited. The workshop will focus on advising on how to access lottery funding, particularly Awards for All and Reaching Communities and will also highlight the important of submitting partnership bids. Other support to local organisations in accessing alternative grant funding will be provided where possible e.g. access to Grantfinder for searching funding opportunities is available at the Council offices.
- 5.13 In the recent Rossendale Borough Council Making Ends Meet Survey, 46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals for changing grants to external groups and organisations, with 31% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. More detailed feedback is captured in the attached Equality Impact Assessment.
- 5.14 Further engagement and consultation carried out is set out in section 8 of this report.
- 5.15 A full equality impact assessment is attached to this report in Appendix 1. An overview is noted in section 8 of this report.
- 5.16 The recommendations are set out in section 1 of this report.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 6.1 Financial matters are noted in the report.

7. MONITORING OFFICER

- 7.1 All relevant comments are contained in the body of the report.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 8.1 Summary of consultation activity in relation to this:
- Meetings were held in September 2012 with all groups in receipt of a Rossendale Council Grant, and their views on changes to the grants process were captured.
 - All groups in receipt of a Rossendale Council Grant were sent a letter in October 2012 to confirm the feedback received in the September 2012 meetings and to reiterate the fact that no decision had been made at that stage as to what level of funding, if any, would be available beyond 31 March 2014
 - All groups in receipt of a Rossendale Council Grant were sent an email in March 2013 to confirm that there were no guarantees that any groups presently in receipt of a grant would receive funding past 31 March 2014.
 - This issue was discussed at the Cabinet meeting on 12 June 2013, and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 June 2013.
 - A question on the proposals for grant funding was included in the Citizens Panel Questionnaire which was circulated in August 2013.
 - A further, specific questionnaire was sent to all groups in receipt of a Rossendale Council Grant, and to members of the Financial Inclusion Group in August 2013.
 - The issue was considered by a cross-party member consultation response group on 21 August 2013.

- Specific meetings to discuss this issue were held with the following current grant recipients: Rossendale Citizens Advice Bureau, Magdalene Project, White Horse Project, Rossendale Credit Unions, Horse and Bamboo Theatre and Bacup Consortium Trust in August and September 2013.

8.2 Community / External organisation Grants

8.3 Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken as part of the development of the policy decision outlined in this report, which has been informed by the associated consultation activity. Potential negative impacts across a range of protected equality groups have been identified as a result of proposed changes to community grant funding. However the Council has sought to put mitigating actions in place as far as possible, which are set in the recommendations of this report, and detailed in Appendix 1A.

8.4 Based on the consultation, at this stage there is no significant evidence presented of a disproportionate impact on any protected equality groups. Nonetheless members' attention should be drawn to the fact that this policy decision may have some impacts on various groups that cannot be further mitigated against, or removed.

8.5 Neighbourhood Forum Grants

8.6 Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken as part of the development of the policy decision outlined in this report, which has been informed by the associated consultation activity. Potential negative impacts across a range of protected equality groups have been identified as a result of proposed changes to grant funding. However the Council has sought to put mitigating actions in place as far as possible, which is detailed in Appendix 1B.

8.7 Whilst neighbourhood forum grants provide a general positive impact for the local community; it should be noted that these were not specifically targeted at any one specific protected equality group. Therefore with the information available to date, it is considered that the proposed reduction of grant funding to Neighbourhood Forums will not have a significant disproportionate impact on any protected equality groups, nor would the impact be as a direct result of possessing any particular protected characteristic. The proposed £20,000 reduced grant funding for an additional 12 months provides mitigation to reduce the transition impact on the local community as far as is reasonably possible.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Given the scale of the savings challenge which faces Rossendale Borough Council, it has been necessary to review the amount of grant funding that RBC gives to community groups and other organisations.

The provision of grants to outside bodies is not a statutory duty. However, the Council recognises that there are some key challenges for people in the borough which the Council would wish to facilitate support services for.

It is therefore recommended that, from April 2014, there is no general grant allocation process. Instead, this will be replaced by RBC providing a contribution to LCC for them to commission domestic abuse support and prevention services in the borough; in addition, RBC will allocate a targeted grant pot to be utilised for the provision of services to facilitate financial inclusion.

Background Papers

Document	Place of Inspection
Medium Term Financial Strategy – Achieval of Budget Reductions	www.rossendale.gov.uk
Rossendale Council and Neighbourhood Forum Grants – paper to Corporate Scrutiny Committee, 24 th June 2013	www.rossendale.gov.uk
Citizens Panel Questionnaire	http://www.letusknow.org.uk/residentsurvey2013/
Appendix 1A & 1B – Equality Impact Assessments	Attached
Appendix 2 - Grants Awarded 2013/14	Attached
Appendix 3 – Evidence to support focus on financial inclusion	Attached