

Item

COMMUNITY GRANTS 2023-24



To:

Councillor Mairead Healy, Executive Councillor for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Wellbeing

Community & Environment Scrutiny Committee, 19/01/2023

Report by:

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Wards affected: all

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is the annual report for the Community Grants fund for voluntary, community, and not for profit organisations. It provides an overview of the process, eligibility criteria and budget and Appendix 1 and 2 detail the applications received with recommendations for 2023-24 awards.
- 1.2 The report also provides updates for 2022-23 and outlines key areas of work going forward.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the Community Grants to voluntary and community organisations for 2023-24, as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 of this report, subject to the budget approval in February 2023 and any further satisfactory information required of applicant organisations.

3. Background

3.1 **The priorities and outcomes** for the Community Grants fund are as follows:

Priorities - All applications must demonstrate how the funding will reduce social and/or economic inequality, by removing barriers for City residents with the highest need, to enable them to access one or more of the funding priorities:

- Sporting activities
- Arts and cultural activities
- Community development activities
- Reducing poverty activities
- Legal and/or financial advice
- Employment support or
- Capacity building of the voluntary sector to achieve the above

Primary Outcome - Reduce social and/or economic inequality for City residents with the highest need

Strategic Outcomes - As well as the primary outcome activities must achieve one or more of the following strategic outcomes:

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Communities come together and bring about change
- More people have better opportunities to gain employment
- Stronger voluntary sector in the city

3.2 **Grant application process** - The 2023-24 Community Grants programme opened in August 2022 for applications and closed on 3rd October 2022. Promotion and publicity of the grant fund included a press release, newsletter articles, emails, posters in areas of the City with the highest levels of deprivation and targeted conversations.

3.3 A range of activities has been undertaken to support organisations to understand the funding criteria and requirements needed for a successful application, including:

- attending organisation's committee meetings, 1-2-1 meetings
- a webinar held jointly with Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CCVS)
- Application Guide and Help Notes detailing the priorities, outcomes and eligibility criteria and giving guidance on requirements, question by question
- factsheets, templates and signposting to other funding providers

- 3.4 All applications were assessed against the same assessment matrix developed around the priorities and outcomes used in previous years, ensuring a consistent approach. These assessments were then moderated by strategy officer meetings informing the award recommendations detailed in Appendix 1 and 2. The Executive Councillor attended a meeting with officers to review the process and outcomes.
- 3.5 **Awards for up to £2,000** – A simpler ‘small grants’ application process has been introduced, reflecting the lower value of these awards. This was trialled as an online only application process. There was an increase in the number of applications for lower amounts of money – 24 applications were received in total, with a significant number from groups new to the Grants Team, and who are planning activities for BAME communities. Funding for the ‘small grants’ comes from the main community grants budget.
- 3.6 Where no (or reduced) funding is proposed it will be due to one or more of the following not being adequately met:
- Grant scheme priorities and/or outcomes
 - Identification of need
 - Quality or viability of the project,
 - Proposals were the remit of another service or organisation such as the County Council, Health, Housing etc
 - Organisations did not demonstrate the beneficiaries could not fund the activity themselves, or that reserves could not be used to fund the activity
 - The impact of the activity is unclear
- 3.7 Due to the cost-of living crisis, the funding has been closely aligned towards activities addressing economic inequality, as per the grant fund primary outcome, supporting as many city residents in need as possible to ensure the Community Grants fund has the greatest impact.
- 3.8 Those applicants where no award is recommended, will receive feedback and signposting to alternative funding and support.
- 3.9 **Making grant awards** – grant awards will be made as deeds or signed underhand (i.e., signed by the recipient and the Community Funding and Voluntary Sector Manager) where appropriate by delegated authority to the Director. This gives the Council the ability to execute grants as deeds where it is felt proportionate to the risk or where particular thresholds were met – such as over a certain financial value. It also

allows the majority of grants which are lower risk and of lower value, to be signed under hand.

4.0 2023-24 Funding Position

- 4.1 A total of £1,742,835 of Community Grants funding has been requested. This is an unprecedented level with feedback from groups that funding streams are shrinking at a time when demand for their services is increasing.
- 4.2 The total value of all the proposed activities is £4,875,273. £3,132,438 is match funding from other sources. The majority of activities are supported with additional, unquantified 'in kind' contributions such as volunteer time.
- 4.3 There is a budget of £1,094,000 available for Community Grants for 2023-24, subject to approval of the Council's budget in February 2023. An inflationary increase of £94,000 has been applied to the usual budget of £1,000,000 in recognition of the challenges faced by the voluntary and community sector as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 4.4 £70,000 of the Community Grants budget is allocated to Area Committee Community Grants as in previous years (see paragraph 4.10).
- 4.5 The inflationary uplift has enabled some grants to be maintained at previous levels and other awards to be increased where the application was able to demonstrate a strong need.
- 4.6 A small events budget has been utilised for appropriate activities enabling the Community Grant fund to cover more projects or for an increased amount. This is highlighted in a separate column in Appendix 1.
- 4.7 The Grants Team was also able to identify a small number of activities which could be started in 2022-23 and met the criteria for 'seed funding'. This is a one-off pot for small scale projects to improve their community; this seed funding can kick-start community activity, strengthen neighbourhoods and support residents with local projects related to Covid-recovery and community-building. Up to 6 activities will be started early using seed funding, further alleviating the pressure on the 2023-24 Community Grant budget (see paragraph 5.2).

- 4.8 The Community Grants fund continues to accept Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) applications that meet the funding priorities, outcomes and eligibility criteria. DRR applications represent good value for money with this budget having to find only 40% of any award made under the Business Rate Retention Scheme. The Council is likely to be in a position to apply a small level of covid related 'retail rate relief' to some eligible organisations, thus reducing the impact of DRR awards on the grants budget. Any underspend will be identified as early as possible and the funds reallocated in year to other activities that meet the grant funding criteria.
- 4.9 If the recommended awards are approved the main Community Grants budget will be spent in full¹.
- 4.10 **Area Committees** - the Area Committee grants round has been widely promoted and following the closing dates for applications, assessments will be undertaken, and reports taken to each area committee with recommendations for funding. The chart below shows the amount available by area²:

Area Committee	2023-24
North	£23,751
East	£22,211
South	£17,297
West Central	£6,741
Total	£70,000

5.0 Grant Funding update for 2022-23

- 5.1 **United with Ukraine Community Grants Scheme** – A £100,000 fund for community groups supporting refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine was launched in October 2022. Applicants can apply for a grant of up to £2,000 and are able to make repeat applications if they've completed and reported back on their previous grant award. To date 3 awards have been made with several more in the pipeline. Funded activities include: 12 weeks of a supplementary weekend school and a traditional Yolka Christmas party for child refugees who've fled the war in Ukraine; distribution of essential provisions for refugees via Ukrainian Aid Hub,

¹ The total value of awards made will be £1,025,053. This is £1,053 over budget. It is anticipated that this will be balanced by in year returns and DRR underspend which we routinely have. However, in the unlikely event this does not materialise, the difference will be met from other areas of the Community Funding budget.

² These figures have been calculated using population figures from the 2021 census and benefit population taken as an extract from the Low-Income Family Tracker.

which also acts as a welcome centre offering community support and signposting; a series of 4 volunteering information workshops and a provision of one-to-one support to refugees interested in volunteering.

- 5.2 **Seed funding** – as set out at 4.7 above, 6 awards have been made from a seed funding budget. Funded activities include: weekly art sessions and an exhibition to increase the visibility of black history in the city, whilst improving the wellbeing of participants; a series of zoom workshops to reduce isolation and increase IT skills for older people; weekly social meetings to reduce isolation among Caribbean diaspora; a series of confidence building workshops for women in the Chinese community.
- 5.3 **Discretionary Rate Relief** – there has been a small underspend in DRR awards because the Council has been able to award retail rate relief which covers 50% of the charge for qualifying organisations. There have also been one-off adjustments in prior years, which are set against this years budget. The Team is currently considering whether this can be re-allocated where there are emerging community needs.
- 5.4 **Platinum Jubilee Grants** - grants of up to £500 were available for community groups celebrating Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee. Platinum Jubilee Grants were awarded for events and activities spread across Cambridge, with a total value £18,196 awarded to 40 groups, with over 6,00 participants. Events included community picnics, garden parties, tea parties and street parties; a window box competition; a royal themed silent disco; cake competitions; a coffee morning; the creation of commemorative bunting; sports and play activities; live music; a playground planting party; a library event; and an exhibition. The report can be found here: [Platinum Jubilee Community Grants \(cambridge.gov.uk\)](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/platinum-jubilee-community-grants)
- 5.5 **Anti-Poverty Responsive Budget** - The management of the Anti-Poverty Responsive fund transferred from Corporate Strategy to the Grants Team from 2022-23. This is not a fund that external organisations can bid into directly but for the Council to approach potential voluntary sector providers to help with the need identified. Following approval of a budget bid of £30,000, the Council has made 2 awards in 2022-23 to date. £10,000 for the Cambridge Sustainable Food 'Cost of Food and Living Crisis' fund-raising campaign; and £10,000 to the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) for energy vouchers for City residents in need. A further budget bid has been submitted for 2023-24 for an anti-poverty responsive budget in recognition of the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

- 5.6 **2021-22 Community Grants Report** – The Grants Team has prepared a report summarising the awards that were made for 2021-22, highlighting some of the achievements of funded groups and illustrating the impact of the Community Grants fund. The report can be found here: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/11770/community-grants-annual-report-2021-2022.pdf>
- 5.7 The Council appreciates all that the voluntary and community sector is doing to support the needs of vulnerable residents during a prolonged period of challenge and wishes to thank all those who contribute.

6.0 Community Grants Review

- 6.1 Phase 1 of the community grants review was approved by Committee on 30th June 2022 and saw the introduction of a ‘light touch’ small grants application process for awards of £2,000 and under for 2023-24.
- 6.2 Phase 2 is part of the wider discussion on community investment and wealth building that is taking place within the ‘Our Cambridge’ transformation programme. The conclusions of Phase 2 will be implemented at the earliest available grant round, allowing for Compact compliant consultation, Council scrutiny and decision making.

7.0 Community Rights

- 7.1 In 2021, the Grants Team took on responsibility from planning services for managing the ‘Community Right to Bid’ process, which has been in place since 2012. Local community and voluntary bodies, along with parish and town councils are able to identify land and buildings that provide an important service in their community. These community organisations can nominate such assets for inclusion on a register of assets of community value, which is maintained by the City Council. If an asset on the register comes up for sale, community organisations may have up to six months in which to raise capital and bid to buy the asset, before it can be sold on the open market. Examples of eligible assets include local shops, pubs, community centres, libraries, playgrounds, swimming pools, and markets.
- 7.2 The Grants Team has also taken on responsibility for managing any requests received by the Council as a ‘Community Right to Challenge’. This process enables voluntary and community groups or council employees to bid to run council services. The Council must

consider expressions of interest and where these are accepted, we will run a procurement exercise for that service. The Right to Challenge is a 'right to compete' in a procurement exercise. The Community Right to Challenge enables eligible groups to express an interest in running a local authority service, as it gives them the extra time they need to be able to compete fairly in an open procurement exercise and provides a way of opening up public service delivery to groups and organisations other than those in the public and private sector.

- 7.3 Since taking on this work, no community groups have exercised their 'Community Right to Challenge'. There have been no new assets nominated or accepted as 'Assets of Community Value' under the 'Community Right to Bid' process.
- 7.4 **Former Library, Mill Road** – The Council has received notification from an owner that they intend to dispose of an 'Asset of Community Value'. This triggered a moratorium period in which several interested, qualifying groups notified the Council of their intention to bid to purchase the building. The moratorium ends on 5th February 2023, after which time the owner is free to sell to whomever they chose.

8.0 Implications

- a) **Financial Implications** - Set out in section 4 of the report.
- b) **Staffing Implications** - There are no staffing implications.
- c) **Equality and Poverty Implications** - Equalities Impact Assessments were carried out as follows:
- January 2015 on the implementation of the Community Grants Fund
 - June 2018 on the review of funding for anti-poverty projects
 - January 2022 on the current Community Grants Fund
- d) **Environmental Implications** - Organisations fund via the main Community Grants fund are expected to have or develop environmental policies.
- e) **Procurement Implications** - The Council's approach to grant aid through the Community Grants is via an application process rather than through the direct commissioning of services.
- f) **Community Safety Implications** - Some of the funded projects will have a positive impact on community safety.

9.0 Consultation and communication considerations

Applicants were notified when this report was published detailing recommended awards, giving an indication of proposed funding from April 2023. This adhered as closely as possible to the Compact framework to give three months' notice of funding changes. Officers will continue the process of award notification, signposting and support, and implementing and monitoring awards.

10.0 Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

11.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Main Community Grants 2023-24 Award
Recommendations

Appendix 2 – Small Community Grants 2023-24 Award
Recommendations

12.0 Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact Julie Cornwell,
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