

Area West Community Grant Request – Allowenshay Mains Water Project (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to consider a request for a financial contribution towards the provision of mains water to the hamlet of Allowenshay.

Public Interest

Awarding grants is a key way that SSDC supports and helps to deliver community projects sponsored by Parishes and voluntary community organisations in the towns and villages across Area West.

Recommendation

Members consider the request for a financial contribution towards the provision of mains water to the hamlet of Allowenshay.

Background

The Allowenshay Private Water Supply is fed by a number of spring features that originate some distance south of the village of Allowenshay in Somerset. The water from the spring features flows via various storage and distribution arrangements to feed some properties in Dinnington and Allowenshay. Over time, several properties within Allowenshay have chosen to seek alternative private supplies of water and as a result, only some of the properties are still on the Allowenshay PWS. The Council are the regulatory authority responsible for ensuring that private water supplies do not pose a risk to health in accordance with the Private Water Supply (England) Regulations 2016. The Council also has powers under the Water Industry Act 1991, to deal with a private water supply which is failing or unwholesome. Following issues of insufficiency and unwholesomeness the Council served a Notice requiring improvements in 2015.

Following ongoing issues with the supply the matter was considered again and a further Notice served in 2018. For legal reasons this Notice was served on consumers of the supply as well as the company considered to exercise management and maintenance of the supply.

At the September meeting of the District Executive, members received an update on the situation and were asked to consider a one off capital grant towards the installation costs of providing mains water. Concerns were raised about potential precedent and scale of the contribution requested given the number of beneficiaries. Members did not agree to a capital contribution and resolved 'that the Exceptions and Appeals Panel be asked to vary the policy for this case only for the approval of a Home Loan through Wessex Resolutions CIC to make it available to all residents served with the Notices regardless of the vulnerability or financial status.'

The residents have decided not to pursue the option of a loan and aim to fund the work mainly through individual contributions.

Proposed solution

The residents have considered three options.

1. Repair of the existing spring water supply: this would require significant monies to replace the extant infrastructure through the countryside and roads. In addition the pipework is on land outside the ownership of the residents.
2. Installation of individual boreholes to each property: the costs of determining the best access to the aquifer and the provision of ultra-violet filters and other health security devices makes the cost to each individual household potentially high.
3. Mains water supplied by Wessex Water.

The most secure long term solution is the provide mains water into the hamlet which will be available to all the community.

The most economical way to provide mains water is for the residents currently supplied with spring water to undertake a self-lay project to provide the infrastructure for mains water and for Wessex Water to adopt and manage the system including maintenance and repair of the pipework once the works are complete. The costs of the scheme is £210,731 inclusive of VAT. After the costs of easements and compensation to the land owners has been paid out and Wessex Water have purchased the infrastructure there is a shortfall of £102,809 which is the amount required to be paid by the twelve residents.

Residents are currently establishing a limited company in order to deliver the scheme. The company will directly contract to install the infrastructure which will then be sold to Wessex Water. Wessex Water will be responsible for the ongoing supply of mains water and maintenance of the infrastructure.

Request for support from Area West - Community Grant Application

An application for a community grant has been received from Kingstone Parish Meeting for a grant towards the provision of mains water.

Initial advice given to the applicant was that the project could be eligible for support through the community grant scheme. However, when further details were supplied by the applicant, a number of issues were identified that make it very difficult to comply with the community grant criteria. The following issues were identified.

1. The group is unable to demonstrate a PC contribution as the application is from a Parish Meeting without the power to precept. 12 households involved in the scheme will be contributing a significant amount.
2. A new company is being established to deliver the project. It will have no track record and governance is unclear at the time of application.
3. Security of Tenure – The intention is for the infrastructure to be installed and immediately sold to Wessex Water to part fund the work. This is an innovative approach and a grant will enable the work. However, a grant will not secure a tangible, physical asset for the community.
4. No other external funding secured other than through sale of the infrastructure.

It is not possible to recommend anything other than refusal on the basis that the project does not meet the criteria for the community grants scheme.

The need for the work is very clearly demonstrated and although the direct beneficiaries are relatively small in number, there are wider benefits to mains water such as the installation of five hydrants. This is particularly relevant in a community with a number of thatched properties and a recent example of a

devastating house fire. Members may want to take account of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the application and the broader benefit of future fire safety and consider the request.

Other residents are affected by the same issue and it is possible that support for this scheme will encourage other, similar requests. These would need to be considered on a case by case basis.

Financial Implications

There is currently £115,239 unallocated capital funding. If members agree to support a £12,500 contribution, this will leave £102,739 unallocated in the capital programme.

Council Plan Implications

Healthy, Self-Reliant Communities - The community has identified an innovative solution to a local issue and is investing a considerable amount into delivery.

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

None arising directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

District Executive July 2019 & September 2019
