

SWT Member Working Group
Scoping Document
Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review

July to September 2021

NAME OF WORKING GROUP: Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review

CHAIR: Councillor Booth

MEMBERS:

The members of the Working Group were Cllr Booth (chair); Cllr Lisgo; Cllr Stock-Williams; Cllr Sue Lees; Cllr Wakefield; Cllr Johnson; Cllr Whetlor; and Cllr Blaker

LEAD OFFICERS:

Scott Weetch, Community Resilience Manager

Christine Gale, Case Manager, Grants

Tracey Meadows, Case Manager, Governance & Democracy

SUBJECT TO BE REVIEWED: Voluntary and Community Sector Grants

REASON(S) FOR THE REVIEW: Recommended and agreed by Full Council on 23rd February 2021. Essential to keep grants under review, particularly understanding the effect of COVID on the Voluntary and Community Sector.

IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE CORPORATE AIMS:

Homes and Communities - Engage with the voluntary sector in their mission to help support our communities.

TERMS OF REFERENCE: Circulated with this document.

This Working Group will:

- Seek to review current funding arrangements (i.e. understand what is currently funded and why)

- Set out objectives in new funding arrangements (i.e. set parameters for how the budget of £215k is to be used e.g. money and debt advice; geographic split
- Consider parity between TD & WS, not just monetarily but for example equal provision.

SCOPE, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF REVIEW: (Remember to consider what is NOT to be included in the review)

□ Purpose:

To ensure the most effective spend of budget and ensure that it aligns with Council priorities and objectives;

To ensure that it enables and prioritises COVID recovery work;

To agree EITHER a method for receiving and scoring of grants and to ensure that each application is considered on its own merits; OR a commissioning process and criteria; N.B. There is already a scoring process for partner grants which has been provided to SCF by SWTC and is used for this purpose.

To consider the merits of a geographic split of funding to ensure some equity in grant distribution or prioritisation of universal access services.

METHOD(S) OF REVIEW (HOW WILL THE REVIEW BE CONDUCTED?) :

A recap of how grant funding currently works, who benefits, the value of grants, etc to be undertaken as part of first meeting.

To review lessons learned from other grant schemes SWT run e.g. community chest

To discuss and agree principles of spend (e.g. financial help and advice services, mental health services, local public transport schemes)

To discuss and agree maximum and minimum levels of grants (granularity) and ability to resource those adequately.

To hear directly from beneficiaries of previous grants.

To discuss and revise any principles arising from presentation of previous beneficiaries.

Discuss whether to continue out-sourcing certain grant funds.

Draft report and conclusions

Final report and conclusions

BENEFITS TO THE COUNCIL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY:

Clarity over funding levels and principles applied.

Wider understanding of grant process, criteria and assessment

Partnership agreements almost at end of term; good opportunity to review what services belong in this funding stream.

KEY ISSUES AND RISKS:

Limited timescale for discussion.

Limited funding pot to meet aspirations of councillors and organisations.

COVID may be masking other issues/causing further problems as yet unidentified.

IMPLICATIONS:

(Financial and Legal implications particularly will need to be considered and signed off by the relevant officer)

Funding to be confirmed is in the region of £215,000 p.a.

Legal agreements are sent out as part of grants agreement process.

DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE:

E.g. Is there any National or local guidance or research into this subject? Is there any best practice guidance available?)

There is no national best practice in this area but there is a great deal of information available from other councils. Nationally, the government support offer for the VCSE sector is set out here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/financial-support-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-vcse-organisations-to-respond-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS OF REVIEW:

E.g. implications on officer resource or impact on the Council's budget.

Officer time plus the continued budget of £215k

EXTERNAL ADVISORS:

Does the Working Group wish to invite any involvement from external advisors?

It would be prudent to invite some current beneficiaries to a later meeting to understand what the funding allows them to do and any consequences arising from COVID and a lack of funding. E.g. Spark, CAB, Wiveliscombe Area Partnership

TIMESCALES: Completed by September 10th to meet with Committee cycles.

ESTIMATED REVISED

(include reasons) Meetings continued until 20th September to allow full discussion and presentations from appropriate organisations to inform decision-making.

ACTUAL

First meeting of Working Group – 12th July 2021

Milestone 1: Meeting agrees Terms of Reference and Scoping Document

Milestone 2: Meeting agrees outline parameters for funding scope.

Milestone 3: Meeting hears from current beneficiaries and ratifies parameters.

Draft Report: End August

Report: Completed by September 24th 2021

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Working Group received documentation and evidence of organisations supported, objectives and outcomes as well as funding agreements.

The Working Group heard representations from a cross section of organisations who outlined their work and were able to answer Members' queries.

The following options were considered:

1: Discontinue small grants scheme: As there is already a small grants scheme available via Somerset West Lottery, the VCS small grants scheme could be discontinued saving £20,000.000.

2: Return Somerset West Lottery community fund to in-house management: the Somerset West Lottery community fund could be brought back to be managed in-house by the Grants Case Manager saving £2,000.00 (at 2021/22 figures).

3: Return Partnership grants fund to in-house management: This arrangement along with all the above were a three-year pilot from 2017 and are already out of contract so could be brought back in house to be managed by the Grants Case Manager saving £1,560.00.

For both options 2 and 3, the Grants Case Manager has expressed that there is a duplication of work in sending the work to Somerset Community Foundation and the same verification is being carried out on both sides of the coin. Often, it is the Council's prompt that is ensuring adequate action is taken and therefore this work will be more efficient if returned to the Council.

In summary the Council could opt to save either a total of **£20,000** by discontinuing the small grants scheme, save a total of **£22,000** by also managing the SWL community fund or save a total of **£23,560.00** by opting for all 1, 2 & 3 options in this summary.

In addition, it was noted that £2,700 of the funding given to the Community Council for Somerset was to cover work relating to the Community Infrastructure Levy. It was understood that this work was now returning to an officer of the Council and therefore, this amount could produce a saving.

Working Group agreed and recommended that

- all three options outlined above be agreed – total £23,560
- additional work paid to Community Council for CIL be ceased – total £2,700
- following governance checks with grant recipients, any irregularities be further investigated, and an opportunity given to regularise the position. If, following this, concerns remained, then funds would no longer be allocated to any non-compliant scheme and consideration given to allocation elsewhere.

The net effect of the agreed changes was to increase the budget from £213,542 to £217,102. This is because the £20,000 small grants fund and £2,700 to Community Council for Somerset were already allocated within the £213,542. The additional £3,560 was raised from returning some administrative function carried out by Somerset Community Foundation in house as described.

Funds that now needed to be reallocated amounted to £26,260.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Group concluded that although radical change was possible, in general, those in receipt of funding and the agreed outcomes were in line with both budget and community need, in particular around debt and benefit advice (Citizen's Advice

Bureaux), support for ensuring the continued use of volunteers (the work of Spark) and wider community support.

Changes to the current levels of funding for many of the organisations that rely upon this support could have long lasting detrimental effects for the groups and the communities that they support.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommended action	Rationale	Net effect on budget
Removal of £20,000 small grants scheme	There is provision within the Somerset West Lottery scheme for players to allocate their ticket price to local community schemes. In 20/21, this totalled in excess of £20,000.	£20,000 to be reallocated
Removal of £2,700 from grant to Community Council for Somerset	This funding was to cover Community Infrastructure Levy work. This will be brought back in house	£2,700 to be reallocated
Return Somerset West Lottery community fund to in-house management	Work carried out by Somerset Community Foundation but often duplicated and can be managed within existing resources.	£2,000 to be reallocated
Return Partnership grants fund to in-house management	As above	£1,560 to be reallocated
Total		£26,260

Proposals for reallocation were considered by the group and agreed that:

- An additional £4,000 be allocated to Homestart to take their total to £5,000
- An additional £4,000 be allocated to CLOWNS to take their total to £5,000

- The remaining £18,260 be allocated equally to Citizens Advice Bureau Taunton and West Somerset

Recommended action	Rationale	Net effect on budget
Additional £4,000 to Homestart West Somerset	Honours previous commitment that had been unable to be met in previous spending rounds	£4,000 allocated
Additional £4,000 to CLOWNS	As above	£4,000 allocated
Additional £9,130 to Citizens Advice Taunton	Support ongoing work for those with most complex needs. Request from CAB for additional funds in line with last year's additional agreed amount (£22,500 each Bureau) was supported by Members if it could be agreed within budget. See 4.18 below.	£9,130 allocated
Additional £9,130 to Citizens Advice West Somerset	As above	£9,130 allocated
Total		£26,260

Members of the Working Group felt strongly that if any funds were freed as a result of continued due diligence work or if underspends were identified that could be allocated in this area, then they had a strong preference for allocating them to the two Advice Bureaus in the first instance.

EXECUTIVE CONSIDERED: To be discussed at Executive on 17th November 2021
as part of Report on VCS Grants

OUTCOME:

FOLLOW UP:

REVIEW OF PROCESS/COMMENTS:

SIGNED OFF BY CHAIR:

DATE: