



CABINET

14TH SEPTEMBER 2017

AGENDA ITEM (7)

COMMUNITY PROJECTS FUND - REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING ALLOCATION

Accountable Member	Councillor Mark F Annett Leader of the Council
Accountable Officer	Joseph Walker Community Partnerships Officer 01285 623146 joseph.walker@cotswold.gov.uk

Purpose of Report	To consider the potential allocation of additional resources to the Community Projects Fund and amendments to the criteria relating to that Fund
Recommendation(s)	<p>(a) That the proposed amendments to the criteria for the Community Projects Fund scheme be approved;</p> <p>(b) that the Council be recommended to:-</p> <p>(i) increase the Capital Programme 2017/18 by a sum of £100,000 to provide additional funding to the Community Projects Fund;</p> <p>(ii) authorise the Group Manager GO Shared Services to amend the relevant Prudential Indicators for 2017/18 in line with the above-mentioned recommendation.</p>
Reason(s) for Recommendation(s)	There remains significant demand for this grant scheme. Without a further financial contribution, the scheme will have to close.

Ward(s) Affected	All
Key Decision	No
Recommendation to Council	Yes, in part

Financial Implications	The Capital Programme for 2017/18 will be increased by £100,000. As at 31 st March 2017, the Council held capital receipts valued at £12,576,080. The Council expects to hold around £9m of capital receipts at the end of the approved Medium Term Financial Strategy.
Legal and Human Rights Implications	None

Environmental and Sustainability Implications	By investing in community facilities this scheme helps retain community hubs across the District, improving social sustainability. By helping upgrade older facilities, the scheme reduces the carbon footprint of older community buildings.
Human Resource Implications	None
Key Risks	None
Equalities Analysis	This scheme has helped update community facilities to improve access for all, and invested in play facilities for children. Without further investment, there is a chance that such projects will struggle to find financial support in the future, thereby not leading to positive outcomes for some groups.

Related Decisions	None
Background Documents	None
Appendices	Appendix 'A' - Criteria for Applicants (with 'tracked changes' to show the proposed changes)

Performance Management Follow Up	None
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Options for Joint Working	The Community Projects Scheme is a discretionary service delivered by Cotswold District Council, governed by criteria set by the Council. However, it is managed by a shared service, also responsible for a similar scheme at West Oxfordshire.
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Background Information	
<p>1. The Community Projects Fund is a long-standing scheme operated by the Council to directly support communities to invest in their own facilities - providing capital resources to community buildings and play facilities. The scheme currently can provide up to £10,000, at up to 25% of the total project cost. It supports community endeavour, and also attracts a degree of investment from various charitable sources into the District, contributing towards the remaining costs of projects.</p> <p>2. The budget for this scheme is currently nearly wholly committed, with a sum of under £5,000 remaining unallocated in the current financial year. Without a further financial allocation, the scheme would need to be closed to new applications. There is still a lot of interest in the scheme from across the District, with enquiries being received for both play and community facility projects.</p> <p>3. As this is a capital scheme, there is no annual budget allocation. Instead, the scheme has been financed by capital allocations, which considered the Cabinet as and when required to continue its operation. The budget is expended as and when eligible projects come forward for support. The annual spend has therefore fluctuated according to the projects actually taking place, and the availability of funds from other sources to support local community activities. Over the last six full years, the annual commitment has varied from just under £70,000 to just over £30,000. The simple average is approximately £50,000 per annum. As the scheme has remained open during this period, and no eligible projects have been turned away, this figure is not constrained by the sum invested by this Council but, instead, is a reasonable reflection on the level of demand in the District.</p>	

4. It should be noted that there is often a significant lag between approval of grant aid from the scheme and actual spend. Some projects come forward with permissions in place, and a reasonable proportion of funds available, but can struggle to find the remaining monies. Conversely, some projects are awarded grant aid and commence immediately. Unsurprisingly, it is often the larger projects that are delayed. The budget committed can therefore exceed the annual spend figures, which would present a challenge if the scheme had to run to an annualised budget.

5. An allocation of £100,000 should meet demand for the next two years, whilst providing some flexibility to respond to such demand.

6. In previous years, requests to the Cabinet for additional resources have also been accompanied by a review of the operation and eligibility criteria.

7. On this occasion, it is suggested that the criteria be amended as follows:-

- there is reference within the second criterion regarding play facilities to the District's Play Strategy. This strategy is now outdated, and should no longer be a requirement;
- there is a reference to quarterly deadlines. As Leader's Decision-Making Meetings are held on a more frequent basis, this is no longer applicable;
- working practice has been to require tender information to be dated within six month of submission, and in a format to enable its authenticity to be established. This should be picked up in the criteria;
- since the criteria were originally drafted, there has been a significant move towards electronic communication and electronic payments. The criteria have been revised to reflect this trend.

8. In addition, the following changes are proposed to better reflect the operation of the scheme:-

- The scheme criteria noted that certain revenue costs associated with scheme preparation are eligible, yet as a general rule, costs already incurred are not reimbursed:-

'Ongoing revenue costs are not eligible and any costs already incurred will not be considered unless they relate to working up the project, for example, preparing plans and tender documents, planning permission fees etc.'

As Applicants have not taken advantage of this clause, it would avoid future confusion to remove this 'exception to the rule'.

- Within the description of community facilities, there is a clause to enable investment in community transport. To date, no applications have used this, but it may have led to some confusion in the case of a recent application for support towards a bus shelter:-

'Community transport schemes will also be considered when they provide access to a wide range of services across the community.'

Community transport providers have considered applying for grant towards minibuses - capital expenditure that this would appear to allow - yet these are rapidly depreciating assets that, arguably, do not fit well alongside the longer term investments typical of the scheme. Accordingly, they have been unable to develop a project that meets the other criteria of the scheme effectively nullifying this clause. On that basis it is proposed to remove this clause.

9. A 'tracked changes' version of the criteria is attached at **Appendix 'A'**, setting the points above in context.

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