

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY GRANTS

Executive Summary

The Council provides a high level of support to the Woking voluntary sector. Each year community grants, and wider financial benefits are given to a range of services to enable them to support vulnerable residents. In 2022/23, over £1.7m worth of investment is being provided to the voluntary sector which is significant.

The Community Foundation for Surrey administers over 80 community funds and are well placed to administer community grants on behalf of the Council. This partnership approach would enable community beneficiaries to apply for funding from a range of sources through one single expression of interest to the Community Foundation, accessing wider funds that are not restricted solely to the Council's grant.

The Community Foundation for Surrey already administers the Woking Community Fund, which provides grants to the voluntary sector in Woking through private sector donations. Applications are received to the Woking Community Fund and the foundation then process these for the quarterly decision-making panel. The Council would set the annual budget for the fund, agree the criteria, join the panel and report annually on outcomes. The Council could also incentivise increased investment into the endowment of the Woking Community Fund by match-funding donations made to it from the private sector.

This approach incentivises wider investment into the community, growing long-term, sustainable contributions. It creates an improved and streamlined application system for community groups whilst enabling the Council to retain full control of the budget and the criteria for its grants. Further, it enables Council Officers to focus less time on administering a grants process and more time developing innovative and sustainable partnerships in its work with community groups.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

- (i) the proposed new partnership between Woking Borough Council and the Community Foundation for Surrey be endorsed and take effect for grants in 2023/24; and**
- (ii) delegated authority to be given to the Strategic Director - Communities to oversee the new partnership between Woking Borough Council and the Community Foundation for Surrey.**

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To improve the process for administering community grants.

The item(s) above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

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Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Louise Strongitharm, Strategic Director - Communities
Email: louise.strongitharm@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3599

Contact Person: Adam Thomas, Head of Family and Community Services
Email: adam.thomas@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3811

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Will Forster
Email: cllrwill.forster@woking.gov.uk

Shadow Portfolio Holder: Councillor Colin Kemp
Email: cllrcolin.kemp@woking.gov.uk

Date Published: 8 June 2022

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Woking Borough Council provides a significant level of discretionary support for the voluntary sector each year, including financial support, accommodation, rate relief and Officer advice. In 2022/23, the Council is investing £1,738,043 for these purposes.
- 1.2 Community grants are administered annually by the Council and form 40% of the investment figure above. This report evaluates the processes and operations surrounding the administration of community grants, to improve the opportunities for applicants through a partnership with the Community Foundation for Surrey.

2.0 Current Framework for Administering Community Grants

- 2.1 The annual community grants process is administered by Woking Council Officers in Democratic Services, supported by Senior Managers across the Council, Executive Members and Corporate Leaders. It commences each April, and the administrative tasks span the entire year. Officers engage in communication with beneficiaries, they advertise the scheme with the relevant dates and information, process applications, conduct consultations, attend planning meetings including a special meeting of the Executive with c.60 individual Executive Reports, then process the administration of the funds themselves in quarterly instalments.
- 2.2 The cost of Officer time to administer the grants process equates to at least £25,000 per year, based on a fair proportion of time from Democratic Services, Senior Managers and the Corporate Leadership Team. This time could be used more productively, instead spent working directly with community groups to advise and support, rather than processing annual applications.

3.0 Proposal for Change

- 3.1 If a trusted partner was used to administer the community grants this would enable the Council to focus on the strategic priorities, governance and wider opportunities for supporting local community groups. It would reduce the administration operations that are currently required and release a significant amount of Officer and Member time to focus on community development. The new approach would enable the Council to continue to retain full control of the grants in setting the annual budgets and the criteria as per the strategic priorities, whilst increasing the transparency of the process and broadening the financial scope of support to communities.
- 3.2 The Community Foundation for Surrey (CFS), based in Woking, is well established and a trusted expert in grant administration. It currently administers 89 funds including endowment and flow through funds, working closely with local businesses, Surrey County Council, and Borough and District Councils. A detailed overview of their work can be found on the CFS website which includes the Annual Report and Accounts. All grant giving is published in the public domain and is transparent in accordance with legal regulations and stipulations of the Charity Commission.

Woking Community Fund

- 3.3 CFS manage the Woking Community Fund, which is an existing endowment fund. Full details of the fund including case studies can be found on the CFS website. The endowment is currently £143,000 and yields an annual return, following investment, of 4% for community grants. The fund is well established and is overseen by a dedicated panel, chaired by an independent Woking resident with expertise in this work.

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- 3.4 Over coming years, with the support of the Council, it would be possible to increase the endowment to £250,000 which is not unrealistic when compared to similar funds in neighbouring areas. Other District and Borough Councils match-fund corporate donations in similar schemes to incentivise new income, and it is recommended that Woking Council match-fund contributions by 50%. Therefore, a corporate donation of £1000 to the Woking Community Fund increases to £1,750, following the Council's contribution (50%) and the addition of Gift Aid (25%). This is a positive and innovative approach to stimulating wider, sustainable investment into the community across sectors.
- 3.5 CFS would receive and process all expressions of interest from applicants, then process these ready for the quarterly decision-making panel. The Council would set the annual budget for the fund, agree the criteria and support the panel in its decisions. It is recommended that the Head of Family and Community Services and Portfolio Holder for Community Grants attends the panel meetings. The Council would receive outcome reports on the use of the grants, and this would be collated and shared annually to promote the benefits of this scheme for residents.
- 3.6 The benefits of this new approach are far reaching. Partnering with CFS enables community groups to apply for funding locally in one place, reducing the need for multiple applications. It provides a wider breadth of funding for beneficiaries and gives Volunteer Woking greater capacity to work alongside groups to develop sustainable fundraising strategies.

Small Grants

- 3.7 The Council provides small grants to youth providers and sports and arts providers through its small grants scheme, with an annual budget of £15,000. It is proposed to keep this budget for small grants to help local groups needing just in time support, in line with the Council's priorities. The framework for these grants is to be agreed with the Portfolio Holder and outputs reported annually with the wider community grants.

4.0 Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 The Corporate Strategy: Healthier Communities theme focusses on the need to support safe, thriving and sustainable communities, high quality homes for all and health and wellbeing for all. It is acknowledged that the voluntary and charity sector plays an important role in supporting these priorities and therefore the community grants scheme should focus on these outcome areas, along with the five priorities from the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 5.1 The Council will ensure that services providing essential support for residents, and those that exist to support community cohesion, receive the funds they need to continue their work in the borough. This can be achieved through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that formally secures their funding, rather than through an annual grants process which creates uncertainty. This will enable these groups to maintain core funds and for the Council to work closely with them to monitor the service outcomes for residents and value for money.
- 5.2 The existing recipients of the annual community grant that should receive secured funding are Woking Community Transport, Citizen's Advice Woking, York Road Project, Woking Asian Business Forum and Woking People of Faith. These services are necessary for supporting the ongoing needs of some of the most vulnerable residents and/or continuing to strengthen

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the connectivity and relationships across the diverse communities of Woking. For 2022/23, these groups have been awarded £499,357.

- 5.3 The Community Foundation for Surrey would administer the grants to community groups through its existing processes. The cost associated with this is c.£17,664 which is considerably less than the costs to the Council currently through Officer time, estimated to be at least £25,000 per year.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.4 The Community Foundation process grant applications throughout the year through a single expression of interest. Applications are invited from potential beneficiaries based on three broad themes. The themes enable a wide breadth of applications and support the funding for the Council's priority groups.
- 5.5 The themes are Wellbeing (advance the wellbeing, physical, and mental health and safety of people of all ages), Equity and Inclusion (reduce disadvantage and increase access to services, strengthen community cohesion and build social capacity), and Young People (supporting the range of challenges faced by young people).
- 5.6 The benefit of having a themed schedule for applications is that the priority areas can be funded collectively, providing a strategic overview of local funding and avoiding duplication and piecemeal grants.

Legal

- 5.7 A Service Level Agreement would be created to formalise the partnership with the Community Foundation for Surrey. This will confirm the expectations of the Council regarding the priorities and criteria for grant giving, budgets and reporting.
- 5.8 Service Level Agreements would be produced for the main regular beneficiaries, as discussed above.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 In preparation for this report, the Portfolio Holder and Council Officers in Democratic Services, Volunteer Woking and Woking Works have been consulted. Feedback has been sought from regular beneficiaries regarding the current process and this has supported the proposal to change the annual application process as it currently stands.
- 6.2 The Council will communicate with regular beneficiaries to discuss the new approach and ensure that support is given to adjust to the new processes, led through Volunteer Woking and CFS staff.

REPORT ENDS