

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2021

Report Title	COMMUNITY WELLBEING GRANTS 22/23			
Purpose of Report	To provide feedback on the revised 2020-21 Community Wellbeing Grant process to committee and propose changes to improve accessibility and effectiveness of the process.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to approve and adopt the recommendations made in Section 3 of this Report for the 2022 Community Wellbeing Grant process.			
Consultation and Feedback	Voluntary & Community Sector Alliance Barnwood Trust Gloucestershire Rural Community Council Grant applicants Officers involved in administering the grant and on the decision panel.			
Report Author	Emma Keating Clark, Community Health & Wellbeing Manager Tel: Email: emma.keatingclark@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	The term of the Community Wellbeing Grant may depend on the terms of Stroud District Council's own Government grant. Therefore the options to consider should be: 1, 2 or 3 year term.			
Background Papers				
Appendices	Appendix A – 20/21 Community Wellbeing Grant Application Guidance Appendix B – Proposed 'Small Community Grant' application form for up to £1k.			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	Yes	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report considers feedback on the revised 2020-21 Community Wellbeing Grant, from the team administering the grant, applicants and the decision panel members.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1 Feedback on grant criteria:

The 20-21 grants process was revised to include more robust funding criteria. This was welcomed by the grants panel. The weighting between criteria was difficult to judge for

the officers who were on the decision panel. Some applicants who were unfamiliar with methodology about their work in a 'wellbeing' context found it difficult to apply the new criteria. The lead officer helped applicants with any difficulties, to enable them to apply before the deadline.

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- Create clearer guidance on the weighting for the decision panel.
- Continue to provide advice to applicants where needed.

2.2 Feedback on application process:

The online tool used to gather applications at first seemed simple but when dealing with over 70 applications it caused difficulties for the applicants as well as the admin team. It was easy to mistakenly submit the application without saving, as a result some applications were lost completely and had to be re-sent by email. The automated messages proved difficult to manage. The process was not good for either the applicants or the team managing it.

Completing the application questions become very time consuming for the applicants, much more so than the previous Community Investment Grants which only had a couple of simple questions.

For many, this was normal for bid writing, and for larger grants the time spent applying was worth the time invested. For less experienced and smaller organisations, this was a difficult task. The application form needs to be shorter for those applying for small grants

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- Gather applications through a dedicated Grants email inbox and set up automatic replies. Access can be shared with appropriate staff and information retrieved easily.
- Create two funding streams, larger Community Wellbeing Grant with an in depth application and Small Grants stream with a simpler application form.

2.3 Feedback on Decision Making Process:

The panel consisted of six officers from the 2030 Strategy team, Youth Service, Leisure Services, Community Wellbeing and Cultural Services. Unfortunately, due to staff absence, no one from Housing could attend, however going forward they will be included.

The process of reading 79 lengthy applications before the panel meetings took approximately two days for each officer. In addition to this two afternoon decision panels deliberated over the applications. Feedback from the officers concluded that this was too much officer time to continue as an annual process.

The panel work was a great opportunity to learn how our community organisations contribute to the work streams of other Council services. The panel tested a number of ways of sharing scores and deliberating on decisions which will assist for the next round of applications.

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- A longer grant term to justify the officer time required to process applications.
- A panel decision should only be required for the larger grants of 1k upwards reducing officer time.
- Smaller grants of up to £1k with simpler applications decided by the Lead Officer and the Committee Chair. This is a similar process to the covid response grants. (See Appendices A and B to compare long application to proposed short application).

2.4 Feedback on term of award:

Feedback from our colleagues in the voluntary and community sector and county advocates for the voluntary sector, (the VCS Alliance, Barnwood Trust and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council) informs us that funding for two or three years is preferable to an annual process. This approach creates a more resilient sector by allowing for continuity of service, enabling projects to take root and develop into sustainable services which have a positive impact on the local community.

The negative impact of a longer grant term is:

- organisations who miss the first applications have to wait longer for the next round of grants.
- If projects are not working, money may be wasted.
- SDC Grant funding needs to be secured for longer than a year.

Considerations for the next round of Community Wellbeing Grants:

- The Community Wellbeing grant to be extended to a 3-year term.
- The grant timetable to be communicated in advance to the local community with a clear criteria on how this money can be used.
- Advice applicants who miss our grant deadline to engage with the Lucky Severn Lottery and other funders in the County.
- Funding should be withdrawn in years 2 and 3 if the applicants does not meet monitoring guidelines.
- Smaller, simpler grants available on a quarterly basis to support small projects.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Recommendations for 2022

- 3.1.1 Create clearer guidance on the weighting for the decision panel.
- 3.1.2 Continue to provide advice to applicants where needed.
- 3.1.3 Gather applications through a dedicated Grants email inbox.
- 3.1.4 Create two funding streams, a larger Community Wellbeing Grant with an in depth application and Small Grants stream with a simpler application form.
- 3.1.5 Smaller grants with simpler applications should be decided every quarter by the Lead Officer and the Committee Chair as is the current COVID Response Grant process.

- 3.1.6 The Community Wellbeing Grant term should be extended to a 3-year term on condition of satisfactory monitoring.
- 3.1.7 Funding conditions could be withdrawn in years 2 or 3 if the project fails to meet the agreed milestones

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report as it recommending processes and conditions. The extension to the 3 year term will only be in conjunction with the receipt of the funding stream.

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4.2 Legal Implications

The Council can rely on the General Power of Competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to provide grants to community groups.

Provided that the grants are paid to local groups for use in the Stroud area, these grants should not be 'subsidies' for the purposes of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement between the UK and the EU as it is unlikely that they will be deemed to affect trade or investment between the UK and the EU.

To safeguard public funds, a grant agreement should be entered into with the groups to record the purpose of the grant and require repayment of the grant should it not be used for that purpose. This could be a letter for small amounts and a more formal agreement for larger sums. One Legal can assist with the review of the grant agreements to advise if they need amending due to the revised process.

One Legal

Legalservices@onelegal.org.uk 01684 272203.

4.3 Equality Implications

An EIA has not been carried out by Officer in relation to the recommendations in this report because the implications remain largely the same as the previous year's grant review and EIA Report. The only exception is that the introduction of a new simpler Small Grants process will hopefully allow smaller, less formalised groups with less experience of writing bids to access funding. It is hoped that this will improve equality of access to funding. As discussed, support will be offered to any groups wishing to apply for the larger grant fund should they need it.

4.3 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.