

DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTE (12 NOVEMBER 2019)

OS25 REVIEW OF GRANTS

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing, the Policy and Partnerships Manager, and the Community Development Manager to the meeting.

The Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing introduced the report submitted to the Committee. She advised that the report set out the recommendations arising from the former Grants Review Panel. The Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing indicated that the proposals aimed to focus support and protect funding for voluntary organisations working with vulnerable residents. She informed the Committee that the recommendations included a smaller Voluntary Grants Scheme and the replacement of the Community Grants Scheme with a new Aspire Grants Scheme. The Committee was advised that the Voluntary Grants and the Community Grants Schemes would operate in the usual way for the last time in the 2020-21 financial year.

During the ensuing questions and discussion, the Committee was provided with information and members made a number of points:

- In reply to a question about the overall decrease in funding for the Citizens Advice (CA) in the Borough, the Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing indicated that the Council would be working with the CA to explore different ways of working. The Policy and Partnerships Manager confirmed that the Voluntary Grants Scheme was an annual, discretionary scheme and organisations such as CA could not assume they would receive funding from the scheme.
- A member of the Committee questioned whether the proposed changes would act against rural areas, with urban areas more likely to apply for funding from the Council. The Policy and Partnerships Manager suggested that the grants schemes and the proposed crowdfunding platform were well-suited to rural areas. He advised that the use of the proposed crowdfunding platform would demonstrate if there was local support for a project and, in addition to Council funding, perhaps help attract corporate sponsors.
- A Councillor suggested that the Committee request a report detailing the amount and use of the New Homes Bonus.
- With reference to the funding priorities within the report and the responsibility of the NHS, the role of the Council in funding voluntary organisations working with mental health services was questioned. In response, the Committee was advised that the NHS was unable to fund such provision and that the Council's funding priorities were based on Corporate Plan commitments.
- The Policy and Partnerships Manager confirmed that the priority groups identified in the report submitted to the Committee might be re-aligned following the upcoming refresh in Corporate Plan priorities.
- The meeting was advised that the proposals included ending the current Voluntary Grants Scheme and incorporating the expenditure within existing service budgets, with funding agreements for specified services then arranged with voluntary organisations.

- With reference to the under-subscription of the Community Grants Scheme in recent years, members questioned its promotion. The Community Development Manager indicated that the scheme could have been promoted more widely. The Policy and Partnerships Manager advised that the Community Grants Scheme had been slightly soft-pedalled to enable virement of funds from the Community Grants Scheme to the Voluntary Grants Scheme. The Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing suggested that Councillors could be more active in their communities in promoting available grants.
- The Committee was advised that the estimated annual cost to the Council of the proposed crowdfunding platform was £80,000. The Policy and Partnerships Manager indicated that the fee charged on Council and private contributions to crowdfunding projects was likely to vary according to the operating and funding model of the provider, particularly the extent of community engagement activity.
- The Community Development Manager indicated that historically many of the unsuccessful applications to the Community Grant Scheme had requested funding to create posts and consequently had been judged unsustainable. The meeting was advised that the criteria for different grants schemes are published on the Council's website.
- The Community Development Manager advised the meeting that the Council's Wellbeing team offered advice on other funds available and that there was no longer a separate forum or briefing provided.
- The Policy and Partnerships Manager advised that the Committee's comments on the draft proposals would be considered by the Executive.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing, the Policy and Partnerships Manager, and the Community Development Manager for attending the meeting.