

Minutes of a meeting of the SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants Scrutiny Review Panel held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 23 March 2023.

PRESENT

Mr. C. A. Smith CC (in the Chair)

Mr. D. Harrison CC  
Mr. P. King CC

Ms. Betty Newton CC

Apologies

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC

In attendance

Tom Purnell - Assistant Chief Executive  
Zafar Saleem - Head of Service, Communities, Policy & Resilience  
Noel Singh - Funding Manager  
Andy Hayes - Funding & Grants Officer  
Rosemary Whitelaw – Democratic Services Officer  
Damien Buckley – Democratic Services Officer  
James O'Brien - Team Manager, Environment Policy & Strategy  
Anna Low - Team Manager, Waste Policy & Strategy  
Kristy Ball - Team Leader, Communities Team  
Mike Thompson - Communities Business Partner, Communities Team  
Kate Revell - Head of Service (Commissioning and Quality), Adults and Communities  
Rachel Cheney - Lead Commissioner, Adults and Communities  
Simon Dalby - Strategic Lead - Community Delivery, Public Health  
Anna Christie - Operations Manager - Local Area Co-ordination, Public Health

1. Election of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. C. Smith CC be appointed Chairman for the duration of the Scrutiny Review Panel.

2. Declarations of Interest.

Mr. P. King CC expressed a non-registerable interest as a recent member of the Charnwood Institute of Financing who were in receipt of a grant from this scheme.

3. Scoping Template for the Scrutiny Review Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Scoping Template for the Scrutiny Review Panel be agreed.

4. Conduct of Scrutiny Review Panels.

RESOLVED:

That the procedures for conducting Scrutiny Review Panel meetings be noted.

5. Draft Work Programme for the Scrutiny Review Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Draft Work Programme for the Scrutiny Review Panel be agreed.

6. Overview of the SHIRE Community Grant and SHIRE Environment Grant programmes.

The Scrutiny Review Panel received a presentation which provided an overview of the SHIRE Community Grant and SHIRE Environment Grant programmes.

The Chairman thanked officers for the presentation and noted the diversity that the grant schemes offer.

- i. The proposal to cease delivery of the SHIRE Community and Environment Grant programmes with immediate effect had been part of the Council's MTFS 2023/24 – 2026/27 and members suggested that the financial position would need to remain a key consideration in determining the future of both grant programmes in 2023/24 and onwards. Members highlighted the importance for the Council to prioritise social care, education, and other statutory services which it must deliver, against a backdrop of difficult financial circumstances.
- ii. In response to member concern regarding the Council's financial position, officers explained that the budget for both grant schemes had been set by members, originally at around £1million in 2017, although the rate had fluctuated year on year. During 2020/21 and 2021/22 the grant budget was higher due to government grants to support with COVID-19 and had reduced to £600k in 2022/23. The Council's departments would usually award contracts for community and charity organisations and the grants compliment what is delivered through these. A member suggested that there would be a need to consider the Council's budget against the social responsibility in supporting vulnerable people and community groups.
- iii. It was suggested that there could be an opportunity for the grants budgets to be reduced rather than ceasing delivery of the schemes. Suggestions for cost cutting measures and how the budget for the grants could be reduced would be considered by officers and potential options for this would be provided at the meeting on 12 April 2023.
- iv. Members raised concern over the costs associated with administering the grant schemes, in particular staffing costs. It was explained that exact costs were not available at the time, but members noted that a number of officer posts were involved in the administration of the grants. Officers agreed to supply members with a breakdown of costs associated with administering the grant schemes, at the meeting on 12 April 2023.

- v. In response to a question regarding the number of organisations that had submitted repeat requests for funding and the frequency of these requests, it was explained that the majority of applications had been from new applicants. However, some organisations who had benefited from the grant schemes had submitted a repeat request, which would usually be for different purposes than that previously. Members noted that the issue of repeat funding had been a discussed with funders and that it had been a controversial challenge to overcome. The grants schemes had been popular with community groups and there was no rule that repeat requests for funding could be made. However, when a repeat request for funding had been received, officers had queried the reasoning for this and would promote other avenues of funding. Members expressed their concern regarding repeat requests for funding and officers agreed to provide members with the number of organisations that had submitted repeat requests for funding and the frequency of these requests, at the meeting on 12 April 2023.
- vi. The grant schemes had primarily focussed on supporting vulnerable people and communities but had on occasion awarded funds to parish and town councils, and larger organisations, to support projects which aimed to support these groups, such as programmes delivering food provision. However, members raised concern at this and questioned whether these authorities and organisations should allocate funding from their own budgets or from alternative sources. Officers agreed to provide the number of applications from larger organisations or precepting authorities at the meeting on 12 April 2023.
- vii. A member suggested that the grants had provided a positive impact on vulnerable groups, and organisations which may have not been in a position to deliver services without the funding and asked that the wider impact of the grants be considered by all members. Officers advised that business intelligence data relating to grants performance was available although it could be difficult to quantitatively measure impact and value for money. Members noted that the impact of the grant schemes and value for money would be illustrated by evidence which would be presented by departmental officers within the Council, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VSCE) organisations and Grant beneficiaries, as well as other grant funders, partners and stakeholders.
- viii. It was suggested that there were various considerations to be made when making the decision whether to cease the SHIRE Community and Environment Grants schemes. Grant funding could be reduced rather than withdrawn completely. The funding process could be amended to not allow repeat requests for funding or to not allocate funding to larger organisations or to town and parish Council's. Consideration could also be made as to whether the grant schemes should have priority themes or proportional splits.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The Overview of the SHIRE Community Grant and SHIRE Environment Grant programmes be noted;
- b) The number of organisations that repeat requests for funding and the frequency of these requests be provided on 12 April 2023;

- c) The number of applications from larger organisations or precepting authorities (both actual number and percentage), be provided on 12 April 2023;
- d) The administrative costs of running the SHIRE Community Grants be provided on 12 April 2023;
- e) Qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate the impact and value for money of SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants be provided on 12 April 2023;
- f) Suggestions for cost cutting measures and how the budget for SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants could be reduced be provided on 12 April 2023.

#### 7. Receive feedback from departmental officers.

The Scrutiny Review Panel received feedback from departmental officers regarding the impact and value for money of the grants programmes and investment into the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and how the grants programmes support the achievement of departmental strategic objectives.

The Chairman welcomed officers from Adults and Communities, Public Health, and the Chief Executives Departments for this item.

#### Adults & Communities

- i. Members noted that the grant scheme had impacted services in Adults and Communities by contributing to community based approaches and complimenting mental health provision. The Department had supported Grants Officers in their decision on whether to provide funding to groups and would be interested in supporting and developing schemes to ensure the delivery of support for communities going forward. The grants schemes had assisted the Department in meeting its objectives. The schemes had supported and contributed towards preventing and reducing people requiring social care support and delaying this before the Department would need to provide costly support packages.
- ii. The grants had focussed on supporting community groups with the aim of preventing and delaying individuals requiring support from social services. The early intervention and support offer delivered by departments had not been duplicated by the grant's schemes, but had complemented this work. Members noted that, when presenting to the Councils front door services, individuals would be treated and assessed as individuals when considering whether the Council can support them. It was suggested that as the Council tightened its provisions, in order to meet budgetary demands, it would be important to consider the impact that this will have on individuals and communities, and whether the grant schemes could help to reduce this impact.
- iii. A Member raised concern regarding the suggestion that the Council would not be in a position to fulfil its objectives without the delivery of the grant schemes and suggested that the grants scheme did not offer value for money for the taxpayer. In terms of the grant scheme providing funding for early intervention work in the community, it was suggested that this work should be funded through the Department's early intervention offer rather than people applying for support through the grants scheme. Officers advised that the community had often

developed projects and services that local people were passionate about and that these projects and services helped to fulfil a variety of the Council's objectives.

### Public Health

- iv. Members noted that the grant scheme had supported the Public Health department by providing funding to help people to maximise resources to support themselves during challenges with health services, to assist with COVID-19, to help reduce the effects associated with the cost of living, in providing mental health support, and through providing dynamic support to individuals and communities at the earliest possible opportunity. The Department assisted Grant officers with funding decisions, and it was suggested that there would be an opportunity to work closely and collaboratively in how grants are utilised, if the scheme were to continue.

### Chief Executives

- i. A member raised concern that the grants had been used to help the Council to meet its priorities and asked how these priorities had been determined. Members were assured that the biggest priority was the Council's MTFs challenges but it was equally important to meet priorities around providing core services. The Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26 sets out the Council's long-term vision and priorities and departments write their own plans to ensure that services support this plan. Officers agreed to provide members with evidence of how the grant schemes support and complement core services at the meeting on 12 April 2023.
- v. In response to question regarding whether there had been a proportional split between different types of projects supported and if projects in different areas of the county were awarded funding equally, it was explained that this was not the case. Initially there had two grants which included allocations by department and sector. The schemes had moved to a position whereby applications were considered on case by case basis. Most funding was awarded to supporting Children and Families and the largest proportion of funding had gone to the Charnwood. The Lead Member for Community and Staff Relations was responsible for approving the grants criteria each year. It was suggested that the grants criteria and awarding process could be streamlined to ensure that funds would be distributed more proportionately.
- vi. Members suggested that Parish and Town Council's should allocate their own funds to support community groups through their precept rather than applying for grant funding. Officers advised that the parish council precept is part of council tax collected from local residents. Members were assured that the Communities Team supported Parish Councils with budgeting and presenting and encouraged them to involve their communities in the process.

RESOLVED:

That:

- ii. The feedback received from departmental officers regarding the impact and value for money of the grants programmes and investment into the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, as well as how the grants

programmes support the achievement of departmental strategic objectives, be noted;

- iii. Evidence of how the grant schemes support and complement core services be provided on 12 April 2023;
- iv. Consideration be made as to whether the grant schemes should have priority themes or proportional splits.

8. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Review Panel would take place on Wednesday 12 April at 13:00.

13:00 - 14:36  
23 March 2023

CHAIRMAN