

Minutes of a meeting of the SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants Scrutiny Review Panel held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 12 April 2023.

PRESENT

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

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC  
Mr. D. Harrison CC

Mr. P. King CC  
Ms. Betty Newton CC

9. In Attendance.

Zafar Saleem – Head of Service, Communities, Policy & Resilience  
Noel Singh – Funding Manager  
Andy Hayes – Funding and Grants Officer  
James OBrien – Team Manager, Environment Policy & Strategy  
Rosemary Whitelaw – Head of Democratic Services  
Damien Buckley – Democratic Services Officer  
Joanna Burrows – Love 4 Life  
Bruce Harrison – Leicester South Foodbank  
Helen Carter – Loughborough Wellbeing Centre  
Sue Willis – The Carers Centre Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland  
Nita Withers – The Phoenix Children’s Foundation  
Clare Smith – The Phoenix Children’s Foundation  
Bob Mitchell – Walk on the Wild Side  
Teresa Chapman – Walk on the Wild Side  
Jim Houghton – Sport in Desford

10. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

11. Declarations of Interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting. The following interests were declared:

- i. Mr. C. A. Smith declared a non-registerable interest in all items on the agenda as he had worked with Sport in Desford who were in receipt of a SHIRE Environmental grant.
- ii. Mr. P. King CC declared a non-registerable interest in all items on the agenda as a member of the Carer’s Centre Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland who were in receipt of a SHIRE Community grant.
- iii. Mr. P. King CC declared a non-registerable interest as his wife was a member of Arthritis Support Leicestershire who were in receipt of a SHIRE Community grant.

- iv. Mr. D. Harrison CC expressed a non-registerable interest in all items of the agenda as in his capacity as Chairman of the Council, an office he held during the 2021 - 2022 municipal year, he visited various Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

12. Exclusion of the Press and Public.

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 3 and 10 of the Act and that, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information –

- SHIRE Community Grants: Feedback from Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations and Grant Beneficiaries;
- SHIRE Environmental Grants: Feedback from Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations and Grant Beneficiaries.

13. SHIRE Community Grants: Feedback from Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations and Grant Beneficiaries.

The Panel considered written statements provided by Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, including SHIRE Grant beneficiaries, regarding the impact of the SHIRE Community Grant and how grant investment supported delivery of community-based projects, services and activities. Copies of these statements marked “Agenda Item 4” are filed with these minutes. The documents were not for publication by virtue of Paragraphs 1, 3 and 10 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Chairman invited representatives from Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to provide feedback on the SHIRE Community Grant.

The Leicester South Food Bank had received various grants from the scheme over six years which had usually been match funded. Members noted that being able to quote that the organisation was in receipt of the SHIRE Grants had encouraged other funders to match fund and, in some cases, had offered other avenues of support.

The Loughborough Wellbeing Centre attributed its success to the SHIRE grant the support of grants officers on the funding process and in signposting to alternative funders had been invaluable. Representatives suggested that such VCSE organisations were helping to prevent people from needing to access front door services of the Council, and other authorities and agencies, and that members should consider the social value and social return attained through grant funding.

The Carers Centre Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland thanked grants officers for their support in delivering services to the community.

SHIRE Grants officers had guided the Phoenix Children’s Foundation from being inexperienced to having the knowledge to operate and deliver the best results. It was suggested that if the grants scheme was withdrawn, it would leave a big gap for small charities and have a negative impact on children and communities. Organisations such

as the Phoenix Children's Foundation provided intervention services and suggested that without services such as these people would require support from the Council. Members noted that the outcomes achieved by VSCE organisations were often difficult to quantify.

Love4Life had received various grants over successive years which had aided project delivery and paid for projects, salaries, resources, and emergency funding. The grant had helped the organisation to expand into new areas of work across Leicestershire.

RESOLVED:

That the feedback provided by VCSE organisations be noted.

14. SHIRE Environment Grants: Feedback from Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations and Grant Beneficiaries.

The Panel considered written statements provided by Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, including SHIRE Grant beneficiaries, regarding the impact of the SHIRE Environment Grant and how grant investment supported delivery of community-based projects, services and activities. Copies of these statements marked "Agenda Item 5" are filed with these minutes. The documents were not for publication by virtue of Paragraphs 1, 3 and 10 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Chairman invited representatives from Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Organisations to provide feedback on the SHIRE Environment Grant.

Walk on the Wild Side thanked the Council for providing grant funding which had been vital in delivering its services and hoped to work with the Council in future. Officers were also thanked for the advice and support which they had provided to the organisation.

The SHIRE Grants scheme had been a primary resort for Sport in Desford in terms of sourcing funding and had been used to leverage funding from other sources. The Council and grants officers were thanked for the support provided to the organisation.

RESOLVED:

That the feedback provided by VCSE organisations be noted.

15. Issues Raised During the Meeting and Further Information Required.

The Chairman invited members to raise questions in relation to the information provided under agenda items 4 and 5.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Members highlighted the Council's financial position and the importance for this to remain a key consideration in determining the future of both grant programmes in 2023/24 and onwards. The value for money achieved through the SHIRE Community and Environment Grants schemes would need to be balanced against the Council's financial position and it would be important to ensure that the Council continued to provide value for money for residents.
- ii. In response to concern that some Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations had relied on the SHIRE Grants for core funding, officers

explained that, following feedback from the sector, it had been decided that organisations should be allowed to apply for core funding, and that in the majority of cases this had been used to cover expenses such as salaries, rent and other administrative costs. Core funding had been offered during COVID to help organisations to operate throughout the challenging period. Members noted that, even when grants were awarded in successive years, these were to fund different projects, not to provide ongoing core funding.

- iii. Officers explained that where a VCSE organisation had applied for grant funding, they had worked to understand the organisation's needs before deciding whether a SHIRE grant would be the most appropriate option for them to pursue. Organisations would always be signposted to other sources of funding in the first instance, and it was reported that around 55% of organisations had already received funding from another source. Although the application process was accessible, rigorous scrutiny of the applications was in place to determine whether SHIRE Grant funding should be awarded, particularly in the case of repeat applicants.
- iv. Two members expressed support for the grants and suggested that VCSE organisations would be negatively impacted if the SHIRE Grants ceased. Officers explained that it would be difficult to determine how successful VCSE organisations would be at sourcing funding from other organisations if the Council ceased the SHIRE Grant schemes. VCSE organisations had reported that SHIRE Grant funding provided credibility and leverage when sourcing match funding, and also that grants officers at the Council had been extremely helpful in signposting to other funders as well as assisting with applications. Members noted that smaller organisations may find it more difficult than larger organisations to source alternative funding. Other grant funders and stakeholders, who also provide funding and investment into the VCSE sector, would be invited to the meeting on 15 May 2023 to discuss the impact and value for money of grants programmes and investment into the local VCSE sector.
- v. Some members suggested that there had been a lack of quantitative evidence available in order to determine the impact that the grants had in terms of reducing the number of people accessing Council services, as a result of early interventions delivered by VCSE organisations. The members highlighted the importance for understanding the impact on communities if the grants were reduced or ceased. Officers explained that it would be difficult to produce such quantitative data due to resources available in the team. Members noted that the grants were seen to complement the work of departments but given that they were usually relatively small amounts of money, it was not considered appropriate to undertake analysis of which commissioning gaps they filled. However, officers would review monitoring information available, as well as information on the grant's application processes, and present this to members at the meeting on 15 May 2023.
- vi. Officers acknowledged that well known, credible organisations with a track record of achievement might find it easier to access funding than new organisations. The scheme was often oversubscribed, and organisations were not necessarily awarded the full amount of funding that they had applied for. It was also noted that grants created a state of reliance, so officers encouraged organisations to identify other sources of income, particularly opportunities for income generation.

- vii. Officers explained that they had worked in collaboration with Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) and that in cases where organisations had not been successful in being awarded with SHIRE grant funding, they had been encouraged to contact VAL for support in sourcing alternative funding. Members noted that VAL would be invited to the meeting on 15 May 2023.

RESOLVED

That:

- a) Other grant funders and stakeholders be invited to the meeting on 15 May 2023;
- b) Monitoring information, as well as information on the grant's application processes, be presented at the meeting on 15 May 2023;
- c) Voluntary Action LeicesterShire be invited to the meeting on 15 May 2023.

16. Actions from the Meeting held on 23 March 2023.

The Panel considered a report which set out a response to some of the issues raised at the meeting of the SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants Scrutiny Review Panel on 23 March 2023. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

In response to a question in relation to whether total officer time spent on administering SHIRE Community Grant included on-costs, officers explained that it did not. Officers agreed to provide members information relating to on-costs, at the meeting on 15 May 2023.

RESOLVED:

That

- a) The additional information provided be noted.
- b) Members be provided with on-costs associated with total officer time spent on administering SHIRE Grants, at the meeting on 15 May 2023.

17. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Review Panel would take place on Monday 15 May 2023 at 10:00am.