SHIRE COMMUNITY AND SHIRE ENVIRONMENT GRANTS SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ACTIONS FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to set out a response to some of the issues raised at the meeting of the SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants Scrutiny Review Panel.

The information is set out in the tables below, in headings relating to the agenda items from the meeting.

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

SHIRE Community Grants

Action	Response
Number of organisations that repeat requests for funding and the frequency of these requests.	In terms of Numbers of Grants Awarded: In 2021-22, a total of 169 grants were awarded. In 2022-23, a total of 152 grants were awarded. Total grants awarded in both years = **321** Across this period, **58** organisations received two grants in consecutive years. This represents **18%** of the number of grants awarded. In terms of amounts awarded: In 2021-22, £897,500 was awarded in total (169 grants). In 2022-23, £612,485 was awarded (152 grants) In total, £1,509,985 was awarded across both years. Of this total, **£689,000** was awarded to 58 organisations for consecutive grants in both years. This represents **45.6%** of the total budget awarded across both years.

Number of applications from larger organisations or precepting authorities (both actual number and percentage).	In 2022-23, £612,485 was awarded for 152 grants.
	Of these 152 grants, **19** of the organisations reported income of over £500,000 in their most recent financial reports, which equates to **12.5%** of grant recipients.
	Of the £612,485 awarded in 2022-23, **£104,500** was awarded to organisations with reported income of over £500,000, which equates to **17%** of the grant budget awarded.
	Of these 152 grants, **3** were awarded to Town/Parish Councils, equating to approx. **2%** of grants awarded. The total awarded across the 3 grants was **£5,115**, representing **less than 1%** of the overall budget awarded.
Administrative costs of running the SHIRE Community Grants	1 x G13 Manager (50%) = £24,470 1 x G10 Officer (50%) = £17,367 **Total Officer Time spent on SHIRE Grant Programme 2022-23 = £41,837** In addition (from April 2021 – March 2024): *2 x G7 Admin Officers (100%) = £46,398 *Note these posts are time limited, and funded with external monies (Covid Grants), and not LCC budgets Tasks include: • Managing an email inbox and recording details of applications received • Dealing with grant related enquiries • Undertaking initial eligibility checks for grant applications received • Preparing papers and recording notes for grant decision meetings • Preparing grant offer / reject letters, sending out letters and collating paperwork from grant recipients • Setting up suppliers on Oracle Fusion, requesting/processing payments, and ensuring recipients are paid • Ongoing monitoring of projects awarded funding (over a 12 month period) including requesting evidence of expenditure, checking evidence against agreed grant awards, dealing with

	discrepancies, escalating any issues, requesting Grant Outcome Reports, and reporting trends, issues and challenges • Contributing to the development and maintenance of various spreadsheets with information about organisations awarded grant funding • Dealing with and responding to any other ad hoc requests for information about organisations awarded funding.

Qualitative/quantitative data to demonstrate the impact and value for money of SHIRE Community Grants

Year	Budget Available	Budget Allocated	No. of Projects Funded
2016-17	£420,000	£448,501	93
2017-18	£420,000	£420,188	104
2018-19	£350,000	£367,588	78
2019-20	£350,000	£386,715	90
2020-21	£2,594,190	£2.6m	379
2021-22	£900,000	£897,500	169
2022-23	£612,485	£600,000	152

A Tableau dashboard detailing numbers/amounts of grants awarded over the last 4-5 years is available here

A range of case studies have been provided within the slides presented to the first Scrutiny Review Panel meeting on Thursday 23 March 2023.

Grants have been awarded to voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations for delivery of prevention/early intervention based health and wellbeing projects/services, including:
• Projects for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people (including those who are NEET, those involved in anti-social behaviour/crime, those with SEND issues and those from complex family backgrounds)
• Community-based Mental Health recovery and wellbeing services
• Projects supporting people who are experiencing financial hardship, energy and fuel poverty
• Projects which help to reduce loneliness and social isolation in communities
• Projects for people of all ages experiencing a range of disabilities/long term health conditions
• Services for people experiencing homelessness
• Services for people with substance use issues
• Services for people who have been victims of domestic and/or sexual abuse/violence

Examples of outcomes achieved include:
• Improved health, wellbeing and quality of life for vulnerable and disadvantaged people
• Vulnerable and disadvantaged people are safer, less isolated, confident and independent
• Disadvantaged groups have access to appropriate information/services and are empowered to participate fully in society

- Reduced inequality, and increased opportunities for vulnerable/disadvantaged people and communities to develop positive lifestyle choices,
- Less reliance on Council and other public services, particularly high-cost health and social care services
- Individuals who are NEET, including disadvantaged young people, have improved opportunities to access education, training and employment
- Reduction in crime, offending and anti-social behaviour in communities
- Communities/community organisations take responsibility for identifying solutions to local issues
- Stronger voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector

Suggestions for cost cutting measures/how the budget for SHIRE Community Grants can be reduced.	It has already been proposed to award smaller grants in 2023-24 (max £5,000), which will enable a larger number of organisations to benefit from grants Further options for consideration could include: a) Reduce capital budget by a further £50k b) The SHIRE Grant (revenue) budget was increased by £150k in 2022-23. A reduction to the current budget of this amount could be considered, so the revenue budget would be reduced to £350k.

SHIRE Environment Grants

Action	Response
Number of organisations that repeat requests for funding and the frequency of these requests.	Over the 13 years of the scheme (2009-2022): **11 organisations** put in repeat applications. Total No of **repeat applications** was **17**. Out of which: - 8 organisations put in 1 repeat application - 1 organisation put in 2 repeat applications - 1 organisation put in 3 repeat applications - 1 organisation put in 4 applications Total no of grants offered is 217. **7%** of awarded applications were repeat applications. Note: Organisations are not able to put in more than one application each year. The SHIRE Environment Grant is part of several initiatives that are designed to support communities to take positive action on waste and the environment. Part of this is taking organisations on a journey to understand their impact on the environment, and what they can do to minimise that impact. Therefore, we are comfortable in supporting repeat applications where appropriate and where they meet the eligibility criteria of the scheme and sufficiently demonstrate good use of the funding.
Administrative costs of running the SHIRE Environment Grants.	The estimated cost of administrating the scheme has been calculated at **£14,998**. This includes time spent processing applications, preparing for each funding round including comms, online workshops, general administration, and management time checking and approving projects. The above figure also includes on-costs of between +38% and +41% depending on grade.
Qualitative/quantitative data to demonstrate the impact and value for money of SHIRE Environment Grants	The methodology used to assess the impact and value for money of projects varies depending on project type. All projects are assessed/scored against a range of assessment criteria (See Appendix).

	All projects are assessed firstly to ensure the organisation and project is eligible and that all required supporting information has been suitably provided. All projects are then assessed against the extent to which they meet or achieve criteria such as: • Primary outcomes • Secondary benefits • Degree of quality of resident involvement and behavioural change • Level and type of community use of the building/property/land • Robustness of evidence demonstrating ability to meet future running or maintenance costs and requirements • Level of project risk • No of volunteers engaged in projects • Sustainability of project • Advertising and marketing of engagement activities In addition, for energy projects they are assessed against the following: • EPCs or DECs (Energy Performance Certificates, Display Energy Certificates) must be provided showing the energy performance of the building • Estimated financial savings per year • Estimated CO2 savings • Payback period • Value for money (CO2kg/£) - total cost • Value for money (CO2kg/£) - grant request For biodiversity projects they are also assessed against the following: • Extent to which project is supporting a wider strategic agenda such as part of enhancing a Priority Habitat Network, Living Landscape, River Catchment Restoration Plan, Strategic Green Infrastructure identified within a local plan

	• Any surveys showing that sites are important for wildlife that it manages, improves or expands habitat or supports specific species • Hectares/m2 of land to be improved For waste projects there is also a post-project evaluation form which includes questions on the following: • What activities have taken place and what did they involve • Who was involved in the project • How many volunteers were involved • What other agencies/organisations did you work with? • What differences has your project made? • Do you have any measurable data? • What impacts and benefits has the project achieved for the community? In addition: Projects are only paid the funding awarded on receipt of evidence that the project has been delivered as described and, on the expenditure, agreed in the award letter. Since the current version of the SHIRE Environment Grant commenced in 2019 on average 55% of applications have been approved indicating the effectiveness of the assessment process in ensuring, where possible funding is awarded to the projects that most meet the requirements and objectives of the scheme.
Suggestions for cost cutting measures/how the budget for SHIRE Environment Grants can be reduced.	Options to consider could be: - Reduce the amount of funding available from £40,000 to £30,000 - Reduce the maximum grant award from £3,000 to £2,500

Item 7: Receive 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;**
- **how the grants programmes support the achievement of departmental strategic objectives.**

Action	Response
Evidence of how the grant schemes support and complement core services	The SHIRE Grant programme has been established to ensure grant funded projects support the key strategic aims/objectives of our departments, but also complement the delivery of LCC services, along with services which are externally commissioned.

A good example is around money/debt advice services. The Council currently commissions Citizens Advice Leicestershire and Rutland along with Charnwood Citizens Advice Bureau to deliver money/debt advice services around the County. However, the demand for such services is clearly greater than what the CABs can realistically meet. Therefore SHIRE Grants have been utilised to fund smaller, more localised debt advice services in parts of the County where this is significant need, and where other local debt advice organisations are based who can provide such services.

Other examples of SHIRE Grant funded projects which complement existing provision include:
- projects which engage young people who are involved (or at risk of involvement) in anti-social behaviour/crime through diversionary activities
- projects which provide parenting support to families from deprived/ disadvantaged backgrounds
- smaller, localised drop in services for people with dementia and their carers
- projects supporting carers, to complement existing commissioned services which provide support to carers
- drop in services and projects for people with mental health issues, e.g. therapeutic services, along with other non clinical mental health support such as arts based, mindfulness, gardening, growing or other nature based activities |
| Consider whether the grant schemes should have priority themes or proportional splits. | For the 2023-24 SHIRE Community Grant programme, we are proposing to focus the grant awards on the following 4 themed priorities: |

	1. Supporting vulnerable people and communities to manage the impacts of the cost of living crisis 2. Support for community-based projects and activities which improve mental health and wellbeing, including projects which reduce loneliness and social isolation 3. Projects for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people (and their families) 4. Projects supporting people with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions Proportionate splits of the budget against set priorities has been attempted in the past. Unfortunately this was not successful. SHIRE Grants are very much demand led and based on who chooses to apply in any given grant round and where the organisation is based/where they are proposing to run their project activities/ where the beneficiaries are from. Dividing the budget on a geographical basis would be difficult for the following reasons: 1. There are more VCSE organisations operating in some districts/boroughs in comparison to others 2. There would be no guarantee/assurance that equivalent numbers of eligible applications would be received from each area 3. Such an approach would disadvantage organisations, if we were to limit the number of grants/amounts to be awarded per district/borough as a number of organisations would miss out on the opportunity to secure a grant It is also worth noting that most District/ Borough Councils also run their own Community Grant programmes.
Evidence from the Children and Families Service	This has been requested.

Conclusion

Members are requested to consider whether the additional information provided is sufficient or whether there are areas where further information is needed.

Officers to Contact

Zafar Saleem
Head of Communities, Policy & Resilience
zafar.saleem@leics.gov.uk
0116 3054952

James Obrien
Team Manager, Environment Policy & Strategy
james.obrien@leics.gov.uk
0116 305