



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. D. Harrison CC  
Mr. P. King CC

Ms. Betty Newton CC  
Mr. C. A Smith 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 (Via Microsoft Teams)  
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  
Nailesh Ramaiya - Environment & Waste Management Technician (Via Microsoft Teams)  
John Levison - Senior Initiatives Officer, Waste Policy & Strategy (Via Microsoft Teams)  
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.

Mr C. A. Smith CC – in the Chair

2. Declarations of Interest.

Mr. P. King CC declared 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.

The Panel considered a document previously agreed by the Scrutiny Commissioners setting out the scope of the Scrutiny Review Panel. A copy of the document marked 'Agenda Item 3' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

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

4. Conduct of Scrutiny Review Panels.

The Panel considered a report of the Chief Executive which outlined the procedures for conducting Scrutiny Review Panels which were to be predominantly held in public session. A copy of this briefing paper marked "Agenda Item 4" is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

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

5. Draft Work Programme for the Scrutiny Review Panel.

The Panel considered a draft work programme for the Scrutiny Review Panel. A copy of this paper marked "Agenda Item 5" is filed with these minutes.

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. Members also noted that the County Council was not the only organisation providing funding via grants and that most projects would be able to find alternative sources of funding.
- ii. In response to member concern regarding the Council's financial position, officers explained that the budget for the SHIRE Community Grant scheme had been set by members, originally at around £1million in 2011, although the rate had fluctuated year on year. During 2020/21 and 2021/22 the grant budget was higher due to additional investment in grants to support with COVID-19 and had reduced to £600k in 2022/23. The Council's departments would usually award contracts to charities and social enterprise organisations for the delivery of services; the grants

were seen as complementary to 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 the officer posts involved in the administration of the grants also had other areas of work included within their job descriptions. 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 previously been considered, but repeat requests were not prevented, particularly if the project was felt to be beneficial and supportive of the main objectives of the grant scheme. Officers did query the reasons for repeat requests 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 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 in line with the priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan but had on occasion awarded funding to parish and town councils, albeit a small number, and larger charitable organisations, where the projects also supported 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 for the SHIRE Community Grant 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, not just the value for money, be taken into account by the Panel. Officers advised that some business intelligence data relating to grants performance was available although it was 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.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The Overview of the SHIRE Community Grant and SHIRE Environment Grant programmes be noted;
- b) The number of organisations that submit 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 and Communities

- i. Members noted that the grant scheme had had a positive impact on services in Adults and Communities by contributing to community based approaches and complementing mental health provision and the early intervention and support offer. The Department currently had minimal involvement in the running of the grants scheme but would be happy to provide more direct support. Officers felt that the scheme ran well and captured the enthusiasm of communities to improve local wellbeing. Schemes funded by the grants had supported the Department in meeting its objectives of preventing and reducing people requiring social care support and delaying this before the Department would need to provide costly support packages.
- ii. A member expressed concern that the SHIRE grants were being relied on to deliver the Department's objectives and expressed the view that projects that supported Departmental priorities should be funded from the core budget. The member also expressed concern that the use of grant funding could result in a 'postcode lottery' for services. Officers advised that the one of the benefits of the grants was that they allowed the community to be innovative and generate their own projects. Communities often had a better understanding of their own needs than the County Council did.

## Public Health

- iii. 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 had minimal involvement in the delivery of the grant scheme, other than providing some assistance with relevant funding decisions, but would welcome the opportunity to work closely and collaboratively in how grants are utilised, if the scheme were to continue.
- iv. Officers felt that creativity could be stifled through the commissioning of services and welcomed the role of the grants scheme in transferring power to communities and enabling them to be creative. Health inequalities were widening, and the grants scheme provided an opportunity for projects to support people at an early stage and for low costs.

## 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 set out the Council's long-term vision and priorities, supplemented by departmental plans. 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 a 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. Applications were considered on case by case basis. Most funding was awarded to projects supporting children and families and the largest proportion of funding had been awarded to organisations in 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. Members were assured that the Communities Team supported Parish Councils with budgeting and precepting and encouraged them to involve their communities in the process.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) 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;

- b) Evidence of how the grant schemes support and complement core services be provided on 12 April 2023;
- c) 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