



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 12 JUNE 2023

**FINAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL ON SHIRE
COMMUNITY GRANT AND SHIRE ENVIRONMENT GRANT
PROGRAMMES**

MINUTE EXTRACT

The Commission considered a report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on SHIRE Community Grants and SHIRE Environment Grants. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Mr C. Smith CC, Chairman of the Scrutiny Review Panel, introduced the report. He reminded the Commission that the Panel had been established at its request following its consideration of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2026/27 in January 2023 which included the proposal to cease delivery of both SHIRE Grant programmes with immediate effect. Members noted that the aim of the review was to determine the impact and value for money achieved through both Grant programmes and to consider the likely effects of discontinuation.

In presenting the report the Chairman welcomed and thanked external witnesses that had contributed to the review.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Whilst it was acknowledged that it was not unusual for organisations to seek repeat funding, the majority of the Panel had been concerned at the level of such applications, particularly as such organisations had no metrics to show the benefits and outcomes achieved with the grant provided which was sometimes substantial.
- (ii) The Council had a significant funding gap of over £80m that needed to be addressed and so it had to be recognised that its resources needed to be prioritised towards its core statutory duties such as child and adult social care.
- (iii) The situation was regrettable and a reflection of the current financial position of the Council which continued to be the lowest funded local authority in the country.
- (iv) A Member commented that the programmes had grown significantly over the years and were being provided to organisations that were not intended to be the original recipients of such financial support. The Grants had

been established to support small community groups and not to support organisations that already had other funding streams, were large enough to employ staff, or those able to raise money by way of a precept. Such organisations had rightly applied in line with the Council's criteria, but this could no longer be sustained.

- (v) All Members recognised that the organisations that sought either grant funding were undertaking valuable work and providing excellent support to communities and that the Panel's recommendations were regrettable. However, the majority commented that difficult financial decisions were necessary at the current time, though it was hoped this could be reviewed again at some future date.
- (vi) Members noted that there were other grant schemes available from organisations with significantly more funding, such as Lloyds Bank and the National Lottery Fund and welcomed plans to ensure officers were able to continue to provide advice, support and signpost to where such funding was still available.
- (vii) A Member expressed disappointment that a reduced grant programme could not be provided for and that the Panel's proposals would mean the Council went from a position of providing a broad Grants programme to providing nothing within a year.
- (viii) A Member further commented that the Grant Programmes had been expanded during the pandemic and suggested that rather than abolishing the programmes entirely, more could perhaps be done to return the scheme to pre-covid levels or for tighter rules to be imposed to prevent repeat applications.
- (ix) Another Member commented that to remove the grants entirely would inevitably impact communities as many of the organisations receiving funding provided services and support where the Council was already unable to do so due to limited resources. Some Members commented that a recommendation for smaller grant fund programmes that were more targeted so as to address the concerns raised by the Panel had been hoped for.
- (x) In response to the concerns raised, the Chairman of the Review Panel commented that by ensuring the Grant Programmes continued for a further year, though on a more targeted basis, this would ensure organisations would have time to seek advice and source alternative funding streams and that Council officers would be on hand to support them in that process. The Chairman further commented that no one wished to see the Grant Programmes brought to an end, but on balance, in the face of current financial pressures, this was considered the best approach. If circumstances improved, then it was hoped the matter could be revisited.

RESOLVED:

That the report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grants be recommended for consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting on 23 June 2023 for consideration.

(The Resolution was put and carried, 8 members voting in favour, 3 members voting against.)

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