

Chichester District Council

Cabinet

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Amendments to the Council's Grants and Concessions Programme

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

- 2.1. To update the third grant programme priority, currently called “Targeted Projects” to the wording in appendix 2 to support grant applications from community organisations and charities responding to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2.2. To delegate authority to officers, in consultation with the Grants and Concessions Panel, to make all necessary amendments to the programme guidance documents and assessment frameworks to align with recommendation 2.1.
- 2.3. To amend the Grants and Concessions policy to reflect the amendment at section 9.3 in appendix 1. Giving the Grants and Concessions Panel the discretion to make recurring grant awards (up to three years in exceptional circumstances).
- 2.4. To amend the Grants and Concessions policy to reflect a change in legislation in regard to rate relief at section 12.6 in appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1. Chichester District Council's priorities for grant funding are reviewed annually to ensure that the discretionary funds available continue to address the issues that the Council sees as most important. This review process is triggered by the Grants and Concessions Panel when they consider their Annual Report. The Panel, at the meeting on 11 October 2023, considered the Annual Report of Grants and Concessions 2022/23 and requested some additional information to allow Members of the new Council to consider the established programme and its impact more fully. Research was undertaken with key stakeholders and a Working Group discussed the findings. Recommendations are focused on the programme's 'Priorities' and ensuring that the grant programme is encouraging applications to come forward that the Panel feel are locally appropriate, timely and match the corporate interest.
- 3.2. Any changes to the policy need to be considered by Cabinet and there is also an update required due to the change in legislation following the Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023 which removes the restriction in section 47(7) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 on backdating of decisions concerning discretionary rate relief. The Government has also revoked all rules on discretionary relief contained in the Non-Domestic Rating (Discretionary Relief) Regulations 1989.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1. For applicants and the wider community, the proposed adjustments to the grants programme are intended to:

- Overtly include within the grant scheme a focus on supporting voluntary and community services that are providing essential support, particularly to the most vulnerable people, through the cost-of-living crisis.
- Support the resilience of local community groups at a time when fundraising is exceptionally challenging, by allowing grant applications to request a contribution to existing valued services rather than specifically requiring one-off projects.
- Further support the resilience of essential local voluntary community services by, in exceptional cases, allowing the Grants and Concessions Panel the option to make a grant offer to recur for up to a maximum of three years.
- Address a recent change in legislation relating to discretionary rates relief.

The amendments also:

- Aim to work within the existing grant programme regime that was introduced to offer a “single transparent process for how the Council gives financial support”.
- Provide clear criteria to suitably manage applicant expectations as the Panel are mindful of the potential levels of interest and demand.

5. Proposal

5.1. There are currently three advertised priorities for grant funding (Appendix 2) and no amendments are proposed to the first two: ‘Economy’ and ‘Improving Places and Spaces’.

5.2. It is proposed that the priority, currently called ‘Targeted Projects’ is renamed and reworded:

‘Stronger communities’

Funding for established voluntary services delivering projects supporting vulnerable people who have been most impacted by current social and economic pressures. Priority will be given to services that are able to strongly evidence that they are: locally appropriate, they are responding to significant need (particularly where this Council is a referring organisation) and can demonstrate their service’s impact.

5.3. To support the sustainability of essential community services (under this Priority only) the Panel propose that they are granted the ability to make a grant offer for more than one year in exceptional circumstances. It is therefore proposed that the Grants and Concessions Policy is updated at section 9.3.

5.4. It is also proposed that all guidance documents and assessment frameworks are update by officers, in consultation with the Chair or the Grants and Concession Panel.

5.5. In addition to the above it is proposed that Section 12: Discretionary Rate Relief is updated to reflect changes to legislation through the Non-domestic Rating Act 2023.

6. Reasons for proposal

6.1. Chichester District Council has a long track record of awarding appropriate and timely financial support to local businesses, community groups and voluntary organisations.

6.2. The Grants and Concessions Panel manage the programme with a total grant pot of £175,000 available annually. Grants can be requested through a Fast Track process up to £1,000 and bids for more than £1,000 are considered quarterly. The programme has experienced high levels of demand. The research undertaken for the Working Group identified how valued the programme is locally and also the challenging economic environment local groups and organisations are facing.

6.3. The Panel were keen for the programme to respond to the cost-of-living crisis, with funding prioritised for applications supporting local people most impacted. They were also keen to incorporate a response to the pressures local voluntary and community organisations are experiencing.

6.4. It is anticipated that the majority of grant awards made under the re-worded Priority would be one-off contributions and for one year, but to reflect the proposals, guidance would be updated to explain that the Panel can make awards to recur for up to 3-years, but this will only be possible in exceptional circumstances and where organisations meet additional requirements. There are no changes recommended to advice around grant size available. The programme guidance allows for bids up to a maximum of £15,000. The Panel are increasingly conscious of the need to manage demand but did not wish to suggest additional changes at this time, however it was suggested that Funding Advisors to the scheme will be encouraged to highlight that grants will not normally be for more than £10,000.

7. Issues and difficulties

7.1. The grant programme has attracted high levels of interest over the last two financial years and the Panel are mindful of demand. However, these amendments are not seeking to respond to or manage demand. Panel recognise that a future review will need to consider how to respond to demand as well as any impacts of these proposals.

7.2. It was recognised that the wording proposed for the programme guidance needs to be carefully considered in order provide clarity and to manage applicant expectations as there is no additional funding.

8. Alternatives Considered

8.1. Consideration has been given to retaining existing priorities as the Panel were broadly happy with the range of bids submitted. However, the current priority focusses on the delivery of specific one-off projects and would not allow for support to be offered to community groups and charities that are facing significant demand and financial challenges due to the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis.

9. Resource and Legal Implications

9.1. There will be a demand on internal resources to ensure all changes are complete in time for the new financial year. However, these can be absorbed into our current workload. Communication on the website will be updated to ensure that organisations are made aware of the planned changes in a timely way.

10. Consultation

10.1. The Grants and concession Panel has been consulted widely upon these proposals. We have also engaged with Voluntary Action in Arun and Chichester and Arun.

11. Other Implications

Are there any implications for the following?	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder		✓
Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation		✓
Human Rights and Equality Impact		✓
Safeguarding and Early Help		✓
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)		✓
Health and Wellbeing		✓
Other (please specify)		

12. Appendices

12.1. Appendix 1 - Grants and Concession Policy 2016

12.2. Appendix 2 – Priorities and Principles Guidance Note