

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GRANT WORKING PARTY

**Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 31 March 2011 at 5.00 pm
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House,
Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs S O Broughton (Chairman)
Councillors Aitkens, Clifton-Brown, Hale, Nettleton and Thorndyke

40. Substitutes

No substitutions were declared.

41. Apology for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Turner.

42. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. Declarations of Interests

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

44. Review of the Grant Terms and Conditions for the Recreation, Village Halls and Play Area Grant Scheme and the Rural Areas Community Initiatives Fund

The Working Party considered Report B529 (previously circulated), which sought approval for changes to the Grants Policy in connection with the Recreation, Village Halls and Play Area Grant Scheme (RVHPAGS) and the Rural Areas Community Initiatives Fund (RACIF).

In respect of the RVHPAGS, the current minimum grant available was £5,000 with no maximum applied. Applicants were able to apply for a maximum of 50% of the total project cost, and could reapply within three years of a previous approval by the Council. In respect of the RACIF, the existing minimum grant available was £500 and the maximum was £5,000. Applicants were able to apply for a maximum of 50% of the total project cost, and unless a Parish Council, could not apply again within two years of a previous approval by the Council.

As funding allocated to both grant schemes had decreased in recent years, it was considered expedient to review the minimum and maximum grant funding thresholds and criteria relevant to each scheme to enable grants to be awarded to a greater range of applicants. Consideration was given to four options for change, as detailed in Section 4.1 of the report, which resulted in Members considering Option 4 being the most appropriate given the pattern of applications in the last couple of years. However, the Working Party felt the minimum grant available from the RACIF should be amended from zero to £250, to avoid receipt of applications for exceptionally low grants, which could be onerous on officers' time.

Consideration was also given to extending the existing email voting system, which currently stream-lined the RACIF scheme decision-making process by enabling Members of the Working Party to approve or refuse grants by email up to the value of £5,000. The Working Party supported the proposal to extend this system to cover both grant schemes up to the value of £5,000 for the RVHPAGS scheme and up to the amended maximum grant threshold of £4,000 for the RACIF scheme.

Applicants could currently apply for up to a maximum of 50% match-funding of the total project cost. On 8 March 2011, Members had suggested that the maximum grant under the RVHPAGS scheme should be reduced to a maximum of 40% match-funding, or £10,000, whichever was the lesser amount. The Working Party considered that this ensured that no one scheme could secure a disproportionate amount of the funding available. Officers had suggested that the 50% maximum match-funding figure should be retained for the RACIF as the projects involved were on a smaller scale, and this was supported by Members. Members also agreed that applicants needed to be aware that the 'total project cost' excluded VAT for those organisations able to reclaim the VAT element, such as Parish Councils.

In addition, community groups could currently apply once every two years to the RACIF and this limit was not currently imposed on Parish Councils who may apply as often as they wished. As the RACIF awarded grants for small-scale projects, the Working Party considered it appropriate to also impose this two-year time lapse for re-applications to the scheme to Parish Councils. Under the criteria of the RVHPAGS, applicants were unable to reapply for funding within three years of a previous approval; however, as the grants awarded from this fund were for larger projects, Members considered the existing three-year time lapse for re-application to this scheme remained appropriate.

The Working Party also held a detailed discussion on whether the two schemes should become elements of a single 'umbrella' rural grant scheme, retaining their separate funding budgets and criteria but making the process easier for applicants. As applications to the new single scheme were received by the Council, on a single application form, the officers would then determine from which funding 'pot' the grant would be awarded, having regard to the proposed amendments to the criteria for each scheme, as detailed above. So that the new scheme was not delayed, Members agreed that delegated authority should be given to the Corporate Director for Community Services, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Grant Working Party, to produce a report detailing this proposal for consideration by the Cabinet at its next meeting on 27 April 2011. A copy of the draft proposals would also be emailed to all Members of the Working Party for their information.



RECOMMENDED:-

That the Council's Grants Policy be amended accordingly to reflect the principles detailed in recommendations (1) to (5) below:-

- (1) of the options listed in Section 4.1 of Report B529, Option 4, as amended at the meeting, to apply a minimum grant threshold of £250 to the Rural Areas Community Initiative Fund, be approved, i.e. a minimum of £250 for the Rural Areas Community Initiative Fund (RACIF) and a maximum of £4,000; and a minimum of £4,001 for the Recreation, Village Halls and Play Area Grant Scheme (RVHPAGS) and a maximum of £10,000;***

- (2) *as detailed in Section 5.1 of Report B529, the email voting system be retained for awarding grants up to £5,000, and extended to be applicable to both the RVHPAGS and the RACIF grant schemes (up to the amended maximum grant of £4,000 available from the RACIF, as detailed in Option 4 of Section 4.1 of Report B529);*
- (3) *the level of match-funding for the RVHPAGS be set at a maximum of 40% of the total project cost or £10,000, whichever is the lesser figure, but maintained at maximum of 50% for the RACIF, as detailed in Section 5.2 of Report B529;*
- (4) *any reference to 'total project cost' for match-funding purposes, be applied on the basis that it excludes VAT for those organisations able to reclaim the VAT element, as detailed in Section 5.2 of Report B529; and*
- (5) *the two-year time lapse in which applicants may reapply to the RACIF also be applied to Parish Councils as well as community groups, as detailed in Section 5.3 of Report B529.*

RESOLVED:

That delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director for Community Services, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Grant Working Party, to produce a report for consideration by the Cabinet on 27 April 2011, containing proposals to enable both the RVHPAGS and RACIF schemes to become a single rural grant scheme, but ensuring the existing separate funding budgets and criteria for each scheme be retained and amended to incorporate the principles in Recommendations (1) to (5) above.

45. Dates of Future Meetings

The Working Party confirmed that future meetings in 2011 would be held on:-

7 June;
6 September;
15 November; and
6 December.

All meetings would be held on Tuesdays commencing at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 5.45 pm.

CHAIRMAN