

## **ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **GRANT WORKING PARTY**

#### **Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 5 March 2013 at 5.00 pm in Room GFR13, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

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

#### **19. Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared:

#### **20. Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor French.

#### **21. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **22. Declarations of Interests**

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

#### **23. Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme (RIGS): Application for Project Funding from Hopton Community Swimming Committee**

Hopton Community Swimming Committee had applied for a Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme grant towards the cost of refurbishing the swimming pool and changing facilities at Hopton Primary School. The application had been considered by the Working Party on 11 December 2012. At that meeting, Members had felt that they did not have enough information from the applicants to make a decision and the application was therefore deferred until this meeting, in order that officers could liaise with the applicants to obtain more detailed information.

The additional information had now been supplied and, together with a copy of the original report (Reference D219), was attached as Paper D317. The additional information included a list of answers from the applicants to specific questions drawn up by officers with the Vice-Chairman of the Working Party, estimated income and expenditure, and estimated budgets for the project. The overall estimated cost of the project was £56,448.60, inclusive of VAT. Officers further reported that Suffolk County Council had agreed in principle to leasing the swimming pool and changing rooms to the applicants for a minimum period of 10 years, although the lease had yet to be signed. The County Council had been asked to contribute financially to the project through its Corporate Regeneration Fund (CRF) with the applicants requesting 20% of the cost. Suffolk County Council had also provided officer time in assisting the formulation of the project. Hopton Primary School would be a user of the facility, as would other local schools who needed access to swimming facilities, and would not be contributing to the maintenance costs.

The applicants had confirmed that the initial planning application did not include the correct opening hours, and that they would be reapplying to request permission to extend the hours to: Monday to Friday, 9am to 2pm and Saturday and Sunday, 9am to 5pm. A decision on funding from Sport England was still being awaited. In response to a Member's question, advice was given that the cover for the swimming pool had been obtained from a redundant swimming pool at Tuddenham and the secondhand value of this had effectively saved £50,000 from the project costs. A concern was expressed that there may be difficulty in meeting the future running costs of the facility and in this event it was suggested that help might be sought from local parish councils.



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That a grant of £10,000 be awarded to the Hopton Community Swimming Committee towards the refurbishment of the swimming pool and changing room facilities at Hopton Primary School, subject to the Head of Economic Development and Growth being satisfied that:***

- (a) the leasehold of the facilities to Hopton Community Swimming Committee for a minimum period of 10 years;***
- (b) permission has been granted to extend the opening hours of the swimming pool and facilities for use by the community; and***
- (c) all other match funding is in place.***

**24. Streamlining Rural Grants Decision-Making**

The Working Party considered Report D318 (previously circulated) which had been prepared further to the request made by Cabinet for the Working Party 'To look at ways of further streamlining the current process of handling applications for Rural Initiatives Grants, perhaps making more use of the electronic system, and reviewing delegations'.

Following preliminary consideration of this matter at the meeting of the Working Party on 11 December 2012, background information on the level of awards made from RIGS funding had been made available to Working Party Members and Substitutes and they had been asked to provide comments.

Reflecting on the level of awards made from 2010/2011 to date and the current operation of the e-mail system, two of the Members responding to the request for comments had suggested extending the voting system to all applications for RIGS funding. The third response suggested that the work of the Working Party should be incorporated into the remit of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Under the current Grants Policy, grant applications for up to £5,000 were circulated via e-mail and, provided a majority of Members, including Substitutes where appropriate, agreed the grant was then approved by officers under delegated authority. This allowed decisions to be made within 14 days of receiving a fully completed application. Where there was not a majority, the application was then considered at the next meeting of the

Working Party. On the only occasion when this had happened, the decision not to make an award was confirmed at the meeting of the Working Party.

All applications for sums between £5,001 and £10,000 were currently considered by the Working Party at its next meeting. If received shortly after the previous meeting there could be a delay of almost 3 months before it was submitted to the Working Party, and a further 1 to 2 months for the recommendations from the Working Party were considered/confirmed by the Cabinet.

Spreadsheets, attached as Appendices A and B to the report, provided:

- (i) an overview of level of awards made over whole the life of the RIGS funding; and
- (ii) from the 2010/2011 financial year to date.

The figures at Appendix B showed that since April 2010, there had been seven applications in the £5,001 to £10,000 range requiring Working Party consideration while the great majority of applications, 31, had been dealt with via the e-mail system.

The report provided further discussion points regarding the two options put forward. Members were of the view that the extension of the e-mail system would require full information about applications for larger grants including a site plan and that there should be safeguards if there was not a consensus of view whether or not to award a grant. Councillor Nettleton spoke in favour of transferring the current decision-making process to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee because of the position of that Committee in having an overview of the Council's budget. He also referred to the values of opportunities for joint working and collective decision-making by elected Members in meetings. A reservation was expressed, however, that the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee would not have the time available to attend to details involved with applications for larger grants.



**RECOMMENDED:- That the following be approved:**

- (1) all applications for Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme funding be dealt with via the e-mail system, as detailed in Section 4 of Report D318, subject to the provisos:**
  - (a) that in the event that there is no consensus of agreement in the case of an individual application a special meeting of the Working Party be called to consider the matter; and**
  - (b) the system be subject to annual review at the meeting of the Working Party held in December of each year which will also consider Core Funding Grants.**
- (2) subject to (1) above, the Grants Policy and the scheme of delegation be amended to reflect the use of the e-mail system for grants up to the maximum of £10,000.**

**25. Date of Future Meeting**

The Working Party agreed that the date of the next meeting be rearranged from 10 December 2013 to Thursday 5 December 2013 at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded 5.30 pm.

**MRS S O BROUGHTON  
CHAIRMAN**