

# Proposed Changes to the Council's Community Chest Grant Fund

<b>Report number:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/24/025</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	21 May 2024
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**Decisions Plan:** The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

**Wards impacted:** All wards within West Suffolk

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1. Agree the proposals as outlined in Section 3. of Report number CAB/WS/24/025.**
- 2. Agree the role of the Grant Working Party be retained for consideration of the Thriving Communities Fund, making recommendations to Cabinet.**

## 1. Background

- 1.1 West Suffolk Council, and its predecessor councils, has had grant funding available for allocation to community and voluntary sector groups, in later years through the 'Community Chest' fund.
- 1.2 A number of changes have been made over the years to the funding criteria and the application process, with the most recent significant changes being made following a Grant Review in 2019. This review was led by the Grant Working Party, with recommendations to Cabinet (paper CAB/WS/19/042 refers).
- 1.3 Following discussions on suggestions for improving the process at the Grant Working Party meeting on 8 January 2024 it was agreed that members would email officers directly with their suggestions, comments and views which would assist in capturing the proposed changes to the process to be considered.
- 1.4 A further Grant Working Party meeting on 20 March 2024 was presented with a draft proposal outlining changes to the grant process, these changes represented feedback from members as well as discussion between the portfolio holder and members.
- 1.5 Based on comments discussed at the Grant Working Party, as part of the 2023-2024 process, a number of recommended changes are set out in this report. These recommendations are made on the basis that the total available fund remains at £466,733.
- 1.6 This report sets out proposals to launch the 'Thriving Communities Funding' in July this year, as a successor to the Community Chest, which, Locality Budgets will come under and will provide a total of £645,953 available to West Suffolk's community and voluntary organisations to develop thrive and provide much needed support for our communities.

## 2. Principles

- 2.1 When considering changes, any grant funding allocation or process needs to meet the following principles:
  - a. Fair, transparent and accessible,
  - b. Support the delivery of the Council's Strategic Priorities,
  - c. Be in accordance with requirements of procurement and contract rules,
  - d. Be proportionate in terms of administration to applicants and the council,
  - e. Provide certainty and confidence to applicants,
  - f. There is unlikely to be enough money to fund all applicants, so support will continue to be provided to organisations to find alternative funding through the Council's Community Team.

### 3. Proposed Changes

3.1 Based on feedback and the principles outlined in paragraph two above, in summary, these are:

- Fund Citizens Advice West Suffolk through a three-year grant agreement (to be agreed) to the total of £200,000 funding per year.
- Remaining £266,733 to be allocated through a 'Thriving Communities' grant scheme, with two levels of funding available for smaller and larger projects.
- Continue to administer £179,220 to West Suffolk communities via Locality budgets.

3.2 The rationale for these changes is summarised below.

3.2.1 **Citizens Advice West Suffolk Grant Agreement – £200,000 a year for three years:** For a number of years, Citizens Advice (CA) West Suffolk has received the largest share of funding from Community Chest. Given the importance of the CA to the council in terms of its support to residents, and the fact this service reduces demand which may otherwise be managed by the council, it would be sensible to provide the CA with certainty over the funding and support for its work that we will provide each year. This will be achieved through a grant agreement (to be agreed) which would mean the CA would no longer be required to apply for funding.

3.2.2 To ensure transparency and accountability, funding to the CA would be allocated through a Grant Agreement which would set out, in detail, what outcomes the council wishes the CA to achieve with the funding as well as the monitoring arrangements.

3.2.3 It is recommended the Grant Agreement should be for £200,000 per year for the period April 2025 to March 2028 (this would cover the first term of an administration following elections to provide certainty to the CA and allow sufficient time for a new administration to consider its options).

3.2.4 The Grant Agreement would cover core costs only and should the CA wish to develop further initiatives (which could potentially support the delivery of the council's priorities) then it could apply to the 'Thriving Communities' fund (see below).

3.2.5 **Thriving Communities fund - £266,733:** The remainder of the budget would be made available through a Thriving Communities fund. This would be an annual open application process (similar to Community Chest).

3.2.6 The aim would be to ensure that smaller groups are able to bid into the fund (which has been consistent feedback from many councillors) but for larger amounts than the councillors' locality budget.

- 3.2.7 The fund, which is revenue and capital, would have two levels of application:
- 3.2.8 Smaller projects: open for smaller community groups focusing on local projects, benefiting the local community, working with trusted/established groups. Funding one off projects £2,000 to £8,000.
- 3.2.9 Larger projects: Available for larger projects, ongoing projects, benefitting the district as a whole or part of the district/the town/village as a whole. Funding projects between £8,001 to £20,000 and the project could be for two-years (no more than £20,000 ie: apply for £20,000 - £10,000 for each year).
- 3.2.10 Allocation of the £266,733 would be split between the two funds to fairly represent the level of applications we would expect for each based on the applications from this years and last year's Community Chest process:
- a) Over £20,001 equated to 14% of the total
  - b) Over £8,001 and up to £20,000 equated to 56% of the total
  - c) Under £8,000 equated to 30% of the total
- 3.2.11 Changes would be made to the application process for the Thriving Communities fund, these changes would be based on feedback from Grant Working Party and consider the following:
- a) Focus on strategic priorities,
  - b) Scoring matrix to reflect the application more for example, priorities, value for money, prior engagement,
  - c) Clearer understanding of the financial ask – management costs, what they are asking for, who they have received grants from,
  - d) If receiving part funding what impact will this have on the project's viability,
  - e) Engagement – to include all engagement with consideration of engagement with ward councillors and Parish and Town Councils,
  - f) New application form, which would have to be revised guidance and clear matrix scoring.
- 3.2.12 Any changes to the application process, guidance and scoring matrix will be drafted and agreed by the chair of Grant Working Party and the Portfolio Holder, with support from officers, in time for the launch of the Thriving Communities fund in June/July 2024.
- 3.2.13 **Locality Budgets - £179,200:** No changes have been made to Locality budgets. Each Councillor will continue to be allocated £2,800 for Locality Budgets to support community groups in their wards.

## **4. Role of the Grant Working Party**

- 4.1 Grant Working Party is vital in the consideration of applications and making recommendations to Cabinet. It provides a useful checking process and ensures wider engagement in the allocation of funding.
- 4.2 It also assists with the monitoring of outcomes, and that could include support for monitoring the CA Grant Agreement. The process through Grant Working Party should, therefore, be retained for the new Thriving Communities Fund.

## **5. Next steps**

- 5.1 To finalise the guidance and application process for Thriving Communities fund to launch in June/July 2024.
- 5.2 To develop a grant agreement with Citizens Advice ensuring that all necessary legal steps are undertaken.
- 5.3 To develop a communications plan highlighting the changes to the application process and proposed changes contained in this report.

## **6. Consultation and engagement undertaken**

- 6.1 Engagement has taken place with members of the Grant Working Party, as well as Cabinet members.
- 6.2 Engagement has taken place with external organisations that are affected by the proposed changes.

## **7. Risks associated with the proposals**

- 7.1 Organisations are not aware of the changes to the grant process, which equates to a medium risk. Control – to implement a wide-ranging communication plan.
- 7.2 Requests for funding exceed the amount of money available, equates to a medium risk. Control – revised eligibility criteria and evaluation scoring matrix to be used to identify best fit and value for money.

## **8. Implications arising from the proposals**

- 8.1 Financial – No implications as funding levels remain unchanged.

- 8.2 Legal compliance – Legal advice has been sought in terms of proposed changes and possible implications which are outlined in the report.
- 8.3 Personal data processing – no implications arise from this report, however personal contact details contained in applications are held by the council for internal use only. As non-decision making body, the meetings of the Grant Working Party are not held in public.
- 8.4 Equalities – The Council’s approach to grants has been subject of an Equality Impact Assessment and no negative consequences have been identified.
- 8.5 Crime and disorder – no implications
- 8.6 Safeguarding – no implications
- 8.7 Environment or sustainability – no implications
- 8.8 HR or staffing – no implications
- 8.9 Changes to existing policies – no implications although changes will be made to the existing terms of reference if proposals agreed.
- 8.10 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – engagement with those external organisations impacted by the proposed changes has taken place.

## **9. Appendices referenced in this report**

- 9.1 None

## **10. Background documents associated with this report**

- 10.1 Recommendations of the Grants to External Organisations Review [Report number CAB/WS/19/042](#) (Cabinet: 26 November 2019)