

Scrutiny committee

Report of Head of Corporate Strategy

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Capital and New Homes Bonus grant schemes

Recommendations:

- (a) that the committee notes the combined performance statistics for the capital and new homes bonus grant schemes shown at appendix one of the report.
- (b) that the committee comments on the proposed amendments to the grant policies and procedures.

Purpose of Report

1. To note the impact of the new capital and new homes bonus grant policies introduced in 2015 and to comment on some additional policy changes now that we've used them to administer two rounds of funding.

Strategic Objectives

2. These grant schemes contribute to our strategic objective to support community groups under the 'Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing' section of our 2016-2020 corporate plan.

Background

3. Following a review of the grant schemes in early 2015/16 the cabinet member for grants approved policy changes in August 2015.

4. At the December 2015 council meeting the cabinet member for grants agreed to review the impact of the changes to the scheme in early 2016 and to review whether the method for allocating the capital grant budget is appropriate.
5. The cabinet member for grants has completed the review of the impact of the policy changes and would like to share the following information with the scrutiny committee:

Statistics

6. Appendix one shows combined performance charts for both schemes in 2014/15 (pre-changes) and 2015/16 (post-changes).
7. It is not possible to compare detailed area committee information due to the change in the number of area committees in 2015.
8. Some interesting points to note during 2015/16 are:
 - we removed the £5,000 maximum grant award amount and over 41 per cent of our awards were over £5,000
 - the area committees also reviewed and amended the officer scores as part of their decision making for the first time; they agreed with over 90 per cent of the officer scores
 - when the area committees changed the officer scores, they were all increased and this meant that all but one organisation moved into a higher grant award category
 - the most common areas that the committees changed the scores in were community benefit and new facilities. This was usually due to receipt of additional information from applicants at the committee meetings.

Policy amendments

9. Following feedback from area committee members and the grants team the cabinet member intends making the following further amendments to the policies:
 - that the capital grant budget is allocated to the area committees at the start of the financial year instead of after each round of funding
 - that any organisations awarded over £10,000 must enter into a grant agreement
 - financial requests covering multiple committees are split equally between them
 - that awards for over £25,000 are paid in three stages instead of two, to improve cash flow for applicants
 - that the policy includes details of when area committee decisions are subject to call-in (organisations awarded more than £25,000 across both schemes during a round of funding)
 - that we include minimum periods that we would usually expect a capital facility to last (a minimum of five years for grants of up to £10,000 and a minimum of ten years for grants over £10,000) and that the same work will not be funded again until after that period of time has passed

- that we won't accept applications for projects we've previously rejected, unless they have made significant improvements in the areas that prompted the committee's rejection
- that the ownership/lease requirement for organisations asking for less than £25,000 are that they either own the property or that they have a lease with at least ten years left on the term, unless they are purchasing mobile equipment they could take to new premises.
- that the scoring matrix is amended and redesigned to:
 - combine the funding information and the organisations financial contribution scores as there is some overlap in these areas
 - include more detail for each scoring category and include reasons for deducting or awarding extra points in certain cases

Procedure amendments

- officers will show the area committee's budget on the display screen at their meetings, so that members can see the rolling budget total as awards are determined
- evaluation reports will include a breakdown of the costs for combined projects (e.g. a project to buy play equipment and make building improvements)
- evaluation report templates will include a section to explain where any points are deducted from the scores and/or significant risks identified
- to improve readability, the 'applicant responses' section of the evaluation report template will have a border to separate them instead of being shaded.

CG Budget allocation

10. The current method for allocating the budget, which we've used since the scheme began in 2012, uses a combination of both population, the number of parishes and the number of councillors in each town, to divide the budget between the area committees (see the current policy for full details).
11. The cabinet member has completed a review of the budget allocation methodology and is satisfied that the current methodology is reasonable and appropriate.

Financial Implications

12. In February 2016, the council approved the 2016/17 budget for the grant schemes.
13. The existing grant policies state how the budgets are allocated between the area committees.

Legal Implications

14. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Other considerations

15. In line with the public sector equality duties of the Equality Act 2010, we have reviewed the proposed changes to the scheme and are satisfied that the changes will not have any negative impact on those protected by the Act.

Conclusion

16. Officers and the cabinet member for grants welcome comments on the performance statistics and proposed changes to the policies and procedures.

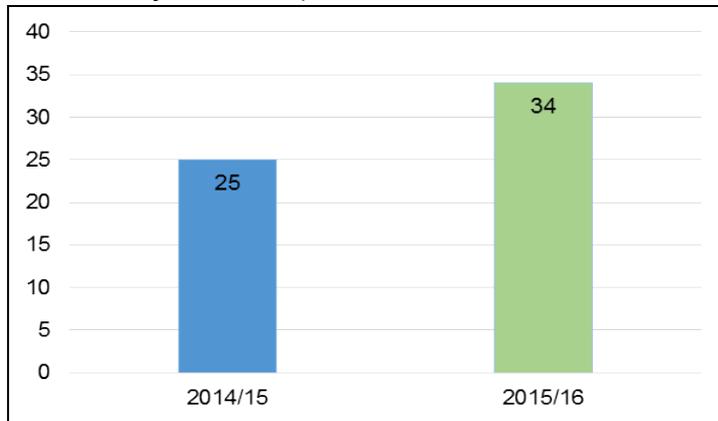
Background Papers

Capital grant policy (approved August 2015)

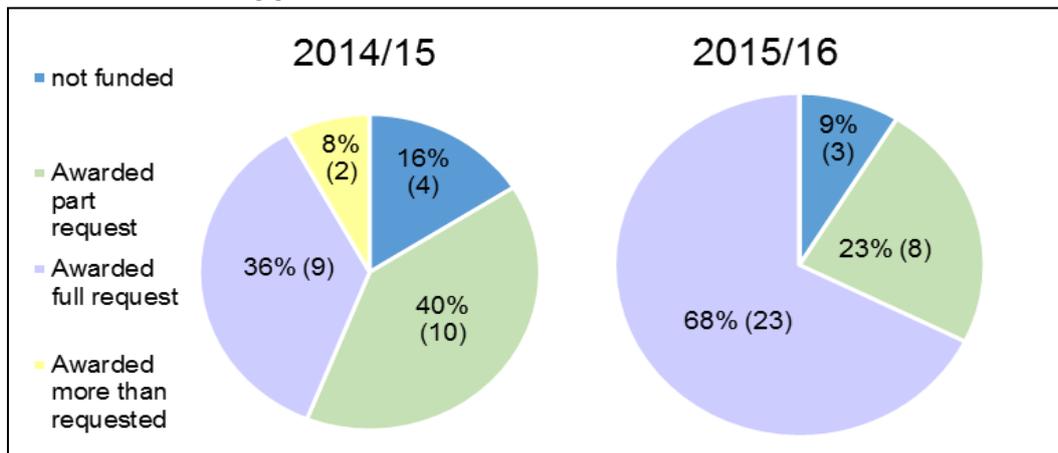
NHB grant policy (approved August 2015)

APPENDIX ONE – performance charts

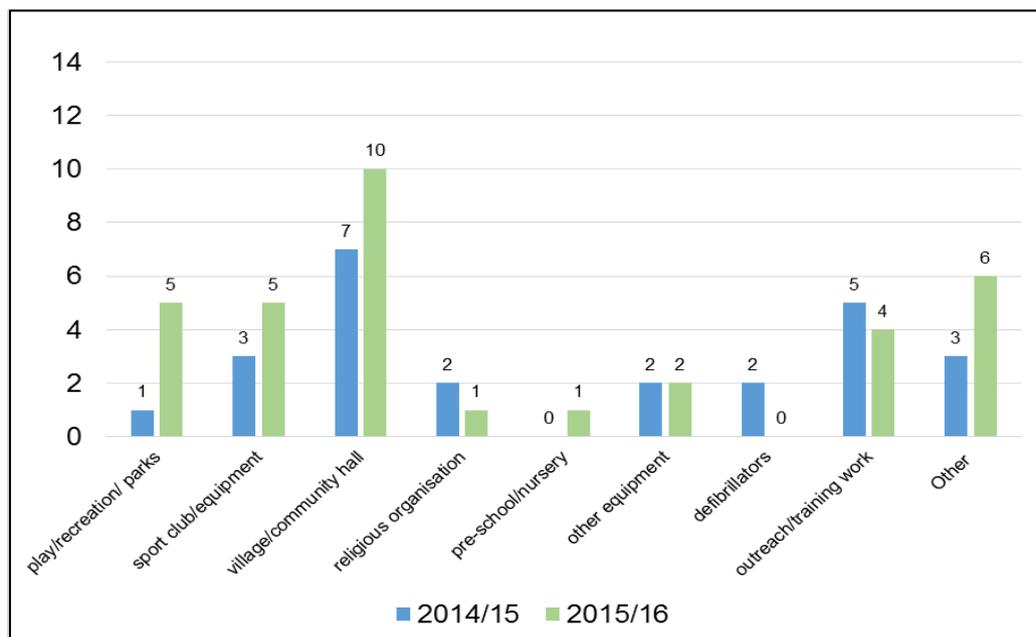
Total number of organisations who applied for NHB and/or CG grants (but not necessarily awarded)



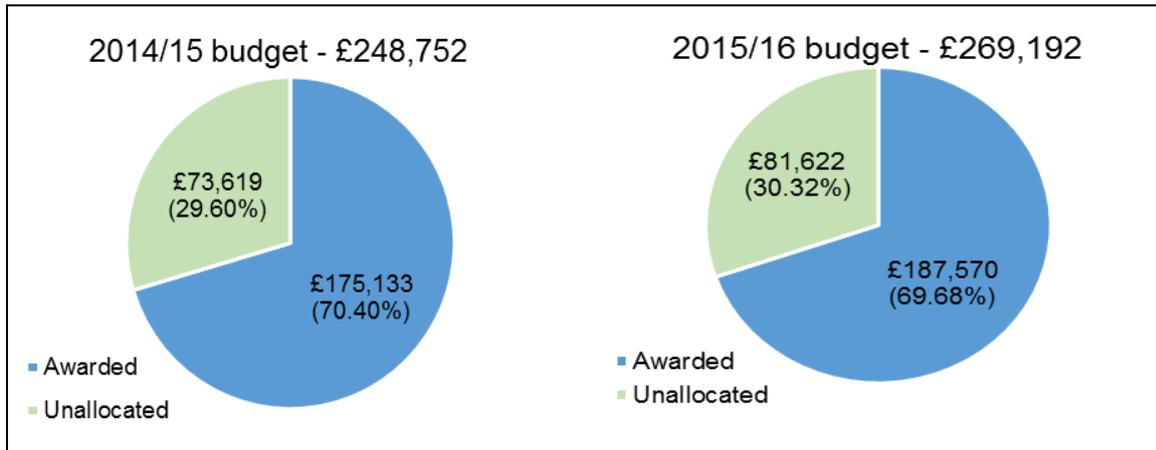
Breakdown of application results



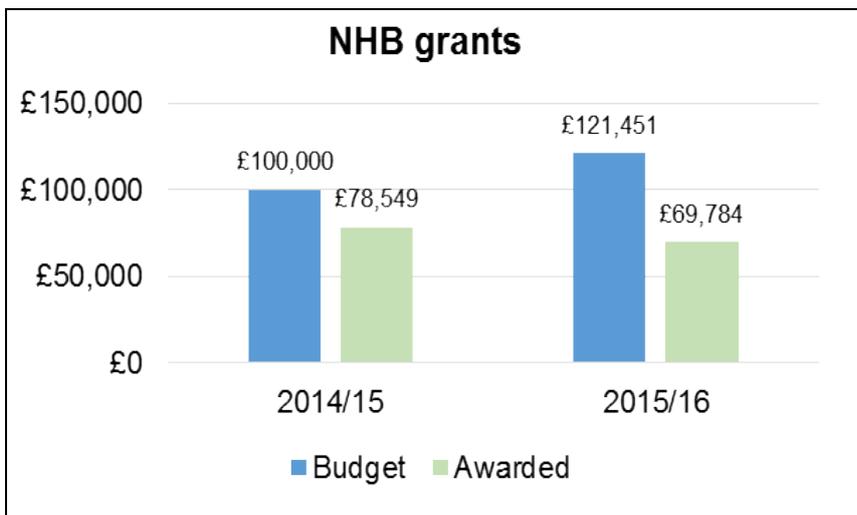
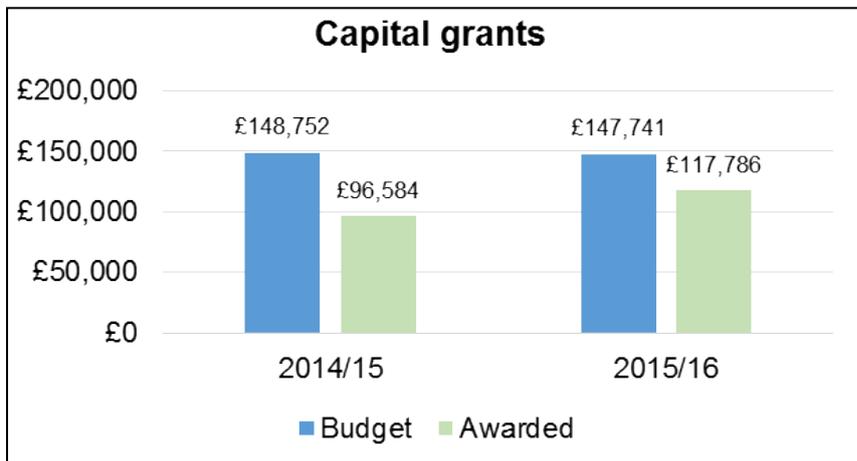
Types of project applying (not necessarily awarded)



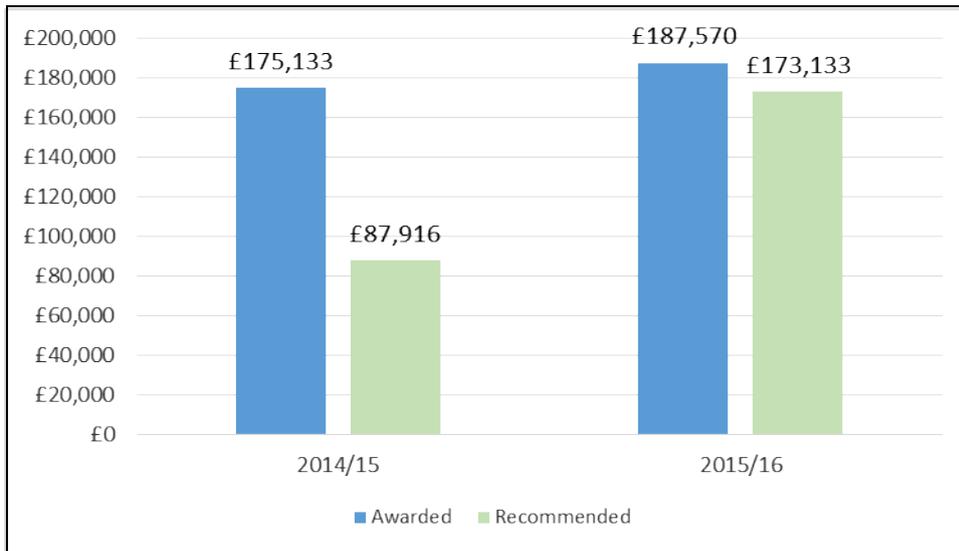
Budget update (shows percentage of budget awarded each year). All unallocated budgets from 2015/16 were returned to general reserves at the year-end.



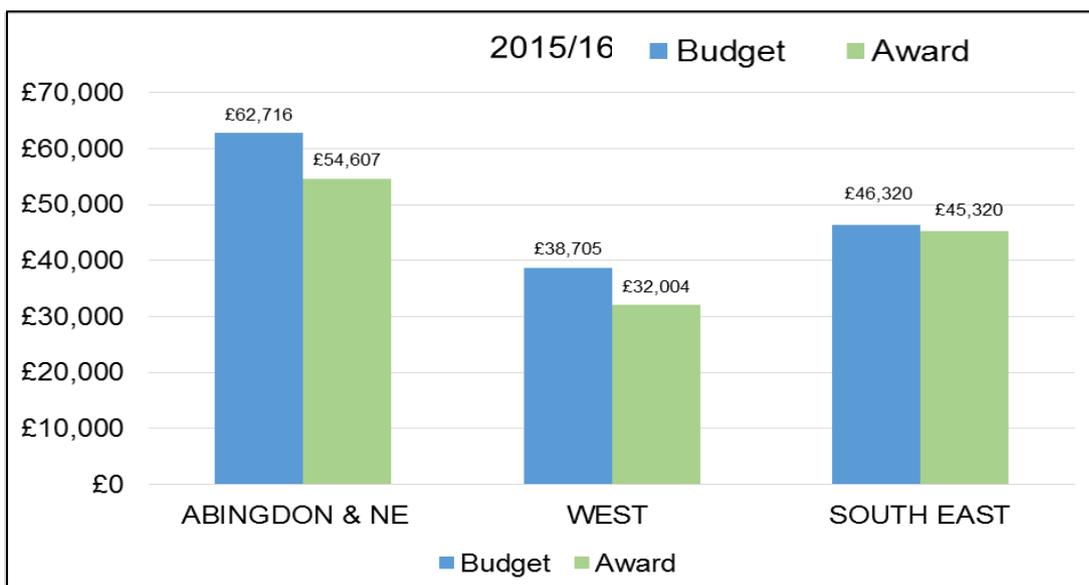
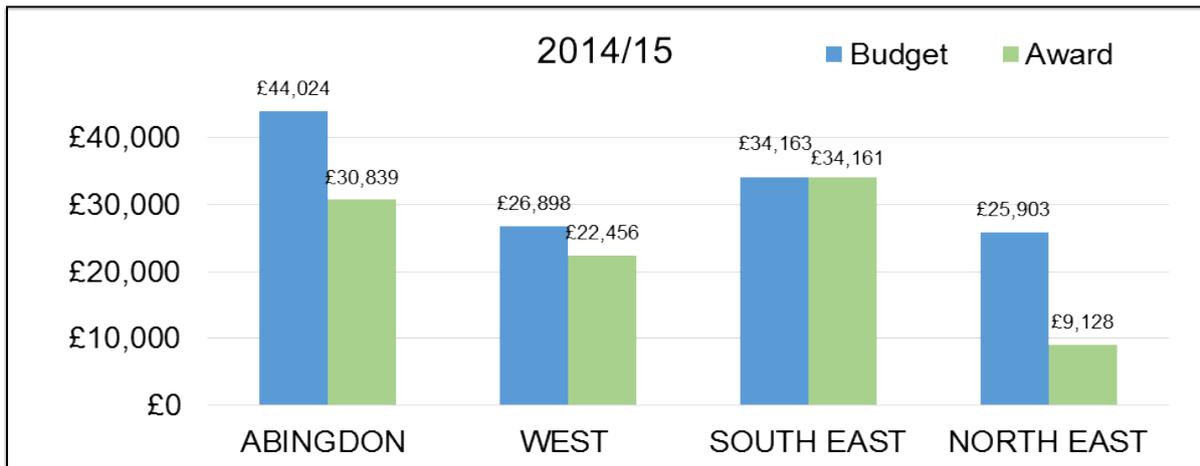
Budget update by grant scheme



Difference between actual awards and officer recommendations (the 2014/15 recommendation figure is low as officers didn't make NHB award recommendations until 2015/16).



Capital grant budget spends by each area committee



New homes bonus grant budget spends by each area committee

