

Briefing note to Cabinet

1 June 2012

Capital community grants scheme

At its meeting held on Thursday 24 May 2012, the Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed capital community grants scheme. Below is an extract from the draft minutes of that meeting, setting out recommendations to Cabinet on the new scheme.

“The committee considered the head of corporate strategy’s report on a new capital community grants scheme. The committee was asked for its views on the new scheme ahead of Cabinet considering the same report on 1 June.

Before it did so, the committee heard a question from Councillor Dudley Hoddinott. He asked how the cost of capital projects would be broken down when the largest component was often labour? The officers reported that the whole capital cost of a project, including labour, would be considered as capital expenditure when determining each application.

The committee noted that this was a new scheme, offering grants to constituted community groups for capital schemes. The scheme did not offer grants to cover running costs, i.e. revenue costs. However, the committee noted that a small budget would be available for some revenue grants through a separate scheme, the details of which had yet to be determined.

The committee made the following suggestions:

- The council should provide examples of capital projects that might be successful under the new scheme as the public might not be aware of the difference between capital and revenue expenditure in local government terms
- The council should inform applicants that there would be a separate revenue grants scheme at a later date
- Applications should be allowed from charitable bodies and community interest companies
- Area committees should consider the grant applications. (One councillor suggested an alternative to the area committees distributing grants funds, believing that councillors should each have an amount to spend on projects in their ward as they thought fit. However, this suggestion did not receive the committee’s support, as this would

result in each councillor having a very small budget. The committee considered that it would be better to pool resources and determine grants collectively through area committees.)

- Area committees could initiate their own schemes. The committee considered that these schemes must be subject to a formal agreement for ownership, liability and future maintenance, for example, perhaps through the formal involvement of a third party
- The scheme eligibility criteria needed clarification on the difference between items such as repairs, maintenance, and professional fees, which were not normally eligible for capital grants, and refurbishment, which might be
- Each applicant should always obtain support of their parish or town council, and ideally an appropriate financial contribution
- Where an area committee was in support of a scheme that had not met all of the criteria (e.g. had yet to obtain planning permission or achieve parish/town council support), the committee should delegate approval of a grant, subject to the criteria/conditions being met. Authority should be delegated to the strategic director/head of service, following consultation with the relevant area committee chairman
- The scheme eligibility criteria should be amended to read 'applications will *normally* be considered if organisations/projects meet the following eligibility criteria...'
- The committee strongly preferred budget allocation option 2: funds to be allocated to area committees on a per councillor basis (10 votes), over option 3 (2 votes) and option 1 (no votes)
- The councillor numbers for each area should not be shown as actual councillor places on each committee as the Hanneys and Longworth wards were split between two areas. The councillor numbers should be amended to read: Abingdon 16, North East 11.5, South East 15, West 8.5
- Where an area committee does not spend its capital grants budget during a year, this should be carried forward to the following year, if capital accounting rules allow

Finally, the committee asked to review the detailed guidance to applicants for this scheme, either at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting or by other means before the guidance was published.

RESOLVED: To

- (a) recommend Cabinet to consider the suggestions in the above bullet points before approving the new capital community grants scheme; and
- (b) request that the Scrutiny Committee be permitted to review the detailed guidance for this scheme before the guidance is published."