

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR & MONITORING OFFICER
TO EXECUTIVE
5TH JANUARY 2007

Delegation of the Determination of Community Grant Applications

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is, to propose a process whereby community grant applications can be determined using delegated powers to the contentment of the whole of the membership of an Area Committee.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared as a result of the recommendation by the Council's Constitution Advisory Group on the 28th September 2006 and the subsequent approval by Council, on 18th October 2006, of an addition to the scheme of delegation.
- 1.3 The contact officer for this report is Toby Warren, Head of Community Strategy (Tel: 01235 547695).

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 *Members are requested to approve that when the total value of community grants applied for is less than £ 4,000 the relevant area committee meeting should be cancelled and the grant applications should be determined by email (or post if an elected member does not have email).*
- 2.2 *Members are requested to approve the proposed process for the determination of grants by email (which is described in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.13).*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- 3.1 This report supports the Council's Vision and Aims
- 3.2 It does not conflict with any Council strategy or any Council policy.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 All applications for community grants of more than £ 500 are decided by the Council's Executive Committee (when a grant application has district wide implications) or one of its Area Committees (West, North East, South East and Abingdon). These committees are made up of elected district councillors.
- 4.2 Community grant applications for less than £500 are not normally presented at a committee meeting. These applications are determined by officers, using delegated authority in consultation with the Chair of the relevant committee.
- 4.3 In the past year there have been several occasions when the main item on an area committee's agenda has been the determination of community grant applications but only one or two grant applications require determination or the total value of the grant applications has been less than £ 4,000.
- 4.4 In these circumstances the costs of room hire, officer time and officers' and elected members' travelling expenses means that it is difficult to justify the holding of a meeting.

- 4.5 However it is important that all community grant applications are determined with due consideration in a timely way to ensure that applicants do not have to wait unduly for a decision about a grant application. A delayed decision could delay the start of a project which is very important for the local community.
- 4.6 The Council's Constitution Advisory Group recommended on 28th September 2006 ' that the Area Committees be invited to amend their delegation to allow a small number of applications to be dealt with under delegated authority or by agreement outside of a meeting.'
- 4.7 On 18th October 2006 Council approved the following addition to the scheme of delegation:
- Deputy Director Planning and Community Strategy; Executive Functions:
 - To approve applications for community grants made to an Area Committee (to) the contentment of the whole of the membership of the Area Committee
- 4.8 The Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer advises that the aim of the delegation is that an Area Committee grant of any value can now be approved without the necessity to call a meeting. The Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer also advises that the Deputy Director, Planning and Community Strategy can further delegate this function to the Head of Community Strategy. The Deputy Director has confirmed this further delegation in writing.
- 4.9 The next section of this report proposes a process by which the delegation can be exercised to the contentment of the whole of the membership of the Area Committee.

5.0 The Proposed Process for Determination by Email

- 5.1 If by 15 working days before the scheduled date of the area committee meeting no grant applications have been received or the total value of grants applied for is less than £ 4,000 the meeting will be cancelled subject to the approval of the Chair of the relevant Area Committee.
- 5.2 If at this time there are applications that have been received (but in total the value of grants applied for is less than £ 4,000) officers will prepare a short narrative report and recommendation for each application.
- 5.3 The narrative must include any written statement that the applicant wishes to submit and the recommendation must include:
- Advice to approve or decline the application (there must be a reason for the advice that makes reference to the Council's priorities, the Area Committee's priorities and the community grant scheme criteria.)
- If approval is recommended:
- Advice on amount of grant to offer
 - Advice on any special conditions that must be satisfied before the grant is paid
- 5.4 The report and recommendation will be discussed with the chair of the committee and the relevant ward councillors. The committee chair and ward councillors can request amendments to the recommendation. The committee chair and/or ward councillors for the affected town or parish can request that the application is deferred until the next committee meeting.
- 5.5 Officers then circulate the report and recommendation to members of the committee by e-mail (or post if a member does not have e-mail). Members will be requested to respond within 5 working days of despatch. A majority of committee members must respond. If a member does not respond within this time period it will be assumed that the member has abstained from making a decision.

- 5.6 Members responding should indicate any personal or prejudicial interest and whether they are for or against; or propose an amendment of any part of the recommendation. Responses against or proposed amendments should include a short explanation of the member's decision.
- 5.7 If a majority of members responding are for or against the full recommendation the applicant will be advised accordingly. In the case of an equality of responses the chair's response will be casting.
- 5.8 If a majority of members responding are for a recommendation to approve an application but propose amendment of the amount of grant or conditions the applicant will be advised that the committee has been 'approved in principle' and the applicant can commence the project (which is the subject of the application) at their own risk. The final determination of the application will be deferred to the next committee meeting.
- 5.9 The intention will be that applications are determined or deferred by the date on which the committee would have met, had the meeting not been cancelled. It is important that applicants are not disadvantaged or inconvenienced by the cancellation of a meeting.
- 5.10 Details of decisions made by e-mail will be reported at the next meeting of the committee. The minutes of this meeting will be published on the Council's website.
- 5.11 If a committee meeting is cancelled and grant applications are determined by email the next scheduled meeting of the committee should take place, regardless of the number or value of grant applications to be determined at the meeting.
- 5.12 It is not intended that the decision by email process should be used to fast track applications so that they are determined before the date of the next scheduled committee meeting. However if an applicant makes a clear case that an application is urgent (e.g. property repairs need to be carried to reduce the risk of property damage) officers, following consultation with the chair of the relevant area committee, can use the decision by email process.
- 5.13 The decision by email process can also be used by the Executive if there is a clear case that a grant application that will be determined by the Executive needs to be determined before the date of the next scheduled Executive meeting.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 When the total value of grants applied for is less than £ 4,000 the determination by email process will allow a meeting to be cancelled. This is a cost efficiency but applicants are not disadvantaged or inconvenienced by the cancellation of a meeting.
- 6.2 The cancellation of an Area Committee meeting because there are insufficient matters requiring decisions by members does not preclude members of a committee (through the chair) requesting officers to convene a meeting of the area forum (which is not a decision making body) in order to discuss matters of interest with local communities. Forums can be organised at a lower cost because they are not decision making bodies and do not require the attendance of a democratic services officer.

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