

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

11 April 2023

CLlr David Smith, Community Safety & Engagement, and Regulatory  
Services

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Community Funding Grants Framework</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<p>Joanne Barrett, Assistant Director Housing &amp; Communities, joanne.barrett@westnorthants.gov.uk</p> <p>Vicki Rockall, Head of Community Safety, Engagement &amp; Resettlement, victoria.rockall@westnorthants.gov.uk</p> <p>Peter Worth, Community Funding Officer, peter.worth@westnorthants.gov.uk</p>

## Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Catherine Whitehead	15/03/2023
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	15/03/2023
<b>Other Director/SME</b>	Jane Carr, Director of Communities and Opportunities	15/03/2023
<b>Communications Lead/Head of Communications</b>	Becky Hutson, Head of Communications	15/03/2023

## List of Appendices

Appendix A - Community Funding Grants Framework

Appendix B - Terms of Reference for the Community Funding Panel

## 1. Purpose of Report

---

- 1.1 The report sets out the proposed principles and criteria that will inform how the Council will award community funding grants from 2023/24 to the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 1.2 The report sets out the proposed framework for how the Council will determine who is eligible to apply for community funding and the standards that will be applied to all grant schemes administered by the Council under a single community funding grants banner.
- 1.3 The report seeks the approval of Cabinet Members for the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework.

## **2. Executive Summary**

---

- 2.1 The report outlines the reasons for moving to a Community Funding Grants Framework for 2023/24.
- 2.2 The report sets out the recommended funding principles and standards that will be applied to determine all future community funding grant awards made by the Council to the Voluntary and Community Sector.

## **3. Recommendations**

---

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - a) Approve the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework for West Northamptonshire Council for implementation from 2023/24.
  - b) Approve the composition of the Community Funding Panel and the role of the Cross-party Advisory Group.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

---

- Following Vesting Day, the Council has had in place an interim Community Funding Grants Policy approved by Cabinet for use until March 2023. This Policy was for the operation of a single grant scheme that combined the district and borough councils' legacy community funding grants and budgets into a single WNC Community Funding Grant Scheme.
- Over the past two years, it has become apparent that our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) have had different expectations and understandings of the use and purpose of this now single grant. There has also been other funding made available to these voluntary and community organisations, which while a welcome investment in prevention, has been aligned to the interim Community Funding Grant Policy without a clear remit from Cabinet.
- There is now the opportunity to align all community funding into a single framework that will embrace current and future community funding grant awards. This will standardise the approach across the Council and ensure a fair, accessible, open and transparent process. Therefore, Cabinet approval is sought to enable Officers to launch the Community Funding

Grants Framework and for this to be applied to community funding that voluntary and community organisations can apply for going forward.

- The recommendation to implement a Community Funding Grants Framework will provide a consistent approach to the grant awards made by the Council and make it clear what the expectations of the Council are for projects to be considered for funding via a set of principles and standards. These principles and standards apply to both the VCS and to any Officers considering funding requests.
- The Community Funding Grants Framework will enable the Council to take a more strategic and targeted approach to grant funding investment into the VCS , ensuring that all awards are aligned to meet identified needs and the Councils corporate priorities.
- The level of grants to a voluntary or community organisation under this proposal will fall below the Council's Scheme of Delegation limits for Officers No grant award will therefore be classified as a Key Decision of the Council.
- The Cabinet, on approval of the Community Funding Grants Framework, will have determined the strategic direction of all community funding to the VCS which will be tracked and reported to members periodically to ensure transparency for all stakeholders.
- The recommendation to approve the composition and ongoing role of the Cross-party Advisory Group extends their advisory role into all future Community Funding Grant Schemes.

## **5. Report Background**

---

- 5.1 Community funding is a mechanism for the Council to support local voluntary and community organisations with grant awards that enable them to deliver important services and activities to our communities. The Community Funding Grants Framework, and the funding principles and standards that apply, are aligned to the Council's corporate priorities, and through awarding community funding grants the Council benefits by means of adding additional resources (through local partner organisations) and the ability to reach those residents most in need.
- 5.2 The decision to recommend a new Community Funding Grants Framework for West Northamptonshire Council will provide better consistency of decision making for VCS grant awards and avoid grant awards being made without a governing framework aligned to the Council's priorities. Without a Cabinet approved framework there is a potential risk to the Council of challenge from unsuccessful applicants.
- 5.3 A single transparent framework approach will provide an improved offer to the VCS by defining a single Directorate Departmental point of contact, a clear timescale for applications and categories for bids. It will also ensure consistency across the Council of funding principles, standards and determination criteria.

- 5.4 The Community Funding Grants Framework would mean that that new Council VCS grants offered by the Council would be made under the Community Funding Grants Framework from 2023/24.
- 5.5 This Community Funding Grants Framework will be reviewed at least once a year. This can be reviewed more frequently, if necessary, to ensure that the Council's corporate plan, strategic aims, objectives and priorities are appropriately reflected within the assessment criteria.
- 5.6 The new framework defines the characteristics that a voluntary or community organisation must have to be eligible to apply for a Community Funding Grant and sets out the funding principles, which include an assessment of:
- need;
  - reach;
  - outcome;
  - sustainability;
  - value for money;
  - other sources of funding / match funding; and
  - levels of monitoring and evaluation required to demonstrate the grant has been spent in the right way, value for money has been achieved, and the required results have been delivered.
- 5.7 It also defines the funding standards that all community funding grants will adhere to. These standards cover the following areas:
- promotion;
  - the Council's priorities (corporate plan, strategic aims, objectives and priorities);
  - evaluation criteria;
  - due diligence levels;
  - determination process;
  - what will and will not be funded; and
  - application processes.
- 5.8 The proposed Community Funding Grant Framework's sets a determination process where all grants will be determined by a Community Funding Panel. The membership of the Panel will consist of Officers (including the Community Funding Officer and / or the Lead Officer), Sector Specialists (as required), and a Cross-party Advisory Group.
- 5.9 Officers will make recommendations to award a grant to the Community Funding Panel Chair supported by a clear rationale as defined by the Framework. This also avoids any perceived concern about any political favouritism or bias in making recommendations related to an area or VCS offer.
- 5.10 The role of the Sector Specialists will be to support or discount approval to fund an application based on the knowledge of their respective areas and the criteria defined in the Community Funding Grants Framework.
- 5.11 The Community Funding Officer (or Lead Officer) will present the recommendations to award grant funding to the Panel Chair. The decision to agree a recommendation to award grant

funding is made by the Panel Chair. The Panel Chair will be a Head of Service (or equivalent) or higher grade.

- 5.12 Cabinet will set the strategic direction of these Community Funding Grants through its decision to approve the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework, which is aligned to the Council's corporate priorities and has been supported by the cross-party members group.
- 5.13 The role of the Cross-party Advisory Group going forward is to ensure adherence to the Framework and that the grants awarded are distributed in a fair and equitable manner. The Chair of the Community Funding Panel is responsible for making the decision to award a grant, in full or in part, following the recommendation of the Community Funding Officer (or Lead Officer), the views of the Sectors Specialists, and the view of the Cross-party Advisory Group.
- 5.14 The proposal is that the Community Funding Grants Framework will be reviewed at least once a year to ensure it remains fit for purpose. It can be reviewed more frequently, if necessary, for example, to ensure that the Council's, strategic aims, objectives and priorities are appropriately reflected in the Community Funding Grants assessment criteria.

## 6. Issues and Choices

---

- 6.1 **Continuing without a Community Funding Grants Framework.** This model would see decision making and awarding of community funding implemented on a Directorate / Departmental basis across the Council with little coordination. This option is not recommended for reasons including:
- there will be different funding policies, principles and standards applied to these grants;
  - there will be an increased risk of challenge due to inconsistencies of officer decision making without a framework being in place;
  - risk of duplicating funding to organisations and/or projects; and
  - inconsistency for ensuring these grants address the Council's corporate plan, strategic aims, objectives and priorities.
- 6.2 **Not to approve the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework.** This would lead to the Council having no mechanism to guide community funding grant awards, therefore having a detrimental effect on the consistency and quality of our decision making which is likely to be detrimental to the VCS and residents of West Northamptonshire.
- 6.3 **Equalities Impact Assessment.** An Equalities Impact Assessment screening form has been completed to assess the impact of the Community Funding Grants Framework.

## 7. Implications (including financial implications)

---

### 7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. By reallocating the administrative resources to carry out this function from other Directorates within the Council, like Public Health and Wellbeing and Health and Integrated Care, the financial impact will be cost neutral. Any additional resources that might be needed will be met within existing salary budgets.

## 7.2 **Legal**

Community Funding Grants will be considered in the context of the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework, the terms and conditions of the grants scheme, and the budgetary control processes and approval limits under the Scheme of Delegation. Officers can approve Community Funding Grants under the delegation limits within the Constitution to the value of £1 million.

## 7.3 **Risk**

7.3.1 Should the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework not be approved by Cabinet there will remain no mechanism to deliver community funding grant awards to the VCS in West Northamptonshire.

7.3.2 Reputational risk for the Council in being seen as not sufficiently supporting the work of the VCS by not providing financial support through grant awards.

7.3.3 Reputational risk for the Council as it will be seen as having removed a source of funding that the previous sovereign councils provided to the VCS and the Council provided under the interim Community Funding Grants Policy until March 2023.

7.3.4 Long term sustainability of the VCS and their ability to remain operational. The closure of voluntary and community organisations would impact on the Council by increasing demand on essential community, health and wellbeing services.

## 7.4 **Consultation and communication**

7.4.1 There is no requirement to carry out statutory consultation for the proposed approach to community funding. Community Funding Grants are discretionary grant awards made at the discretion of the Council.

7.4.2 The Community Funding Grants Frameworks has been discussed with our Local Infrastructure Organisations, who provide support to our voluntary and community sector.

7.4.3 The Council will promote the aims, outcomes and benefits of the proposed Community Funding Grants Framework, and continue to publicise to all stakeholders when grants become available. It will also work with recipients to help them communicate the outcomes and benefits of grant awards within their local communities.

## 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

## 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 Dependant on the grant awards made, but all grant awards will be aligned to the Council's corporate priorities.

7.6.2 The criteria used to assess applications will consider the contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan priorities:

- Green and Clean;
- Improved Life Chances;
- Connected Communities;
- Thriving Towns and Villages; and
- Economic Development.

## 7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 Dependant on the grant awards made, but all grant awards will be aligned to the Council's corporate priorities and have a strong focus / impact on building community resilience and sustainability.

7.7.2 The criteria used to assess applications will consider the contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and the:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- Community Safety Strategy; and
- Anti-Poverty Strategy.

7.7.3 It will also consider the Integrated Care partnership's ten 'Live Your Best Life' ambitions and the Council's Procurement's Grant Guidance.

## 8. **Background Papers**

---

8.1 Appendix A - Community Funding Grants Framework

8.2 Appendix B - Terms of Reference for the Community Funding Panel