



ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Panel Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 25th October 2012

Title: Small Scale Community Projects

Report of: Scrutiny Task Group

Report reference: OS 24/12

Summary:

This reports details the Task Groups initial findings with regard to the Small Scale Community Projects and makes recommendations to the Executive with regard to the budget.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- Consider the content of the report
- Approve recommendation to the Executive

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Agenda Item: A2b

1. Background

- 1.1. It was agreed by Members of the Environment and Economy Panel that a small Task Group should look at the Members Small Scale Community Project Grant. Concerns had been raised about whether the criteria was too narrow and restricting Members from accessing the grants for community projects
- 1.2. There was also a perception that some of the budget remains unspent or un-accessed by some Members with the remaining balance returned to reserves. Members wished to look at the budget to determine whether this was correct and wanted to assess the accessibility of the grants.
- 1.3. The final concern is with regard to the large number of submissions just prior to the closing date which adds to the pressure of staff who administer the scheme.
- 1.4. The Group were requested to present their initial findings to the Panel in order to determine whether any recommendations should be made to the Executive.
- 1.5. Councillors Bainbridge and C Bowman (Resources O&S Panel) volunteered to undertake this piece of work.
- 1.6. Task Group Members were provided with the following information:
 - Monitoring Reports (including budget allocated and projects identified) for the years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 (to date)
 - Letter to Members dated 30th July from the Director of Local Environment detailing the process to be followed and the criteria for small scale grant.
 - Application Form for funding
- 1.7. Members also held a meeting with the Director of Local Environment on September 3rd 2012.

2. Findings

- 2.1. The Authority has a non-recurring budget of £40,000 for Members Small Scale Community Projects.
- 2.2. Members were informed in July of their wards allocation which is based on population Members and should be used for items of one-off expenditure. Any items which have ongoing revenue implications would not be approved, for example, grit or litter bins. Following discussion with the Director, Members agreed that the criteria was appropriate and suggested that a simple tick list was included on the application form so that Members could ensure that their project would within the given criteria.
- 2.3. For the year 2012/13 a deadline was placed on applications, 30th January 2013 and Task Group Members agreed that this would lighten any end of year surges in applications.

Agenda Item: A2b

- 2.4. Task Group Members considered the budget expenditure and highlighted that there were various excellent examples of inspiring community based projects which had been funded by the Small Scale Grants, from the renewal of play equipment in Keenan Par to the purchase of Community Notice Boards, from purchasing and planting of a tree for Longtown Parish Council and to a contribution towards a footpath at Acredale Park.
- 2.5. Task Group Members agreed that there was a need to promote how a relatively small budget produced real community benefit and it was decided that if a budget was agreed for 2013/14 then a list of 12/13 projects would be circulated to Members via email which would include photographs of projects. This information could also be placed on the Carlisle City Council Website.
- 2.6. Following perusal of the monitoring reports it was noted that in 2011/12 the budget was accessed by all Councillors either on joint projects with their fellow wards councillors or individually. Task Group Members would encourage all Members to identify community based projects for 2012/13 and submit their applications before the deadline.
- 2.7. Members of the Task Group would like the Panel to consider whether a recommendation should be made to the Executive to include an allocation for Members Small Scale Projects in their 2013/14 budget. The Task Group appreciate the financial position of the authority but conclude that this budget has produced excellent community based projects and should be allowed to continue.
- 2.8. Task Group Members questioned whether the partnership funding of the Neighbourhood Forum represented a similar value to the work of the district councillor and that perhaps the money used there could be added to the small scale fund. The response given was the current financial outlook was such that should the Neighbourhood Forum system cease, then the savings made might be judged as being more suitable in order to deliver a balanced budget.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the Executive include a non-recurring budget for 2013/14 for £40,000 for Members Small Scale Projects.