



GRANTS TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR PANEL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH JULY 2018 AT 5.00 PM**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

C. Andrews, L.J. Binding, A. Farina-Childs, A. Gair, R.W. Gough, L. Jeremiah, Mrs G.D. Oliver, D.W.R. Preece, R. Saralis, A. Whitcombe

Together with:

S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), D. Roberts (Principal Group Accountant), Mrs G. Elliot (Communities First Finance Assistant) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Mrs G.D Oliver be appointed as Chair of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel for the ensuing year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs G.D. Oliver be appointed Chair of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel for the ensuing year.

2. TO APPOINT A VICE-CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Councillor R.W. Gough be appointed as Vice Chair of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel for the ensuing year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor R.W. Gough be appointed as Vice Chair of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector for the ensuing year.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors M. Davies, D.T. Hardacre, A.G. Higgs and Mrs A. Leonard.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received from Councillors R.W. Gough, L. Binding and R. Saralis in respect of Agenda Item No. 6 (Applications for Financial Assistance). Details are minuted with the respective item.

5. MINUTES – 14TH MARCH 2018

The minutes of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel held on 14th March 2018 (minute nos. 1 – 4.4) were received and approved as a correct record.

6. APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Councillor R.W. Gough declared a personal interest in the Llanbradach Community Centre application listed in Appendix 3, as the Chairman of the Community Centre.

Councillor L. Binding declared a personal interest in the Aber Valley YMCA application listed in Appendix 3, as the building is in his ward and he has utilised the facilities on a personal basis.

Councillor R. Saralis declared a personal interest in the Oakdale Community Centre application listed in Appendix 3, as a member of their management committee.

Vicki Doyle (Policy Officer) presented the report, which informed Panel Members of a number of changes to the administration process for financial assistance for both the Grants to the Voluntary Sector budget and the Welsh Church Fund. The report also advised Panel Members of the budget allocations for both the Grants to the Voluntary Sector budget and the Welsh Church Fund and provided details of applications received between 1st April and 30th June 2018.

It was explained that the intention of the changes is to streamline existing processes and facilitate grant payments more quickly. Historically the Corporate Finance team have administered the financial assistance offered by the Council from both the GTVS budget and the Welsh Church Fund. However, the Council's Corporate Policy Team has overall responsibility for the Council's relationship with the voluntary sector generally, including the Compact agreement, managing Service Level Agreements with a small number of voluntary organisations and providing support via the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee. Therefore it has been agreed that responsibility for administering financial assistance grants will move from Corporate Finance to the Corporate Policy Team with effect from 1st May 2018, and the Panel were asked to note this change as part of the report recommendations. All grants will continue to be approved using the delegated decision making powers of the Head of Corporate Finance, as per the current arrangement.

6.1 Grants to the Voluntary Sector Budget

Members noted the budget available for 2018-2019 is £164,523.79, which included the estimated reduction for Discretionary Rate Relief (£155,586.22) and budget carried forward from 2017-2018 (£23,746.78). If all awards as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report were agreed, the remaining budget would be £153,843.79.

As part of the report recommendations, Members were asked to consider the application listed in Appendix 1 to the report (Panel Awards 2018-19) and Appendix 2 (General Criteria Awards) and to make appropriate recommendations to the Interim Head of Corporate Finance for approval. It was noted that the recommendation in respect of Appendix 1 was set out in the body of the report but had been omitted from the recommendations listed at Section 10 of the report.

The Panel discussed the merits of the application set out in Appendix 1 which had not met the criteria set out in Appendix 4 of the report:-

- (a) Royal British Legion: Blackwood and District Branch - £500

Members queried whether other Legion branches might also wish to apply for the grant and Officers explained that there is potential for a Covenant Grant for WWI commemorations to be made available. Discussion took place on whether this application could be granted in principle if the Covenant grant is not available.

An additional recommendation was moved and seconded that the application as set out in Appendix 1 be granted if the Covenant grant is not available and that the Head of Corporate Finance be given delegated powers in this regard. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

The Panel noted the details of the applications received since the last meeting totalling £9,910.00, as listed in Appendix 2, which are in accordance with the agreed criteria and will be processed by officers. A Member observed that a wide range of other sports are not on the list and queried whether schools have been informed of the grants available. It was explained that details are passed to the governing bodies. Members expressed a need to promote the grant to organisations that may be interested and also discussed community chest applications. Officers explained that there is only a narrow category of groups that may apply for the General Criteria Awards. Members were also advised that they will be kept informed of any change of club status from amateur to professional.

As part of the report recommendations, Members were also informed of a revised process for payments of applications for financial assistance. Currently, applications are approved by Officers where they meet the criteria as set out in Appendix 4. Any applications not meeting the criteria are referred to the Panel for discussion, with the Panel making a recommendation on whether individual applications are supported and the amount of grant to be awarded. Panel recommendations are considered by the Head of Corporate Finance for approval or otherwise under delegated powers. In future, applications for financial assistance from individuals or organisations that meet the criteria in Appendix 4 will be approved on a monthly basis under the delegated powers of the Head of Corporate Finance. Following this, the relevant payment will be generated immediately, rather than applicants having to wait up to three months for payment, as is currently the case.

During the course of discussion on this item, Officers gave assurances that all successful applications will continue to be reported to Panel meetings, albeit for information purposes only. It was also noted that any applications for financial assistance that do not meet the criteria in Appendix 4 will continue to be reported to Panel meetings for discussion and for Panel Members to make a recommendation to the Head of Corporate Finance for approval or otherwise under delegated powers.

6.2 Welsh Church Act Fund

The Panel were reminded at that their meeting on 17th January 2018, Members considered a number of options for increasing the upper limits on grants available, and the intervention rate to be applied, in order to make better use of the funding available. The recommended preferred option of the Panel when considering applications for assistance from the Welsh Church fund, was set out in Paragraph 4.6.1 of the report, and approved by Cabinet on 28th March 2018, with the revised criteria introduced from 1st April 2018.

In regards to Item (iv) of the preferred option (review of the grants process to expedite payments wherever possible and explore options for publicising the funding more widely) an advert was placed in the June 2018 edition of Newline, which generated a significant number of enquiries and resulted in around 20-25 applications being set out in the two weeks after the article was published.

As part of the report recommendations, the Panel were asked to note a revised process for authorising payments relating to the Welsh Church Fund, in relation to Item (iv) of the preferred option, which will see the expedition of signing off grants once the required

documentary evidence has been provided. Currently, five signatures are required to release a payment, but will in future be reduced to three – the Corporate Policy Manager, the Head of Corporate Finance, and the Chair/Vice-Chair of the Panel. Additionally, the Annual Internal Audit Plan will include an annual sample review of approved applications and subsequent procedures each financial year, in order to ensure a full Internal Audit review will take place on a cyclical basis, and this process will also apply for any staged payments that are necessary.

At its meeting on 13th July 2009, the Panel agreed that Officers would approve applications meeting the Welsh Church Fund criteria using delegated powers. Such decisions would be reported to the Panel for information where Members could ask for further information if required. There are no changes to this process and therefore Members were asked to note the details of the Welsh Church Fund 2018/19 Criteria Awards as set out in Appendix 3 of the report, which total £59,202.33 and have been approved by Officers under delegated powers.

The Council have received written confirmation from Monmouthshire County Council that the 2018/19 Welsh Church Fund budget allocation is £61,600.00. They have also confirmed that the underspends from previous years can be carried forward, resulting in a total available budget for the current year of £324,839.89. If all the awards approved to date within Appendix 3 spend to their maximum allocation, there will be a balance of £265,637.56 remaining.

Members were also asked to note the previously approved applications as set out in Appendix 5, which have exceeded the 18-month time limit to claim funding as set out in the Terms and Conditions. The applicant has been advised that the grant has now been withdrawn. The withdrawn grant totals £2000.

In response to a Member's query, Officer provided clarification on the purpose of the Welsh Church Funding for Blackwood Golf Club (to provide disabled access to the front door). Discussion took place regarding the distinction between community clubs, private members clubs and registered charities, together with discussion on another premises who had applied for funding for a similar purpose. Officers outlined the criteria that needs to be met and the purpose of this funding, and gave assurances that in cases of uncertainty on whether an application meets the set criteria, these will be brought to the Panel for consideration before funding is granted. They also confirmed that in respect of the application by Blackwood Golf Club, they would make further enquiries as to the nature of the organisation before approving under delegated powers.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations, and including the aforementioned additional recommendation, be approved. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the changes in responsibility for administering financial assistance grants (from Corporate Finance to the Corporate Policy Team) with effect from 1st May 2018, be noted;
- (ii) the revised process for payments of applications for financial assistance, as detailed in paragraph 4.5.8 of the report, be noted;
- (iii) the revised process for authorising payments relating to the Welsh Church Fund, as detailed in paragraph 4.6.4, be noted;
- (iv) the details of the applications contained in Appendix 2 and 3, which will be approved by the Head of Corporate Finance under delegated powers, be noted;
- (v) the withdrawal of one Welsh Church Fund grant due to the project exceeding the 18-month time limit, as detailed in Appendix 5, be noted;

- (vi) the application contained in Appendix 1 be recommended to the Head of Corporate Finance for approval under delegated powers, subject to there being no alternative funding available in this regard.

It was noted that since the agenda papers were published, an additional £32,000 of Welsh Church Fund grants have been approved and will be reported to the next meeting of the Panel.

7. MR STEVE HARRIS – INTERIM HEAD OF CORPORATE FINANCE

It was noted that this would be the last Panel meeting that Mr Harris would be attending in his capacity as Interim Head of Corporate Finance. Members placed on record their thanks to Mr Harris for the valued support and guidance he had given to the Panel during this interim period.

The meeting closed at 5.48 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2018, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR