



GRANTS TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON WEDNESDAY, 6TH MARCH 2019 AT 4.00 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs G. Oliver – Chair
Councillor R. Gough – Vice Chair

Councillors:

Mrs C. Andrews, M. Davies, Ms A. Gair, A. Higgs, D. Preece, R. Saralis and A. Whitcombe.

Together with:

S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), V. Doyle (Policy Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors L. Binding, D.T. Hardacre, L. Jeremiah, Mrs A. Leonard and J. Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received from Councillors Mrs C. Andrews in respect of Agenda Item No. 5 (Applications for Financial Assistance). Details are minuted with the respective item.

3. MINUTES – 21ST NOVEMBER 2019

The minutes of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel held on 21st November 2018 (minute nos. 1 – 4.4) were received and approved as a correct record.

4. WELSH CHURCH ACTS FUND – CHANGES TO CRITERIA

The report, which is to be presented to Cabinet on 27th March 2019, sought the views of Members on the proposed changes to the criteria for the Welsh Church Acts Fund (WCAF), and the introduction of formal criteria relating to how the grant scheme is operated within Caerphilly County Borough Council.

The WCAF was established on 1st April 1996 from the former Gwent Fund and part of the former Mid Glamorgan Fund. The Fund covers the administrative areas of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen and Monmouthshire, with Monmouthshire being designated the Lead Authority.

Members noted that since the increase in the upper limit of the Grant, additional publicity has been undertaken to raise awareness of the grant scheme, which has led to a significant increase in interest in the WCAF. Since 1st April 2018, 39 individual projects have been approved totalling £191,264.39, with a number of other projects still in the pipeline. It was noted that the budget available for 2018/19 is £324,839.89 including underspends carried forward. Therefore, the unallocated amount currently remains at £133,575.50.

The report proposed two key changes to how the WCAF is currently operated; one proposal was that the grant criteria be revised so that the maximum grant available under the WCAF is £5,000, at a grant rate of up to 100% as appropriate. Projects with a total cost of over £5,000 would still be eligible for a grant of up to £5,000, but would not need to seek match funding from other sources or their own funds. It is proposed that this change in criteria be implemented from 1st April 2019.

The report also proposed that there be a change to the criteria as, whilst the general criteria is wide ranging in nature, it does state that they are 'Charitable purposes for which the fund may be applied' and therefore there is no requirement for the Council to offer grants under the WCAF for all these categories. It was noted that historically, awards have been made in relation to categories (iv) The advancement of religion and (v) Other purposes beneficial to the community. In addition to this, at its meeting of 28th March 2018, Cabinet made a decision that 'grants should be restricted to community organisations and community based projects in the first instance and that this position should be reviewed in 12 months time'. As a result, the report proposed that appropriate criteria be implemented from 1st April 2019 and includes an indicative but not exhaustive list of formal items that cannot be funded, which include usual running costs of any organisations e.g. rent, utilities, insurance etc.; revenue costs including the employment of staff and training etc.; items for a one off or annual use and/or seasonal use and retrospective costs for any projects.

The Panel were also asked to consider a proposal in response to a number of enquiries during the financial year, that the criteria be widened to allow applications from individuals in relation to the 'advancement of education'. The report proposed that limited support would be provided for 'exceptional individuals' as a one-off grant of up to £1,500. It would be for the Panel to decide what is meant by 'exceptional', but applications could relate to sporting or academic pursuits, or other activities. All applications from individuals would be reported to the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel for consideration, and the Panel would make a recommendation on which applications should be supported and the amount of funding to be awarded. These recommendations would be considered and approved as appropriate by the Head of Corporate Finance under delegated powers.

The Panel thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member sought further information on the support provided to applicants when applying for grants. It was noted that GAVO provide advice to applicants to assist them to make the right grant applications to suit their needs and signpost where possible. However, Members were asked to note that the WCAF requirements provide that that money be spent on the desired project, before the grant can be awarded, and can be used to top up other grant awards.

Discussions ensued around telecommunications and wind turbine/ solar farm grants, which are often offered to local communities, however it was noted that these are only provided by organisations that have agreed to take part in the scheme, and not all areas would qualify for this funding. GAVO can provide information on specific grants.

The Panel discussed the proposal to fund 'exceptional individual' applications. Whilst in favour of the proposals, Members raised concerns for the grant being applied on a 'one-off' basis for 'exceptional individuals', where these individuals are offered places for example in private schools or prestigious higher education establishments. In addition, concerns were raised around 'Hardship' and the possibility of means testing applications. Officers explained

that there would be difficulty policing this and would require applicants to provide a lot of information for the process. As a result, it was proposed that applications be considered up to a maximum of £1500, which would be determined on merit and up to a maximum of 3 years, with evidence provided each year should circumstances have changed.

Members were also asked to note that, at present there are no suitable application forms for individual grant applications, which will be developed and circulated to the Panel for consideration.

Following consideration and discussion it was moved and seconded that for the reasons outlined within the officers report, and in noting the additional recommendation, the recommendations within the report and be approved. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report: -

- i. the revised upper limit of £5,000 for applications to the WCAF grant scheme be approved with effect from 1st April 2019;
- ii. the introduction of Caerphilly County Borough Council criteria for the operation of the WCAF grant scheme be approved with effect from 1st April 2019;
- iii. that individual applications be considered at the discretion of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel, for up to £1,500, for a maximum of 3 years, which be determined on merit and provision of sufficient evidence year on year.

5. APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The report provided the Panel with the applications for financial assistance received between 1st November 2018 and 31st January 2019.

The report advised Panel members of the budget allocations for both the Voluntary Sector budget and the Welsh Church Acts Fund and provided details of applications received between 1st November 2018 and 31st January 2019.

5.1 Grants to the Voluntary Sector Budget

Members noted the budget available for 2018-2019 is £133,901.01, which included the estimated reduction for Discretionary Rate Relief (£171,689.00) and budget carried forward from 2017-2018 (£140,507.01). If all awards as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report were agreed, the remaining budget would be £131,861.01.

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 Head of Corporate Finance for approval.

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) Music in Hospitals and Care - £250.00

Members were asked to note that this Organisation has previously received similar grants in 2006, 2014 and 2018 for the same purpose.

The Panel discussed the application and it was moved and seconded that the application as set out in Appendix 1 be granted 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 11 applications received since the last meeting totalling £1,790.00, as listed in Appendix 2, which are in accordance with the agreed criteria and will be processed by officers.

As previously agreed by the Panel, grants awarded during the 2018-19 financial year that exceed the budget allocation will be funded from the brought forward balances.

5.2 Welsh Church Act Fund

Members were reminded of the criteria which applies when considering applications for assistance from the Welsh Church Acts Fund and of the decision taken that Officers would approve applications meeting the Welsh Church Acts Fund criteria using the delegated powers of the Head of Corporate Finance. Such decisions would be reported to the Panel for information, where Members could ask for further information if required.

It was noted that the total budget available for 2018-19 is £324,839.89, which includes the annual allocation from Monmouthshire County Council totally £61,600 and underspends from previous years of £263,239.89.

Details of eight applications received since the last meeting, as set out in Appendix 3 of the report (totalling £37,855.35) which were requested in accordance with the criteria.

The Panel discussed a number of the grant awards and were asked to note that following the change in the criteria and the increase in grants awarded, it was felt that this would be a good news story, which therefore could be shared within Newline, outlining the impacts of the grant funding and details on how to apply for Welsh Church Act Funding.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be approved. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the requests for Financial Assistance, as listed in Appendix 1 of the report be approved. The recommendations to be considered and approved by the Head of Corporate Finance under delegated powers;
- (ii) the applications listed in Appendix 2 and 3, which have already been approved by the Head of Corporate Finance under delegated powers be noted.

The meeting closed at 4.50 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 24th July 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR