



GRANTS TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR PANEL – 9TH MARCH 2023

SUBJECT: FUTURE OPERATION OF THE GRANTS TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUND AND THE WELSH CHURCH ACTS FUND

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consult with the Grants to the Voluntary Sector (GTVS) Panel on a number of options for the future operation of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector (GTVS) Fund and the Welsh Church Acts Fund (WCAF).
- 1.2 The Panel to make recommendations on their preferred options, to be taken forward for consideration by Cabinet in due course.
- 1.3 The Panel to make a recommendation on whether to disband the GTVS Panel and for all future reports to be taken to the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee, which will be considered by Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and/or Full Council in due course.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report asks the GTVS Panel to consider a number of options for future operation of the GTVS Fund and the WCAF, and to make recommendations for Cabinet to consider. The report considers each of the grant schemes in turn, and also considers the possible future reporting of grants awarded under both schemes, and whether this should change from the GTVS Panel to the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee (VSLC).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The GTVS Panel are asked to make recommendations in relation to the following issues. The recommendations will be reported to Cabinet for a final decision in due course:
 - a. Should the WCAF provide funding for revenue costs and if so, what would be the criteria for providing revenue funding for projects?

- b. What should the maximum level of future grants under the WCAF be?
 - i. Maintain the status quo i.e. maximum grant of £5,000
 - ii. Increase the maximum grant to £10,000 until the underspend is fully utilised
 - iii. Increase the maximum grant by a smaller amount e.g. a maximum of £7,500 until the underspend is fully utilised
- c. Should the General Criteria amounts for the GTVS Fund be uplifted by 20% from the 2023/24 financial year and then in line with CPI inflation in future years?
- d. Does the list of proposed General Criteria for the GTVS Fund cover all the categories required or are additional categories needed?
- e. Should the GTVS Panel be disbanded and future reports in relation to the GTVS and WCAF be made to the VSLC?
- f. If item (e) is agreed, a recommendation will be needed in relation to applications received which are outside the General Criteria for the GTVS and applications from 'exceptional' individuals in relation to the WCAF. Two options were proposed:
 - i. These applications are discussed with the S151 Officer and Cabinet Member, who agree whether a grant should be awarded.
 - ii. These applications are discuss at the pre-meeting of the VSLC with Councillors on the Committee, which make a recommendation on whether a grant should be awarded in a similar way that the GTVS Panel do currently.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The GTVS Panel have requested that a review take place of the operation of the GTVS Fund and the WCAF. A workshop session took place on 18th January 2023 and the GTVS Panel and invited voluntary sector representatives were invited to give their views on the current operation of both grant schemes and where possible changes could be made – the options paper following this workshop is included at Appendix 1 to this report.

Officers also took the opportunity to gather the GTVS Panel's views on future reporting arrangements in relation to both grant schemes, and whether this should change from the GTVS Panel to the VSLC in future. The views of the Panel in this regard are also captured in the options paper.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Officers of the Council held a workshop with representatives of the GTVS Panel and invited representatives of the voluntary sector on 18th January 2023, to discuss the view from the voluntary sector that changes were needed to the criteria and operation of the WCAF and the GTVS Fund. During the workshop, Panel members were given a presentation on the current application processes and budgets for both grant schemes, together with current underspends. It was noted that once these underspends have been fully utilised, each grant scheme would only have an annually allocated amount to spend, and further details of this are given in the report at Appendix 1.
- 5.2 Officers also outlined that the only role of the GTVS Panel was to receive details of grants already awarded and approved under delegated powers by the S151 Officer, and to make recommendations in relation to GTVS Fund applications that were outside the General Criteria, and applications from 'exceptional' individuals in relation to the

WCAF. Officers suggested that in future, these reports could be given to the VSLC, which has membership from both Councillors and the wider voluntary sector, and may be a more appropriate Committee to report these grants to.

Welsh Church Acts Fund

- 5.3 The annual allocation from Monmouthshire County Council was outlined, together with details of the historic underspend. A number of issues were raised by Panel members and the voluntary sector representatives, and a number of minor amendments to current processes were agreed. One issue where the Council was out of step with other local authorities was in relation to offering revenue grants under the WCAF, and details of the offer in other areas is noted in the report. Panel members are asked to make a recommendation in relation to the following:

Should the WCAF provide funding for revenue costs and if so, what would be the criteria for providing revenue funding for projects?

- 5.4 In relation to the historic underspend on the grant scheme, the reasons for this were outlined. Panel members were concerned over the level of the underspend and suggested raising the maximum grant amount to fully utilise the underspend. Panel members are asked to make a recommendation in relation to the following:

What should the maximum level of future grants under the WCAF be?

- i. Maintain the status quo i.e. maximum grant of £5,000**
 - ii. Increase the maximum grant to £10,000 until the underspend is fully utilised**
 - iii. Increase the maximum grant by a smaller amount e.g. a maximum of £7,500 until the underspend is fully utilised**
- 5.5 Panel members were concerned that potential applicants could not access the application form online, and officers explained the reasons for this. They also felt that applicants having to provide funding up front was problematic, and the S151 Officer agreed to support the recommendation that 50% funding is released on approval, similar to the approach for the Community Empowerment Fund.
- 5.6 Another issue raised was in relation to the need to provide more than one quote, and this was particularly problematic for specialist items. The S151 Officer agreed to support the recommendation that a single quote or a more expensive quote be accepted on a case-by-case basis where appropriate.
- 5.7 Finally, issues were raised in relation to communications around the grant scheme, and some minor amendments to current information were agreed.

Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund

- 5.8 The current funding arrangements for the grant scheme were outlined, together with details of the historic underspend. The S151 Officer agreed that from 2023/24, Discretionary Rate Relief would be split into a separate budget and an annual amount allocated to the GTVS Fund.
- 5.9 Panel members were concerned that the General Criteria amounts had not received an uplift since 2015, and suggested an immediate uplift of 20% for the 2023/24 financial year, and an annual uplift each subsequent financial year in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). Therefore, Panel members are asked to make a

recommendation in relation to the following:

Should the General Criteria amounts for the GTVS Fund be uplifted by 20% from the 2023/24 financial year and then in line with CPI inflation in future years?

- 5.10 Panel members were concerned regarding the large number of General Criteria categories and suggested that these needed to be simplified. A list of the proposed new General Criteria categories is included in the report at Appendix 1. Panel members are asked to make a recommendation in relation to the following:

Does the list of proposed General Criteria for the GTVS Fund cover all the categories required or are additional categories needed?

- 5.11 Panel members agreed that more needed to be done to encourage uptake of the grant scheme and that both the Council and the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations had a role to play in this.

GTVS Panel -v- VSLC

- 5.12 Officers outlined that there were two groups currently in existence – the GTVS Panel and the VSLC – that could potentially report on successful applications to the GTVS Fund and the VSLC. The VSLC has a wider membership in that it includes 15 Elected Members (some also sit on the VSLC) as well as a number of representatives from the wider voluntary sector. Some voluntary sector representatives agreed that there is duplication between the two Committees. Officers suggested disbanding the GTVS Panel and that future reports on awards under the GTVS Fund and WCAF are considered by the VSLC. Panel members are asked to make recommendations in relation to the following:

Should the GTVS Panel be disbanded and future reports in relation to the GTVS and Welsh Church Act Funds be made to the VSLC?

If this is agreed, a recommendation will be needed in relation to applications received which are outside the General Criteria for the GTVS and applications received from 'exceptional' individuals in relation to the WCAF. Two options are proposed:

- i. These applications are discussed with the S151 Officer and Cabinet Member, who agree whether a grant should be awarded.**
- ii. These applications are discussed at the pre-meeting of the VSLC with Councillors on the Committee, which make a recommendation on whether a grant should be awarded in a similar way that the GTVS Panel do currently.**

5.13 Conclusion

This report summarises the workshop session held on 9th March 2023 and identifies a number of areas where a recommendation is needed from the GTVS Panel. These recommendations will form the basis of a report to Cabinet in due course, after which any changes agreed will be implemented.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no changes to existing budgets as these have already been identified for 2022/23.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report summarises the views of the GTVS Panel and invited voluntary sector representatives to the workshop session held on 9th March 2023. Any proposed changes are aimed to improve the experience of organisations applying for a GTVS Fund or WCAF grant, so an IIA has not been undertaken.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The financial implications are those set out in the report.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 There are no consultation responses which have not been reflected in this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972 and 2003 and the Council's Financial Regulations.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report on Workshop Session with Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel – 18th January 2023