

**Notes of Workshop Session with Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel –
18th January 2023**

Officers of the Council held a workshop with representatives of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector (GTVS) Panel and 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 Welsh Church Acts Fund (WCAF) and the Grants to the Voluntary Sector (GTVS) Fund. The S151 Officer Stephen Harris (SH) opened the meeting by stating that the role of the GTVS Panel was to make recommendations on possible changes, but these would need to be formally approved or otherwise by Cabinet, before any changes could be introduced. SH also explained that in his role as S151 Officer he has a responsibility for the effective stewardship of public funds and will be mindful of that in recommending any changes.

Vicki Doyle (VD) gave a presentation on the current application processes and budgets for both grant schemes, including historical underspends. It was noted that once these underspends have been utilised, each grant scheme would only have the annual allocation each year to be spent. Opportunity was given to Panel members to discuss the current processes at various stages during the presentation.

Kath Peters (KP) noted that the only role of the 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. She drew members attention to the fact that the VSLC also exists, which has membership from both Councillors and the wider voluntary sector, and may be a more appropriate Committee to report these grants to.

The rest of this report summarises the agreed actions and identifies options for the Panel to discuss and agree their preferred approach for reporting to Cabinet for a final decision.

Welsh Church Acts Fund

VD noted that each year the Council receives an annual allocation from Monmouthshire County Council, the trustee for the Welsh Church Acts Fund (WCAF) in Gwent. The annual budget for this grant scheme is around £60,000, with a confirmed amount of £57,760 for 2022/23. In addition, there currently is an historic underspend on the grant scheme which amounts to £186,011.

Panel members noted their concern over the historic underspend, and wanted to allocate it as quickly as possible. One of the issues raised was the need for two quotes, as this proved problematic for applicants sometimes. VD noted that for items of equipment etc. two quotes could mean two different prices from different companies on the internet. Actual quotes are only needed where a contractor will be carrying out work on behalf of the applicant organisation. The S151 Officer recognised the issues raised and agreed that he would be happy to accept one quote in exceptional cases, and this would be considered and agreed on a case by case basis. It was requested that the application criteria and Council webpage be updated to reflected this. **Action: VD to update.**

Currently the WCAF could only fund capital projects, although it was noted that other local authorities accept applications for revenue projects. Subsequent to the meeting, VD has undertaken further research and grants are available in other authorities for the following revenue purposes:

- Carmarthenshire County Council – for individuals towards a specific activity with the county, apprenticeship, or work placement to a maximum of £150
- Newport City Council – individuals where they are a resident of the City of Newport and can clearly demonstrate that there is no alternative source of funding available for intended purpose. Grants will not be provided to support the day to day running costs of groups and organisations where these are likely to create an ongoing dependency on the Fund for future financial assistance.
- Vale of Glamorgan Council – no funding priority is indicated, but due to the level of resources available, applications are not normally accepted from individuals.
- Flintshire County Council – individuals up to 25 years who are resident in the Flintshire local authority area (not including statutory provision) can apply for a grant of £200. Community groups can apply for funding for core costs for up to 3 years, providing the group can provide accounts for at least the last 12 months and the amount being applied for is less than 50% of annual turnover.
- Powys County Council – revenue grants are awarded to support organisations with projects and activities to benefit the residents of Powys.
- Gwynedd County Council – revenue support is provided in relation to the following types of activity i.e. training costs for volunteers; costs in connection with new activities for older people/pensioners; support studies and research into subjects involving history, topography, literature and Welsh life; interpretation materials for buildings of historic and/or architectural interest. No grants provided for individuals.
- Swansea Council – Other than applications from churches, priority will normally be given to revenue funded schemes. Organisations seeking deficit funding will not normally be eligible and neither will individuals seeking funding for educational purposes, sponsorship or charitable donations.

As can be seen from this information, other local authorities have different approaches to revenue funding, with some only offering grants to individuals and others not offering revenue support at all.

During the discussions, the Panel view was that salaries should not be supported as only part of the costs could be funded, and that revenue costs for organisations should not be funded year on year.

Panel recommendation needed: Should the WCAF provide funding for revenue costs and if so, what would be the criteria for providing revenue funding for projects? Note: The Panel already provides funding for ‘exceptional’ individuals of up to £1,500 per year for up to 3 years.

A discussion took place on the level of the historic underspend. VD explained that when she took the grant over from Finance in 2018/19 the underspend had been over £300,000. As a result of concerns the maximum grant was changed to £10,000 for one year, and then back to £5,000 the following year when the balance reduced (it should be noted that when the Fund was managed by Finance the maximum grant was £1,500 for up to a third of project costs). The result of this was that the underspend reduced from over £300,000 to around £100,000 by the end of 2021/22.

However, we were then informed unexpectedly of an additional £86,000 that Monmouthshire County Council were holding on our behalf, which brought the total back to £186,111.

Panel members were concerned over the level of the underspend and suggested raising the maximum grant amount to fully utilise the underspend, although officers noted that once the underspend is fully used there will only be the annual allocation each year. VD noted that the bids received in the current financial year are already higher than the annual allocation, so the historic underspend is already being spent.

Panel recommendation needed: What should the maximum level of future grants under the WCAF be?

- 1. Maintain the status quo i.e. maximum grant of £5,000**
- 2. Increase the maximum grant to £10,000 until the underspend is fully utilised**
- 3. Increase the maximum grant by a smaller amount e.g. a maximum of £7,500 until the underspend is fully utilised**

VD noted that even if the maximum amount is increased, not every project requests the maximum amount.

Panel members were concerned that potential applicants could not access the application form online. Officers explained that the reason for this was that it is helpful for officers to understand the proposed project before an application is made, and also to provide any assistance or signposting that the potential applicant may need. Once an initial discussion has taken place and officers are reassured that the project meets the application criteria, an application form is sent. This helps to reduce unnecessary time wasted for both the applicant organisation and officers in assessing the application.

Panel members were also concerned that payments were made in arrears once work had been completed or the funding awarded spent. Officers recognised the problems that this can cause, and the S151 Officer agreed to support the recommendation that 50% of the grant is provided up front, the same as the Community Empowerment Fund. It will be important however to have robust monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that grants are used for the intended purposes.

Panel members raised the issue that we provide funding based on the cheapest quote, and there are certain circumstances where a more expensive quote is a more appropriate option i.e. purchasing specialist items or undertaking specialist works. The S151 Officer agreed to support the recommendation that a more expensive quote be considered, on a case by case basis providing appropriate evidence for the need for this is provided by the applicant.

Some issues were raised in relation to the communications of the grant scheme. It was suggested that more information is provided on the dedicated webpage in relation to where groups can access support if they are just setting up. **Action: VD to update website with contact details for GAVO/Community Cares.**

In addition, it was suggested that communications need to be improved for those groups not able to access information via a website, and a leaflet was suggested that could be given to interested groups. **Action: VD to design a leaflet to support the information available on the webpage.**

Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund

VD also gave a presentation on the current process for the GTVS Fund. She noted that each year the budget is top sliced to provide funding for Discretionary Rate Relief and the budget allocation each year is relatively small. For 2022/23 the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Budget is £195,686, however £187,367 has been top sliced for Discretionary Rate Relief, leaving a balance of £8,319 for the grant scheme. In addition, £110,883 has been brought forward from historic underspends, giving a total of £119,202 for 2022/23. The S151 Officer agreed that from 2023/24, Discretionary Rate Relief would be split into a separate budget and an annual amount would be allocated to the GTVS Fund. VD noted that the vast majority of applications received for this Fund are automatically approved using the General Criteria (previously agreed by the Panel) via the delegated powers of the S151 Officer and are reported to the Panel for information only.

It was recognised by officers that the General Criteria amounts have not received an uplift since 2015, and therefore agreed that an uplift would be appropriate. Panel members suggested that an immediate uplift of 20% is applied from the 2023/24 financial year, and then an annual uplift each financial year in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rate of inflation, which would help to reduce the historic underspend over time.

Panel recommendation needed: 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?

Panel Members expressed concern regarding the large number of categories that currently exist under the General Criteria, and suggested the need to simplify these. They suggested the revised criteria could be linked to factors such as the number of members and organisation has, whether the organisation operates a building, how often a group meets etc. Officers have considered a revised list of General Criteria and propose the following (a table of existing categories and amounts is included at Annex 1):

| Category | Criteria | Amount (£) |
|----------|--|------------|
| A | Organisation or Association owning a building | 360 |
| B | Organisation or Association not owning a building | 180 |
| C | Sports Club (up to 50 members) | 120 |
| D | Sports Club (over 50 members) | 240 |
| E | Other membership group e.g. Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Scouts, Cubs, Brownies, Rainbows, St John Ambulance etc. (up to 50 members) | 120 |
| F | Other membership group e.g. Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, Scouts, Cubs, Brownies, Rainbows, St John Ambulance etc. (over 50 members) | 240 |
| G | Brass and Silver Bands | 480 |
| H | Arts Groups e.g. Jazz Bands, Choirs, Arts Societies, Writers Clubs, Theatre Groups etc. | 120 |
| I | Environment Groups e.g. Allotments, Beekeepers Groups, Gardening Clubs, Tenants & Residents Associations, Pigeon Clubs etc. | 120 |
| J | Other Community Groups | 120 |
| K | Individuals (amateur) representing Wales within the UK | 156 |
| L | Individuals (amateur) representing Wales outside the UK | 300 |
| M | Individuals (amateur) representing Wales Top-up Grant | 144 |

This list has been derived by combining some of the existing General Criteria categories, and the amounts listed incorporate the 20% uplift recommended by the Panel.

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

Officers asked what else could be done to reduce the historic underspend relating to this grant scheme. Panel members suggested that more needs to be done to encourage wider uptake of the grant scheme, and recognised that GAVO had a role to play in this. It was also important for groups to realise that they are able to apply for a grant every year. Some Panel Members thought that groups may not apply due to the small grant amount that they can access, and that this is a disincentive for them. **Action: The Council and GAVO to do more to publicise the availability of the GTVS Fund.**

GTVS Panel -v- VSLC

KP outlined that there are currently two groups that reports relating to the WCAF and the GTVS Fund could go to – the GTVS Panel and the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee (VSLC). Both the panel and the committee comprise 15 cross-party elected members, some overlapping (see list in Annex 2). Both groups have been in existence since 1996 and there seemed to be a large degree of duplication involved in their respective roles. KP noted the limited role of the GTVS Panel (i.e. to make recommendations in relation to applications outside the GTVS General Criteria and applications received from ‘exceptional’ individuals in relation to the WCAF), compared with the much wider remit of the VSLC i.e. being consulted on the annual budget proposals and any other Council budget changes, receiving presentations on items of interest, equal status and membership of the sector on the committee etc. KP also noted that the VSLC have requested an update on the outcome of the GTVS Panel workshop at its next meeting. Some invited voluntary sector representatives agreed that there is duplication between the two Committees.

Officers suggested that one option could be to disband the GTVS Panel and provide all future reports in relation to the GTVS and WCAF to the VSLC. A couple of suggestions were made in relation to approving applications outside the GTVS General Criteria and applications received from ‘exceptional’ individuals in relation to the WCAF, should the GTVS Panel be disbanded:

1. These applications are discussed with the S151 Officer and Cabinet Member, who agree whether a grant should be awarded.
2. 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.

There was some concern from voluntary sector representatives that if either of these options were pursued then they would be excluded from the process.

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

Panel recommendation needed: 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.**

GAVO representatives noted that they sit on a number of multi-agency funding panels, which could be useful in terms of sharing information on what other funds groups are applying for. Some Panel members were concerned that they would be disadvantaged if the Council were to reduce down to a single Committee covering the work of both Committees. It was also suggested that there may need to increase the number of VSLC meetings to accommodate the extra workload, if the GTVS Panel is disbanded. Currently the GTVS meets 3 times per year and the VSLC meets 4 times per year.

Existing General Criteria

| Category | Criteria | Value |
|----------|---|-------|
| a | OAP Association with own building | £300 |
| b | OAP Association without own building | £150 |
| c | Individuals (amateur) representing Wales at home | £130 |
| c1 | Individuals (amateur) representing Wales Top Up Grant | £120 |
| d | Individuals (amateur) representing Wales abroad | £250 |
| e | Jazz Bands | £100 |
| f | Choirs | £100 |
| g | Junior Sports Club (up to 50 members) | £100 |
| g1 | Junior Sports Club (over 50 members) | £200 |
| h | Boys & Girls Clubs/YMCA/Scouts/Cubs/Brownies/Guides/Boys Brigade/Crusaders (up to 50 members) | £100 |
| h1 | Boys & Girls Clubs/YMCA/Scouts/Cubs/Brownies/Guides/Boys Brigade/Crusaders (over 50 members) | £200 |
| l | St John Ambulance (up to 50 members):- Cadets/Badgers | £100 |
| j | St John Ambulance (over 50 members):- Cadets/Badgers | £200 |
| m | Brass and Silver Bands | £400 |
| n | Allotments | £100 |
| o | Arts Society | £100 |
| p | Writers Clubs | £100 |
| q | Theatre Groups | £200 |
| r | Community Groups | £100 |
| s | Beekeepers Groups | £100 |
| t | Garden Clubs | £150 |
| u | Tenants & Residents Association | £100 |
| v | Websites - Initial design stage only | £100 |
| w | Pigeon Clubs | £200 |
| x | Clubs run From Churches/Chapels | £200 |
| y | Sports Club (up to 50 members) | £100 |
| z | Sports Club (over 50 members) | £200 |
| aa | Other - up to max | £400 |

Latest Revision 15/7/15

Summary of Membership of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel and the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee

| Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel | Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee |
|---|---|
| Cllr Anne Broughton-Petit | Cllr Robert Chapman |
| Cllr Marina Chacon-Dawson (Chair) | Cllr Mrs Patricia Cook |
| Cllr Mrs Patricia Cook | Cllr Kevin Etheridge |
| Cllr Gary Enright | Cllr James Fussell |
| Cllr Ann Gair | Cllr Colin Gordon |
| Cllr Teresa Heron (Vice Chair) | Cllr Teresa Parry |
| Cllr Dawn Ingram-Jones | Cllr Denver W R Preece |
| Cllr Leeroy Jeremiah | Cllr Mrs Dianne Price |
| Cllr Denver W R Preece | Cllr Haydn Pritchard |
| Cllr Judith Ann Pritchard | Cllr Jim Sadler |
| Cllr Jo Rao | Cllr Eluned Stenner |
| Cllr Janine Rees | Cllr Lindsay Whittle |
| Cllr John Eryl Roberts | Cllr Shane Williams |
| Cllr John Taylor | Cllr Walter Williams |
| Cllr Walter Williams | Cllr Jill Winslade |
| | |
| | Voluntary sector representatives: |
| | Sam Howells |
| | Simon Ellington |
| | Mrs C Williams |
| | Lisa Tibbs |
| | Mr S Tiley |
| | Judith Pritchard |
| | Ms Katy Stevenson |
| | Ms Lowri Jones |
| | Ms Carlie Loring |
| | Margaret Lippard |
| | K Sutcliffe |
| | Roger Evans |
| | Nyree George-Titley |
| | Ms M Jones |
| | Mr J Wade |
| | Mrs M Wade |
| | Catherine Gregory |
| | Ms J Tippins |
| | Rich Hassett |
| | Mrs D Lovering |
| | Community Councillor H Llewellyn |
| | Mr J Goldsworthy |
| | Chief Inspector Amanda Thomas |