



CABINET – 14TH JUNE 2023

SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE OPERATION OF THE WELSH CHURCH ACTS FUND AND THE SMALL GRANTS TO THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUND

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES



1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend to Cabinet a number of changes in relation to the operation of the Welsh Church Acts Fund (WCAF) and the Grants to the Voluntary Sector (GTVS) Fund, following a review by the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel, and recommend delegation of future changes to Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report will provide a summary of the recommendations that have been proposed by the GTVS Panel, in relation to the operation of the WCAF and the GTVS Fund. It will detail the consultation undertaken with the Panel and the various options that were considered in order to arrive at the recommendations detailed in this report.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet are asked to approve the following recommendations from the GTVS Panel in relation to the operation the WCAF and the GTVS Fund:
 1. The Welsh Church Acts Fund will not provide funding for revenue costs.
 2. The maximum level of future grants under the Welsh Church Acts Fund be £7,500 until the underspend is fully utilised.
 3. The General Criteria amounts for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund be uplifted by 20% from the 2023/24 financial year and then in line with CPI inflation in future years.
 4. The list of proposed General Criteria for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund covers all the categories required.
 5. A new set of terms of reference will be agreed at the next available Voluntary Sector Liaison Sub-Committee to allow this to happen and put in place a post-meeting with Elected Members only, to consider applications that fall outside the General Criteria or relate to 'exceptional individuals' seeking financial support.
 6. That the application form and criteria for the Welsh Church Acts Fund be published on the Council's website.
 7. That the minimum amount of grant funding to be awarded to voluntary organisations is increased to £200.

8. That future decisions in relation to the management and operation of the Welsh Church Acts Fund and Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund are delegated to the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To make Cabinet aware of the recommendations of the GTVS Panel following the recent review undertaken of the WCAF and the GTVS Fund and to seek their endorsement.
- 4.2 To allow the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer to make any future decisions on the operation of both grant schemes, given the relatively low value of each grant considered against the set criteria.

5. THE REPORT

Introduction

- 5.1 The WCAF and GTVS Fund were both established on the creation of Caerphilly County Borough Council in 1996, following Local Government Reorganisation. They are both grant schemes which can be accessed by community and voluntary organisations operating within Caerphilly county borough, and a limited number of 'exceptional' individuals that satisfy the grant criteria.

Welsh Church Acts Fund

- 5.2 The WCAF was established from the proceeds and assets of the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. These assets were distributed evenly amongst the former county councils in Wales, and then divided between the Welsh Unitary Authorities when they were formed in 1996. The Welsh Church Act Fund is an independent charitable trust managed by Monmouthshire County Council on behalf of the Gwent region.
- 5.3 Within Caerphilly County Borough Council the following criteria is used to award grants, which are derived from the Charitable Purposes for which the Fund may be applied:

"The Welsh Church Acts Fund is available to churches, chapels, places of public worship, community organisations and charities operating in Caerphilly county borough. It provides support to these organisations in the form of capital grants for the repair or refurbishment of buildings and the purchase of equipment to support the aims of the organisation and meet the identified needs of the local community. It is intended that projects supported will have a lasting effect on the communities in which these organisations and buildings are located."
- 5.4 Limited support for is also provided for 'exceptional' individuals in relation to the advancement of education. The definition of 'exceptional' was deliberately not prescribed, as what is defined as 'exceptional' for one individual may be very different for another individual. Apart from the 'exceptional' individuals, the WCAF can only be used to pay for capital items of expenditure i.e. works to land or buildings (such as refurbishment or development), equipment, furniture etc. The current criteria for the WCAF are provided at Appendix 1.
- 5.5 The Council receives an annual budget of circa £60k from Monmouthshire County Council as its share of the income from investments. In 2023/24 this amount is £59,841. In addition there is an historic underspend which has built up over a number of years. Various adjustments have been made over the years in terms of the maximum amount an organisation can apply for, but the current maximum is £5,000 per application. At the end of 2022/23 the underspend stood at £155,874, which will be carried forward to 2023/24. This gives a total budget for the year of £215,715.

Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund

- 5.6 The GTVS Fund is a small value grant scheme which is aimed at providing grants towards running costs for community and voluntary organisations. In addition, the grant scheme also provides grants to individuals who represent Wales or GB and their chosen sport at either a UK or international level. Both these types of grants can be applied for annually. Grants are awarded on the basis of a set of General Criteria – the current criteria are listed in Appendix 2.
- 5.7 The funding for the GTVS Fund comes from a wider Voluntary Sector Budget, which is top sliced to provide funding for the Discretionary Rate Relief scheme. In 2022/23, the total budget was £195,686 and was top sliced by an amount of £187,367, leaving a balance of approximately £8,319 for projects (amounts to be confirmed for 2023/24). At that time, there was an historic underspend on the budget of £110,883, giving a total budget for 2022/23 of £119,202.
- 5.8 During 2022/23, grants were awarded to the value of £12,850, which leaves an amount of £106,352 to be carried forward to 2022/23.

Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel

- 5.9 The GTVS Panel was established at the same time as the GTVS Fund in 1996. The Panel meets three times a year to receive retrospective information reports on grants awarded under both the WCAF and the GTVS Fund, as the majority are approved under the delegated powers of the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer. In addition, the Panel considers and makes recommendations in relation to any applications to the WCAF from 'exceptional' individuals and applications to the GTVS Fund that are outside the General Criteria.
- 5.10 Over the years, the GTVS Panel has been consulted on minor changes to both the WCAF and the GTVS Fund, and where these have been agreed they have been implemented as appropriate. Officers have also responded to requests for changes, such as when the WCAF was opened to 'exceptional' individuals in 2019. However, both grant schemes have largely remained unchanged since they were first established in 1996.
- 5.11 During the Local Government Elections in 2022, a number of new Members were elected to the Council for the first time, which resulted in a number of new Members being nominated to sit on the GTVS Panel. The first meeting of the Panel after the 2022 Elections took place on 14th July 2022, and at that meeting Panel members expressed concerns regarding the historic underspends, accessing the funding and the level of grants available in relation to both the WCAF and the GTVS Fund. They requested that a review be undertaken, and a Working Group be established to consider various elements of both grant schemes. This request was considered by the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer, who agreed that a workshop would be held to discuss the issues of concern and agree a set of recommendations to be taken forward to Cabinet for consideration.
- 5.12 A workshop was held with the GTVS Panel and other invited representatives from the voluntary sector on 18th January 2023, to discuss the issues raised at the Panel meeting on 14th July 2022 and to consider a set of options developed by Officers in relation to changes the Panel felt were needed. The notes of the workshop are attached at Appendix 4, and they outline a number of areas options were provided for consideration by the Panel. A summary of the preferred options is shown below.

Recommendations for Welsh Church Acts Fund

- 5.13 The WCAF can only fund capital projects currently, apart from those applications from 'exceptional' individuals. Panel members had suggested that consideration be given to providing funding for revenue projects. Following discussions at the workshop it was agreed to maintain the current position that only capital projects would be funded moving forward.

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Church Acts Fund will not provide funding for revenue costs.

5.14 The Panel expressed concern regarding the level of the historic underspend and wanted to allocate this as soon as possible. Three options were provided for the Panel to consider:

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

Following a discussion it was agreed that the maximum amount is increased to £7,500 until the historic underspend is fully utilised.

Recommendation 2: The maximum level of future grants under the Welsh Church Acts Fund be £7,500 until the underspend is fully utilised.

Recommendations for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund

5.15 Panel members acknowledged that the General Criteria award values had not been uplifted since 2015. In addition, there was a large historic underspend which Panel members were keen to utilise. Therefore, Panel members agreed that the General Criteria values be uplifted by 20% in 2023/24 and by the CPI inflation rate in each subsequent year.

Recommendation 3: The General Criteria amounts for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund be uplifted by 20% from the 2023/24 financial year and then in line with CPI inflation in future years.

5.16 Panel Members also 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 therefore devised a shorter set of criteria which was agreed by the Panel (Note: the 20% uplift recommended above has already been applied to these figures):

| 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 |

Recommendation 4: The list of proposed General Criteria for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund covers all the categories required.

Recommendations regarding the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel

- 5.17 As part of the review, the opportunity was taken to consider the respective roles of the GTVS Panel and the Voluntary Sector Liaison Sub-Committee (VSLC), and to consider the interrelationship between the Council and the sector. Both the Panel and Committee have been in place since Local Government Reorganisation in 1996, and (over time) their roles have become overlapped. Both the Panel and Committee comprise 15 cross-party Elected Members, however, the VSLC is a committee that sits with members of the voluntary sector alongside Elected Members. The role of the GTVS Panel has become limited over the years to receiving retrospective reports on grants agreed under delegated powers, and considering the relatively few applications that fall outside the Grant Criteria or pertain to 'exceptional' individuals seeking financial support.
- 5.18 During the workshop session it was concluded by the Panel that it would be an opportune time to disband the GTVS Panel and transfer its activities to the VSLC. The primary reason for this is that the sector would be more closely sighted on the process of grant awards by the Council under the two schemes. However, as the disbanding of the GTVS Panel is a decision to be made by Full Council at the AGM rather than Cabinet, it was considered at the Full Council meeting on 11th May 2023 and the GTVS Panel has now been disbanded. Future reports on grant awards under the GTVS Fund and the WCAF will be made to the VSLC.
- 5.19 In order to ensure that the functions of the Panel are restricted to democratically Elected Members of the Council, it was proposed that a post-meeting of the VSLC Elected Members only would be held following each VSLC meeting (if applications have been submitted), to consider any applications that fall outside the General Criteria or relate to 'exceptional' individuals seeking financial support, where necessary. An information report on grants awarded during the previous quarter would be reported to the main meeting of the VSLC. The Panel agreed with these suggestions and made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 5: A new set of terms of reference will be agreed at the next available Voluntary Sector Liaison Sub-Committee to allow this to happen and put in place a post-meeting with Elected Members only, to consider applications that fall outside the General Criteria or relate to 'exceptional individuals' seeking financial support.

- 5.20 The GTVS Panel met on 9th March 2023 to formally approve the recommendations made during the workshop on 18th January 2023. At this meeting the Panel Members requested that two additional recommendations be included in the Cabinet report.

Recommendation 6: That the application form and criteria for the Welsh Church Acts Fund be published on the Council's website.

- 5.21 The criteria for the WCAF are already published on the Council's website [Caerphilly - Caerphilly County Borough](#). The application forms are not currently published on the website as Officers would prefer to have an initial conversation with potential applicants, so they can understand what the project entails, to help ensure that the application process is as easy as possible, and to signpost applicants to other departments (e.g. Caerphilly Cares) or organisations (e.g. GAVO) who can help them to develop their project or complete an application form. If the application form were published on the Council website this may not happen, and applicants could submit an application form that is ineligible or is not as developed as it could be, which could lead to the application being unsuccessful. Cabinet is asked to make a decision in relation to this suggestion.

Recommendation 7: That the minimum amount of grant funding to be awarded to voluntary organisations is increased to £200.

- 5.22 The Panel agreed at the workshop on 13th January 2023 to increase the current General Criteria values by 20% in 2023/24. This would result in the grants levels as detailed in 5.16 of this report. However, at the Panel meeting on 9th March 2023, Panel members suggested that the minimum amount that should be awarded to voluntary organisations is £200 be application. If this suggestion is agreed by Cabinet, eight of the thirteen categories in 5.16 would be affected by this increase. Cabinet is asked to make a decision in relation to this suggestion.

Delegation of decision making to Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer

- 5.23 The final issue for consideration by Cabinet is the request that in future, decisions of this nature in relation to the WCAF or the GTVS Fund are delegated to the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer. This will help to ensure that future changes to the grant schemes are more responsive to changing circumstances e.g. the recommendation included in this report is for the maximum grant amount to increase to £7,500 until the historical underspend is utilised, however, once the underspend has been used the maximum grant will revert to the current level i.e. £5,000.

Recommendation 8: That future decisions in relation to the management and operation of the Welsh Church Acts Fund and Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund are delegated to the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer.

5.24 **Conclusion**

This report summarises the proposed changes to the operation of WCAF and GTVS Fund that have been recommended by the GTVS Panel. Cabinet is asked to consider each of the recommendations.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions applicable to this report. The grant amounts available in 2022/23 and 2023/24 have been confirmed.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An IIA has not been completed as the proposed changes will benefit the recipients of the WCAF and GTVS Fund due to increases in the grant awards to be made. The recommended changes will also help to simplify current application processes.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Increasing the level of grants awards to be made will mean that the historical underspends for the WCAF and the GTVS Fund will be used up more quickly than they would be under the current grant levels. However, if the suggested changes are implemented, Officers will monitor the effect of the higher grant award levels and make the necessary adjustments once the underspends have been utilised.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications. Both grant schemes are currently managed by a Policy Officer within the Policy & Partnerships Team.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The views of consultees have been incorporated into the report as appropriate.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Equality Act 2010 and Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. One of the specific duties covers matters of engagement.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Current criteria for Welsh Church Acts Fund
Appendix 2 Current General Criteria for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund
Appendix 3 Minutes of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel meeting 14-07-22
Appendix 4 Notes of workshop session with the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel 18-01-23
Appendix 5 Draft minutes of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel 09-03-23