

TITLE OF REPORT: TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S GRANTS PROCESS AND RELATED COMMUNITY BENEFITS

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group on the Council's Grants Process and Related Community Benefits is attached at **Appendix A** for Cabinet's consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to
- consider the comments of the Council's Senior Management Team (SMT) in para 7.2 below; and
 - consider and endorse the recommendations of the task and finish group's report.

3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To allow Cabinet to consider the report and its recommendations.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The conclusions and recommendations of the report were the subject of a full discussion of the members of the task and finish group.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 The members of the task and finish group represented a range of urban and rural constituencies. Three of the witnesses who attended were from external organisations.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1 The task and finish group held its review on 7 February. This is a positive report which endorses the current processes, commends the work of the Community Development Team and suggests some changes to improve the current arrangements still further. The report's evidence has been cleared by the review's witnesses. Its conclusions and recommendations are at section 2 of the report and have been endorsed by the lead officer.

7.2 SMT supported the report and its recommendations and made the following specific comments:

- SMT clarified that recommendation 1 (setting clearer priorities) applied to priorities for grants, not the overall priorities for the Council;
- SMT queried whether the Council had the resources to implement recommendations 4 and 5 (monitoring the outcome of grants) and heard from the lead officer that reviewing a summary of the outcomes might be a manageable way of taking this forward rather than reviewing every single project in detail; and
- SMT considered that once this report has been to Cabinet, there might be scope for a wider examination of the grants process to assess its cost effectiveness and its benefit to communities.

7.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a full discussion of the report's conclusions and recommendations and amended two of its recommendations. These amendments have been incorporated into the final report:

- Recommendation 7 – the need for a district-wide grant - the task and finish group originally recommended this should be achieved by re-distributing a proportion of area committee budgets into a district-wide fund, but the Committee considered that although a district-wide grant would be desirable, the mechanism for achieving it needed more thought and that Cabinet should commission an officer review on how best to achieve this.
- Recommendation 12 originally asked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider whether to change how the Rural Grants Fund was administered and advise Cabinet accordingly. It is many years since the Fund was established and it has diminished over the years. The Committee recognised the logic of combining the Fund with area committee budgets but were concerned that larger rural projects around rural Royston and rural Baldock could not be progressed with the small slice of the Fund they would receive under a new arrangement. The Committee therefore decided to recommend the status quo remain for two years at which time Cabinet should consider the merits of re-distribution.

7.4 The Council's Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) will undertake an audit of the Council's grants process shortly. This report will form part of the background to that review and a copy of the draft report has already been sent to SIAS.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

9. FINANCE AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no financial or risk implications arising from the contents of this report.

10. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no new HR implications arising from the contents of this report.

11. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new public sector equality duty, which came into force on 5 April 2011. There is a general duty, described below, that public bodies must meet, and which is underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet it.
- 11.2 In line with the public sector equality duty, a public body must, in the exercise of its functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 11.3 The report's recommendations aim to improve the grants process and the help this gives to communities which can only have a positive equalities impact.

12. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of social value as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied.

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 Appendix A - Report of the Task and Finish Group on the Council's Grants Process and Related Community Benefits.

14. REPORT AUTHOR

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