

**HITCHIN COMMITTEE
6 SEPTEMBER 2016**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

6

TITLE OF REPORT: GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY & COMMUNITY SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR TONY HUNTER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To advise the Committee on the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee budgets.
- 1.2 To bring to the Committee's attention details of recent requests received for Area Committee Grant Funding, made by community groups and local organisations, which confirm to the Authority's Grants Policy approved by Cabinet on June 14th 2016.
- 1.3 To advise the Committee of the activities and schemes with which the Community Officer has been involved.
- 1.4 To bring to the Committee's attention some important community based activities that will take place during the next few months.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development Ward Budgets as set out in Appendix A – Hitchin Area Committee budget for 2016/17.
- 2.2 The Committee notes the request for grant funding from Hitchin Business Improvement District, as outlined in 8.1.1
- 2.3 The Committee considers the reallocation of the following amounts totalling **£4,583** to the Area Committee's base budget.
 - £3,333 Junction Protection allocated in March 2011
 - £1,250 Pedestrian Island by Our Ladys Primary School was found not to be feasible as the road was not widen enough.

Neither of these former schemes are now compliant with existing policy as funding can not be provided to another statutory authority.

- 2.4 That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Officer.
- 3.2 This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation, assists in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget and ensures actions are performed within the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in June 2016.
- 3.3 The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims expressed in the Corporate Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no alternative options being proposed other than those detailed within the text of this report. However in the course of debate at committee, Members may wish to comment and offer additional views on any of the items included within this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Consultation with Members has occurred in connection with the allocation of funds for Community Projects
- 5.2 Consultation with the respective officers and external bodies/groups has taken place with regard to funding proposals for Area Committee Development Funds.

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. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix A Hitchin Area Committee Budget Spread sheet, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for the for 2016/17.
- 7.2 The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial years, including balances and past expenditure relating to the allocated and unallocated Area Capital Visioning Budgets available to the Committee.

- 7.3 The current level of unallocated funds carried over from the Area Committee's 2015/16 Area Grant Budget was £14,702. The development budget for 2016/17 was £19,600 as outlined in Appendix A - Hitchin Area Committee budget for 2016/17.

At the last meeting in May 2016, £10,303 was awarded and £688 was reallocated into the base budget.

This equates to a total of **£24,717**. If distributed evenly between the remaining 3 meetings in the civic year this would provide £8,239 budget available per meeting.

8. PROJECT/ ACTIVITY/ SCHEME DETAILS

8.1 Grant Applications

8.1.1 Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID)

The Hitchin BID submitted an application for grant funding from the Hitchin Committee Budget.

The proposals the organisation requested funding for were;

- Floral displays
- Christmas lights
- Festival events
- Sunday bus service
- A new tourist information facility.

Members may have seen the Floral displays within the town which have been funded via the BID and local business sponsorship. Displays have been sited at each entrance to the Town Centre and provide a spectacularly colourful welcome to visitors. Comments from the public, received at monthly Councillors' Surgeries in the market place, greatly praising the quality of the displays have been passed on to the BID.

The Christmas lights and town centre events running up to the Christmas holiday (including the light switch on event) are all very costly to implement and the BID would seek some sponsorship towards this event.

The continuation of the No 80 Sunday bus service and the extension of the route to the Purwell area of the town, have also now been funded via the BID. This provides much needed public transport to and from the Town Centre and is well utilised. Funding has now been found from Hertfordshire County Councillors Locality Budgets, the BID and local business sponsorship.

The BID have plans in place to create a Tourist Information Centre relocating from their current premises on Churchyard to a larger unit which will incorporate the Town Centre Manager, the Hitchin Markets and the BID office, with enough space to welcome and advise visitors to the town on how to make the most of their visit.

The four proposals outlined above will cost approximately £75,000 to achieve and the Hitchin BID had requested that the Hitchin Committee consider making a contribution of funds towards these activities.

However, as outlined in the information note provided to Area Committee on 24th May 2016, Members were reminded of the policy decision taken 10th February 2011, where it was agreed not to provide funds to Town Centre Partnerships or BIDs.

In addition, the new grants policy adopted by Cabinet in June 2016 would prevent funding a precepting authority. The Number 80 Sunday Bus is a service that would otherwise have been the responsibility of Herts County Council and would not be compliant under 'Activities previously or still the responsibility of another statutory body or agency.'

The Communities Officer has consulted with the BID manager in order to advise on alternative suitable funding streams that may be available for those activities / proposals which still require funding.

8.2 **Community Update**

8.2.1 Bancroft Hall

As Members will be aware, as part of the adoption of the Community Halls Strategy in October 2011, Council resolved that Bancroft Hall would be closed and demolished and the land reinstated to parkland.

This was only to be undertaken, however, after the reopening of Hitchin Town Hall following the completion of its extensive refurbishment programme. Hitchin Town Hall has now re-opened and preparations are now underway to prepare for the demolition of Bancroft Hall.

Therefore the Hall will be formally closed on 30 September 2016. Following closure, contractors will undertake the dismantling and general demolition of the building and the removal of the concrete plinth on which it stands. Once the area has been cleared of debris the land will be reinstated to parkland with appropriate the elements of grass and landscaping.

The next steps being undertaken:-

1. Advising the remaining regular users of the hall of the date of closure.
2. Clearing the building of equipment, possibly offering some of it to local community groups / facilities as was the case when the Town Hall closed prior to the commencement of its refurbishment.
3. The demolition of the building and the removal of all debris.
4. Landscaping of the footprint area of the building.

8.2.2 Westmill Community Centre

The Westmill Community Association (WCA) has now signed the lease agreement with the Authority and has taken possession of the new centre.

A phased move over from the old centre to the new is planned and the old building will be vacated on September 19th 2016 by which time the new centre will be fully operational. The £20,000 grant funding provided by Hitchin Committee has now been released to allow the WCA to purchase new fixtures and fittings for the new building.

8.2.3 Westmill Estate

The multi-use games area (MUGA) was moved temporarily to the rear of the flats and shop units on John Barker Place by North Herts Homes some time ago.

There are a couple of groups of children who have caused some criminal damage in the area including breaking into the Coffee Mill (youth facility) store at the rear of the unit. They have also been entering and climbing up to the walk ways of the above flats which are now vacated ready for phase 2 of the redevelopment of the area.

The Communities Officer co-ordinates a networking group for agencies working on the Estate. As a result of discussions within this group the Police have helped to set up a sub group of officers, youth workers and community workers to address the current issues.

As part of the initiative to provide diversionary activities to some of the young people the Communities Officer has arranged with Stevenage Leisure for some free swim sessions at Hitchin Pool. The Youth Worker employed by Youth Connexions will be taking groups of 10 young people to the pool over the school holiday.

A new MUGA will be installed on the site of the old community centre and the Youth provision at the Coffee Mill will be re-located to the new Community Centre. It is hoped that this will help to alleviate the current issues.

8.2.4 Rhythms of the World

Rhythms of the World are holding 25 events between April and October 2016 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the organisation.

The three community events supported by the Hitchin Committee with the provision of £4,280 have now taken place.

These events were;

- a weekend of concerts in St Mary's Church in June
- a family fun day in the Market Place on 10th July
- and event at Mary Exton School on 16th July

Due to the organisations' difficult financial situation the funding is being released in instalments on receipt of invoices. At the time of writing approximately half the funds have been released to the organisation.

8.2.5 Early Days Playgroup

The Early Days Playgroup which received £1,500 grant award from the Area Committee in 2015 has finally been able to raise the remaining funding required to implement their plan to improve the outside play area at their base located in Oughton Primary School. The group plans to hold an opening event in the near future and Hitchin Members will be invited.

8.3 Highways Matters

This section is included within the community update report for each committee cycle to facilitate debate and enable appropriate feedback on any of the proposed or listed Highways related schemes.

Any new proposals or revised schemes will be forwarded to the respective Herts County Councillor for consideration who will in turn report back and advise the Committee accordingly.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Terms of Reference in relation to Area Committees confirm that they may establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations which include discretionary grant aid/financial support but excluding grants for district-wide activities. The Committee has delegated powers, as a body, to allocate discretionary budgets and devolved budgets within the terms determined by the Council and outlined in the current Grant Policy agreed by Cabinet in June 2016.

9.2 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a General Power of Competence which gives local authorities the power to do anything that individuals generally may do. This may be for, or otherwise than for the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident in its area.

9.3 Section 137 Local Government Act 1972 provides specific authority for the Council to incur expenditure on anything which is in the interests of and will bring direct benefit to its area. This includes a charity or other body operating for public service.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 In the past few years there has been no inflationary allowance to the main Area Committee Budget. From the 2016/17 financial year, a proposal was made through the council's corporate business planning process to reduce the overall amount the council awards by way of grants, both area committee and district wide, by a suggested 20%. Following member workshops, there was a request that whilst the principle of saving approximately £86k of revenue was supported, the current level of district MoUs should be retained, thus the area committee element was reduced by a greater amount.

10.2 Appendix A provides the detailed budget for 2016/17.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are relevant risk entries recorded on Covalent, the Council's performance and risk system, relating to Bancroft Hall and the regeneration of John Barker Place and the provision of the new Westmill Community Centre. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with this report specifically.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The projects which comprise the Community Officers' workload, and area committee funding assigned to community projects are assessed to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible to members of the local community. The only deviation to this is where a minority group may specifically receive funding or allocation of resources to address a particular area of need or 'gap' in provision.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 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, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no pertinent Human Resource implications associated with any items within this report.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix A Hitchin Area Committee Budget Report 2016/17

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.
- 17.2 Review of Grant Policy Cabinet June 2016