

Minutes of the Extraordinary Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel



Location: Council Chamber, The Symington Building,
Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough,
LE16 7AG

Date: 1st August 2024 commencing at 6.30pm

Present:

Councillors: Anderson (Chair), James, Mahal, Page, Sarfas, Taylor, Whelband
(Asher, King, Knowles)

Officers: J. Richardson – Chief Executive
C. Hartley – Director of Communities
C. Mason – Director of Resources & S151. (Online)
E. Newman – Democratic Services Officer.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nunn, who was substituted by Councillor Mrs Page.

2. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Call-in request of the Cabinet decision (15 July 2024) on the “Criteria and allocations for £1m Community Grants Fund to Parish and Town Councils report”

The item was introduced by the Chair of the Panel. He spoke through the process that this section of the meeting would follow.

Explanation of call in by lead signatory

As lead signatory to the call in, Councillor King set out the reasons that he had called in this review. He highlighted that the distribution of the funds was based on a hierarchy of needs based on past housing delivery, which has not been adopted by the Council. He also discussed the issue of the Kibworths (Kibworth Beauchamp and Kibworth Harcourt) being grouped together under the proposed funding scheme. It was also noted that the proposed funding allocations were not brought to scrutiny panel, when the 'Criteria for Community Grants to Parish and Town Councils' report was brought to the Services and Communities Panel on 13th June 2024. He went on to note that it was felt that the £40,000 allocated to Parish Meetings, was not enough to fund an individual project for each Meeting. He also discussed alternative methods that could be considered if the report were to be sent back for Cabinet review. These included not having individual allocations for each area, but have major grants, which would be considered by the Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants, and smaller grants, which could be decided under officer delegation. This would allow any community to apply for any level of funds to support a project in their area. This would also allow more rural areas to access larger sums of money for projects to develop their area.

Question	Answer
Could the Hierarchy of needs be explained in terms of the current hierarchy versus the one being used to distribute the funding?	This is taken from the current Local Plan, and the one being used in this case would be as part of the emerging Local Plan.
Are there two parish councils for Kibworth Harcourt and Kibworth Beauchamp?	There are two separate parish councils to represent the two different communities.
What would the Lead Signatory suggest being a fairer, simpler system?	The major grants scheme to support larger projects, and a smaller grants

	<p>programme for minor projects. Larger areas already have opportunities to bid for other funding, especially if they have housing developments through Section 106.</p>
<p>Why is there a need to split the Kibworths?</p>	<p>To split the 'Kibworths' would be a fairer, as they are different communities.</p>
<p>Should there be a role for District Councillors in the allocation of grants?</p>	<p>It will be important for the ward members to be included in the process. It should operate in a similar fashion to current grant allocation projects. It is also important that ward councillors are able to receive feedback on the success of the bids.</p>
<p>How much consultation has the Lead Signatory undertaken with the Parish Councils and Parish Meetings?</p>	<p>Representations have been received from Kibworths and surrounding areas. Councillors were also brought queries regarding application process.</p>
<p>Does the proposed system promote equality and diversity of bids from different communities?</p>	<p>It is important that smaller areas are able to access meaningful sums of money to promote community development, and the proposed process limits the funds that, in particular, Parish Meetings can access.</p>
<p>Are the combined Kibworths (Kibworth Beauchamp and Kibworth Harcourt) a similar size to 'Larger Villages' e.g. Great Glen, Broughton Astley, Fleckney?</p>	<p>Both Kibworths together are larger than both Great Glen and Fleckney. Each Kibworth village (Beauchamp and Harcourt) are similar sizes to both Great Glen and Fleckney.</p>

It was noted by a Member of the Panel, that the previous S106 application process was very complicated. Therefore, Parish Meetings and smaller Parish Councils did not have the resources to complete the bid application process. The process was simplified to ensure all parishes could access the funding streams. Implementing the proposed process may be too complicated and put off smaller parishes from applying.

Overview and Explanation of decision by the relevant Cabinet Member

Cllr Knowles, as the relevant Cabinet Member at the inception of the decision, gave an explanation of why the decision was made. Cabinet reviewed various allocation systems and decided that the one presented was the best process to provide this funding to Towns and Parishes. The criteria and allocations were decided on based on housing delivery, as well as identifying 'service provision areas', specifically areas people go to receive and engage with community support services. He highlighted that Members were able to attend the Cabinet meeting at which the decision was made to receive the up-to-date information and put any questions to the Cabinet that they may have had.

Question	Answer
What support will be provided to less experienced or less resourced Parish Councils/Meetings?	There will be additional resourcing at the council through a new Community Development team to assist with the grants application process.
The scheme acknowledges where additional development has taken place and where there is a need for a support structure, but how does this grant differentiate from Section 106 grants?	S106 grants are made available from developer contributions received, and are specifically for mitigating additional development and must meet a series of tests set out in legislation. These grants are not linked to specific developments, but do recognise where development has taken place.

<p>If those larger areas do not pull down the grants, where will the remaining money go?</p>	<p>There may be a requirement for review in the future, if there is remaining funds.</p>
<p>Why have smaller villages, with limited additional development, still received £10,000?</p>	<p>This amount is significantly less than other settlements have been allocated, recognising the smaller levels of development.</p>
<p>If the new settlement hierarchy is used, what happens if smaller villages receive an unexpected level of growth? How do they provide services for those additional members of their community with a smaller amount of money?</p>	<p>The allocation process isn't an exact science, and it wouldn't be fair to make speculations about where potential housing growth may be taking place. For future schemes, there may be changes needed to be made to accommodate increased growth.</p>
<p>How would you suggest the Ward Members be involved in the application process?</p>	<p>District Councillors are encouraged to input into Parish/Town meetings' discussion on potential grant projects.</p>
<p>How will it be ensured that there is equality in the application process for all Parishes?</p>	<p>Officers have ensured compliance to all necessary delegations.</p>
<p>How has the allocation process been developed?</p>	<p>The details of the process are currently being worked on, and will be available on the Council's website as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Why have the Kibworths been grouped together?</p>	<p>They have been grouped together for the 'overall' allocation, to recognised that they generally operate as one area and residents do not necessarily recognise boundaries. However the</p>

	<p>allocation amounts set out in the Appendix are accompanied by a footnote to show the amount per Parish if they would prefer to approach it that way.</p>
<p>What are the relevant Portfolio Holder's comments on rural communities' needs and how best to cater to their needs with this scheme?</p>	<p>The needs of all communities, including rural communities, will be considered through the application process. Grant Officers will work with smaller Parish Councils and/or Meetings to help with this.</p>
<p>What projects could be undertaken by the smaller parishes with the £5000 allocation?</p>	<p>Smaller parishes may have projects they want to use the funds for, or they may not. It's important that there is provision for all communities.</p>
<p>What is the Cabinet Member's thoughts on the scheme previously suggested by the Lead Signatory?</p>	<p>The suggested system could be considered for schemes for future funding, but this particular scheme has been developed to cater for this particular scheme, with massive officer input.</p>
<p>How will the scheme be operated and what will the officers' involvement be? How will smaller parishes engage in the scheme?</p>	<p>As per the previous questions regarding the process, this is being worked on, and will be available on the Council's website as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Will exceptions be made for the smaller parishes who seek funding for larger capital schemes?</p>	<p>In the case of this funding scheme, there is not flexibility for increased funding. However, there are several other grants available where larger pots</p>

	of money could be allocated to larger projects.
Can the scheme be flexible to changes that may be implemented by the new government regarding required housing numbers?	There is limited flexibility in this case, as the decision has been taken now, to support the community. There can't be speculation on the future housing numbers.

Statement from the relevant officer

The Director of Communities and Wellbeing gave her written statement. She gave a brief recap of the decision process, discussing that the £1 million was agreed at Council in February, the criteria was considered by the Services and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel in June, and then a decision was made by Cabinet in July. The scheme is a capital funding allocation, intended to support physical community infrastructure. However, it cannot be allocated to community services.

The funding split was not an exact science, but key principles were considered. This included favour to settlements which are likely to have a need for community infrastructure following large growth or expected growth. The settlement hierarchy was felt to be the best way to allocate the funding. Settlements which are centres of service provision would receive the higher allocations. It was also considered that larger settlements would have a higher likelihood of requirements and would need larger service provisions. There had been a suggestion that there be no settlement allocation, however it was felt that this posed two significant risks – it would result in a first come first serve system, which would favour those with projects already in the pipeline; and that those with more experience of or resources for the grant application system would receive higher amounts of funding. The third principle was the desire not to segregate communities – communities may span settlements, and those living in one settlement may access services in another settlement. Smaller communities may wish to use their allocation for smaller projects (e.g. Benches, cycle racks), or pool their allocation with other settlements to fund larger projects (e.g. village halls).

Question	Answer
What is meant by 'several' application round?	The plan is currently to operate three application windows within the year.
What will happen if there is remaining money once the scheme has completed?	If there is significant funding remaining, the process would be reviewed.
Could there be an opportunity for larger parishes to usurp any additional funding left over?	Any funding remaining would be reviewed at that time, and a fair process put in place.
Would there be a limit for the amount of funding allocated throughout the additional rounds?	This is not yet known, as we do not yet know what the take up will be during the first rounds.
How will the Grants team be engaging with the Parish Councils/Meetings in order to assist parishes where they may not be as engaged?	Parish Councils/Meetings have been written to regarding the schemes. Grants Officers will be out in the community to assist with the Community Grants programme, but also other funding schemes available, and providing practical support.
How will the officers ensure that the Parish Councils/meetings distribute the funding throughout the community?	The funding is intended to go to Town/Parish Councils with an opportunity for councils and community groups to work together to develop capital projects. Community Groups will receive additional information on the scheme. Ward Members will be an important link between Parish Councils

	and community groups to encourage engagement.
How to deal with parish council prejudices against certain community groups?	All applications will be reviewed by the Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants, and representatives of both Parish councils and community groups can attend to speak on their applications.
Would children's play equipment be included in the capital scheme?	Yes. The scheme does not prescribe what projects can and cannot be funded using the scheme, but it needs to be physical community infrastructure.

Panel Debate

The Chair then opened the debate to the Panel.

Councillor Mrs Page highlighted that ward members need to be engaged with parish and town councils in their application. As well as this, Parish and Town Councils need to engage with community groups regarding potential community projects. She also specified there needed to be increased detail on the funding windows and when these would be and for how long. She also recommended that the 'Kibworths' should be separated (Kibworth Beauchamp and Kibworth Harcourt). She then suggested that Parish Councils should be required to accept applications from community groups. Finally, she discussed the need to reallocate the funding, in order to reallocate some of the proposed funding from the large market towns (Market Harborough and Lutterworth) to smaller parishes. Councillor Whelband and Councillor Mahal expressed their support for Councillor Mrs Page's recommendations.

Councillor James added that the Kibworths area and allocation would need to be reviewed. He also highlighted the need for communication with community groups to ensure they are able to make applications via their local Parish Councils.

Regarding the issue raised in the debate with the Kibworths allocation, the Director for Communities and Wellbeing clarified that there was a joint allocation for both areas, but they could split the allocation between the two Parishes.

The Chair then concluded the debate.

Decision

The Chair then indicated to the Panel that it was time for the decision to be made.

Recommendation (ii) to 'refer the report back to Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out in writing its reasons for so doing' was proposed by Councillor Mrs Page and seconded by Cllr Whelband. This was brought to a vote, and the vote was **LOST**.

Recommendation (i) 'Reject the call-in and endorse the decision. In this case the decision shall take effect on the date of the Panel's acceptance' was proposed by Councillor Taylor and seconded by Councillor Sarfas. This was brought to a vote, and the vote was **WON**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the call-in was rejected and the original decision was endorsed. The decision would take effect on the date of the Panel's acceptance.

4. Any urgent items

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 20:10.