

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	7 November 2024
Title:	Community Grants Programme
Report of:	Ian Fitzpatrick, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning
Cabinet member:	Councillor Johnny Denis, Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Tourism & Leisure
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of report:	For Cabinet to consider the funding recommendations of the cross-party Grants Working Group.
Decision type:	Key
Officer recommendation(s):	To agree the proposed funding allocations set out in Appendix 1, and the additional recommendation at para 2.8.
Reasons for recommendations:	The recommendations outlined in this report enable the Council to support a broad range of causes and continue to deliver improved outcomes for residents during the cost-of-living crisis.
Contact Officer(s):	Name: Seanne Sweeney Post title: Community Services Lead E-mail: Seanne.Sweeney@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk Telephone number: 01273 085 630

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In April 2021, the Council commenced a tri-annual Community Grants Programme (CGP) in line with the newly produced Community Grants Policy. This marked a new approach, moving away from the former policy of awarding grants to the same limited pool each year. The 2021 CGP is now in its final year, meaning current grants will draw to a close in March 2025.
- 1.2 In response to feedback received in 2021, the process of awarding the next grant cycle in 2025 ought to commence well in advance, giving applicants a period of notice as to whether or not they would receive funding. To that end, the CGP 2025 – 2028 was launched in May of this year.
- 1.3 As with the current CPG, the 2025 prospectus was designed to complement the recently published Corporate Plan and sought to focus on the current challenges facing residents and the local voluntary sector, whilst retaining the flexibility to

support good causes and events which otherwise would likely not access Council funding.

1.4 In the summer of 2022, the Council recognised that a myriad of challenges was culminating in a national cost-of crisis. The Council acted quickly, producing a range of support for residents and key partners, including:

- A dedicated hardship fund
- Small grants for Welcome (warm) Spaces
- Financial assistance for local food banks and community supermarkets
- Additional funding for specialist advice provision
- Forming and facilitating the multi-discipline Cost of Living Action Group (CoLPAG)
- Setting up a cross-departmental Cost of Living Officer Working Group
- And, crucially, a dedicated part-time officer role along with a new portfolio lead: Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing.

However, although there has been great progress in building joint stakeholder solutions across the district, the resilience of communities will be tested again in the coming months as we enter winter with food and energy bills remaining high. Longer-term, sustainable solutions are needed, and formal collaboration with key partners will enable the Council to focus on internal policies and practice whilst still playing a pivotal role in co-producing improved outcomes for local people.

2 Budget update and grant recommendations

2.1 Lewes District Citizens Advice (CitA) have continued to offer information, advice and casework on a range of issues including welfare & benefits, employment rights and debt amongst others. As with the pandemic, CitA have seen a sharp increase in contacts from residents as the cost-of-living crisis has continued.

2.2 in 2021- as with previous years - CitA was awarded £190kpa via the Community Grants Programme to deliver vital core advice, advocacy and guidance to residents across the district. This spring, during the design phase of the 2025 programme, it was acknowledged by the Grants Working Group (and subsequently supported by Cabinet members) that CitA, as a valued partner with a significant role in the district's crisis response, ought to be separated from the overall budget, leaving a total of £84k to be allocated for the 2025 CGP.

2.3 Following discussions of the Grants Working Group and with the endorsement of Members, the new CGP prospectus set out two categories under which groups could apply:

1. Cost-of-Living Crisis Support
 - Specialist Advice
 - Sustainable Food Initiatives
 - Community Wellbeing & VCSE Support
 - Fuel Poverty & Access
2. Equality & Inclusion

- Targeted support for protected groups (*as defined by the Equality Act 2010*)
- Annual Events
- Digital Exclusion

- 2.4 As expected, the programme was vastly oversubscribed with almost 50 applications seeking a total of £300k against a budget of £84k.
- 2.5 The Grants Working Group were tasked with assessing each application against a set of criteria. After careful consideration and much deliberation, the group produced the grant allocation proposals set out in Appendix 1. It is recommended that Cabinet approves these proposals.
- 2.6 The 2025 CGP is a vehicle through which the Council can drive sustainable solutions and ensure that the resources and relationships produced and fostered by the Council's Cost of Living response will not disappear. Over the years, 3VA (the local voluntary action in the district) has consistently been a key collaborator, assisting the Council to deliver priority outcomes through the pandemic and latterly the current crisis.
- 2.7 At the time of writing this report, East Sussex County Council have launched a consultation on proposals to reduce the cost of vital services within Adult Social Care. If these proposals are approved and implemented, it's likely there will be severe impacts on the local voluntary and community sector. Lewes District Council is already aware that organisations are extremely concerned about how they will manage to support vulnerable people, in what is an already challenging climate for groups seeking secure funding.
- 2.8 To that end, Cabinet recognises that enhancing the resilience of the local voluntary action whilst they, like many organisations across the county, face uncertainty is crucial. Members therefore are recommended to provide an additional small grant to 3VA to fortify in as much as is possible essential access to guidance and advocacy for groups within the district, a move which aligns with the Corporate Plan commitments around support through challenging times and community wellbeing.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 Ongoing engagement through the Council-led Cost of Living Partner Action Group and Equality & Fairness Stakeholder Group have fed into the production of the 2025 prospectus.

4 Corporate plan and council policies

- 4.1 Making changes to the voluntary sector grants policy supports the council's pledge to promote open and transparent decision making, as outlined in the Corporate Plan.
- 4.2 The new policy improves alignment with the Corporate Plan pledge to respect and promote principals of equality and support the council's equality and fairness policy.

5 Financial appraisal

- 5.1 The proposed spend on the new programme will increase the current budget allocated by Lewes Council from £274k to £280k. The additional £6k will be built into the budget for 2025/26.

6 Legal implications

- 6.1 This grant funding programme constitutes financial assistance given directly from public resources by a public authority, under the Subsidy Control Act 2022. It will therefore require assessment, either as a scheme or for individual grant awards, to ensure compliance with that Act.

- 6.2 Legal Services can assist with such assessment(s) and with developing any scheme(s) where applicable.

013412-LDC-CEC

7 Risk management implications

- 7.1 If Cabinet does not allocate the funding it has budgeted for grants there are risks both to the council's reputation in relation to this high-profile activity and to the council's own services. Supporting the local voluntary sector can, in some instances, reduce demand for council services and prevent residents reaching a situation where council or other support would be required.

Reviewing the council's policies and performance on a regular basis provides an assurance that the council is fulfilling its functions in a way that complies with current legislation.

8 Equality analysis

- 8.1 An Equality & Fairness Analysis has been undertaken on these proposals. This concluded that overall, recommendations for the 2025 Grants Program would have a positive impact on residents with protected characteristics, particularly age, race, disability and carers.

In addition, the funding will support residents who continue to struggle with the cost-of-living crisis, including people who are facing homelessness.

9 Environmental sustainability implications

- 9.1 The new grants programme seeks to complement the Council's sustainability commitments. Priorities of food and nature systems are built in by supporting green energy, sustainable food initiatives and community wellbeing.

10 Contribution to Community Wealth Building

- 10.1 One of the key principles of Community Wealth Building is plural ownership of the economy. The community and voluntary sector, including not for profit

organisations such as cooperatives and community interest companies all contribute to this plurality. By supporting the sector through a grants programme, the council aims to help stimulate plural ownership and social entrepreneurship.

11 Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Recommended Grant Allocations

12 Background papers

- [Community Grants Policy](#)