

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:-	Cabinet Member for Safe & Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:-	14th October 2013
3.	Title:-	Community Grants to Encourage Community Service Delivery
4.	Directorate:-	NEIGHBOURHOOD & ADULT SERVICES

5. Summary

Promoting volunteering, engaging communities and supporting tenants to take ownership of estates are high priorities for Rotherham Council.

Through the development of a small grants scheme, Rotherham MBC is provided with the opportunity of working with and engaging the voluntary and community sector to support Streetpride services and undertake environmental improvements.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet Member,

- **Reviews the content of the report prior to submission to Cabinet Member for Communities and Cohesion**

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Background

Promoting volunteering, engaging communities and supporting tenants to take ownership of estates are high priorities for Rotherham Council with a number of initiatives being delivered/developed;

- A project aimed at developing and streamlining volunteering opportunities within the Local Authority is being advanced corporately. The project will increase the numbers of local people (with a focus on the deprived neighbourhoods) giving time to add value to services and service delivery as well as enabling volunteers to build transferable skills such as employability skills, build confidence and self-esteem or meet new people.
- The deprived neighbourhoods agenda is a key strategic project for the Council. Rich picture analysis of the 11 most deprived neighbourhoods in Rotherham has identified both community engagement and environmental quality as key priorities for 6 of the 11 and 8 of the 11 neighbourhoods respectively.
- A report was submitted to DLT in May on the use of the Council's capital housing investment programme as a catalyst for community action, engagement and area improvement beyond the scope of works being undertaken by the Council. This scheme is currently being developed with a pilot planned for Canklow during a major reroofing scheme.

Discussions between Streetpride and Rotherfed have taken place to explore opportunities for joint working in the context of budget cuts affecting Streetpride services such as grounds maintenance and street cleansing since 2011/12. One such opportunity was the use of community grants to encourage the community to add value to the baseline service delivery.

7.2 Proposal

As the majority of community groups have an income of less than £10,000 per annum, small grants are essential to keep these groups running or to enable them to undertake small community projects.

Through the development of a small grants scheme, Rotherham MBC would provide the means of working with the voluntary and community sector to support Streetpride's environmental services.

2 potential grant schemes are detailed below;

1. The Environment Exchange Grant Scheme

Rotherham's Community Groups and TARAs can apply for a small annual grant (of up to £250) to assist with running costs in exchange for their commitment to undertake specific, mutually agreed activities on the communal areas of estates such as litter picking, emptying litter bins, grubbing out weeds etc.

2. The Improving Your Community Grant Scheme

Rotherham Community Groups and TARAs can apply for a small annual grant (of up to £250) which must be spent on improving their community/environment through schemes such as adopting a street or flowerbed, litter picking, basic gardening equipment.

Rotherfed have agreed in principle to manage the grant and would look to hold an event for members and other community groups with the purpose of launching the grant, scoping potential projects and promoting the Streetpride Volunteers scheme to see what linkages can be made between volunteers and community groups.

Having Rotherfed manage the grant will clearly differentiate this funding from other Council sources such as the Community Leadership fund and Community First funding. Both the Community Leadership fund and Community First fund are administered by the Neighbourhood Partnership team therefore having Rotherfed manage these new grants will also avoid any additional work pressures being placed on this team.

The Community First fund is a government funded initiative that will run for four years, until March 2015. The programme will help communities come together to identify their strengths and local priorities in order to plan for their future and become more resilient.

Eleven of Rotherham's twenty one wards were identified as being eligible for Community First funding, and offered a total grant of £712,110 over four years through to 31st March 2015; 83 projects are in receipt of Community First Years 1 and 2 funding totalling £263,803 NB excludes Rawmarsh Ward Panel

The process is now in its third year with the required Community Plans having been submitted to the Community Development Foundation (Cdf). These plans were developed and enabled colleagues/panels to refresh priorities for years 3 and 4. The plans were informed by consultation with partners and residents and incorporated existing consultation/plans. The revised priorities provide a framework for each of the panels with priorities tailored to local conditions.

Groups who apply to the 2 environmental grant schemes could potentially use this funding as match to apply for Community First funding (minimum of £200 per grant). This could enable community groups to undertake larger scale environmental projects or sustain projects for a longer period of time. It is acknowledged that not all groups could or would want to commit to this type of neighbourhood activity, and that sustaining such activity could be a challenge. However it is felt that encouraging groups to take on additional activity beyond that of local public bodies, could be a useful mechanism for sustaining and improving local conditions.

The small grants schemes could also be run in conjunction with the 3 initiatives detailed earlier:

- RMBC staff could be actively encouraged to volunteer on litter picks, planting of flower beds etc as well as promoting such opportunities to the wider public.
- The grants scheme could be piloted in the 11 deprived neighbourhoods, helping meet the community engagement and environmental quality priorities.

- Groups applying to the Environment Exchange scheme could be asked to undertake specific activities whilst Capital Housing Investment Programmes are taking place in an area.

This type of approach is already being successfully piloted in Canklow (one of the deprived neighbourhoods) as part of a major reroofing scheme. RMBC officers and contractors are working closely with Canklow Community Connections (a community group) to see how they can support them to make visual improvements to the area and in getting more members of the community engaged.

Canklow Community Connections have accessed Community First funding to enable them to purchase gardening equipment and develop a community garden. The group's future plans are to also use the gardening equipment to support vulnerable community members maintain their gardens. As part of the investment works, officers and contractors are supporting the group in acquiring a container to store the equipment.

If trialled, the 2 environmental grant scheme would ideally compliment and add value to this type of approach.

Both schemes will provide benefits to Community Groups. Groups will either have additional resources to support running costs or undertake environmental improvements – both providing groups with an opportunity to raise their profile within their communities and encourage new volunteers.

While supporting Community Groups to undertake environmental tasks such as litter picks, grubbing out etc may not realise direct, measurable savings to the council there will be some clear benefits, for example:

- Regular litter picks reduce the pressure on cleansing teams, and may enable them to pick up other ancillary tasks;
- Maintaining a litter-free environment discourages other issues such as Fly-Tipping; each fly-tipping incident costs approximately £50 to remove;
- Emptying litter bins and storing bags for collection will help increase capacity to service them more frequently;
- In the longer term, grubbing out will slow down the rate of deterioration of footpaths and help manage maintenance costs

It is expected that the two grants will help supplement Streetpride's environmental services. Both Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance have seen substantial reductions in staffing levels and service standards over the last 2 years such that they are now provided at a much more basic level. Therefore whilst the two grants will help support Streetpride's activities, it is not expected that this would enable the Council's overall provision to be scaled back. If the grants scheme is successful and community resilience is demonstrated then Streetpride could perhaps divert some frontline resources to support volunteers for example by training and up-skilling them, or to provide focus on working in the deprived communities. In summary, the environmental grants schemes would not be about reducing Streetpride resources but (potentially) about enabling Streetpride to refocus capacity.

8. Finance

The total fund for both grants will be £10,000 per annum. Groups will be able to apply for a maximum of £250 per annum per grant, this will enable up to 40 groups to access the funding on an annual basis.

Rotherfed will manage and administer the grant at no cost to Rotherham MBC

The grant will be funded via the Housing Revenue Account.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

There is a risk that the Council sees little or no return from the grant scheme. The grant will therefore run as a pilot scheme initially for 1 year.

Following the trial, a review will be undertaken and if the grant is to be continued, a report will be presented to SLT demonstrating savings and social outcomes.

There is also a risk related to the take up and correct use of the grant by community groups. Having Rotherfed manage the grant will ensure there is a robust application and monitoring process to ensure funds are being spent as appropriately. Rotherfed will also hold a launch event to promote the grant and support groups in applying for funding.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

This proposal supports Council priorities;

- CP3 – Helping people from all communities to have opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing
- CP4 – All areas of Rotherham are safe, clean and well maintained.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

NAS DLT Report 28th May 2013 – Supporting Emerging Objectives

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