

Report to:	EXECUTIVE
Relevant Officer:	Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	

WARD GRANTS SCHEME

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To consider a revision to the funding arrangements for the Ward Grants Scheme.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 That the ward funding scheme is amended with effect from 1 April 2021 to reflect that the £15,000 allocation is split between the ward councillors, thereby giving each an allocation of £7,500 each and removing the requirement for both councillors to agree to funding of an individual scheme.

2.2 To revise the maximum carryover to £2,500 per councillor with effect from year end 2020/21 and to note that any residual funding is used to meet one-off costs for a ward funding app.

2.3 That the revised criteria for applications for ward funding is approved with immediate effect to ensure that any schemes applied for meet the Council's objectives in terms of sustainability and climate change.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To meet the demands placed upon the Council in terms of budget provision and required savings. A ward funding app would also improve the speed and efficiency of the application process.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

Options include: Removing the arrangement for carryover altogether (for non-committed funds); an alternative carryover figure; or retaining the current arrangements. However, the proposed option will help to address budget restraints while allowing some flexibility for carryover of funding.

Not having a ward funding app would mean that applications would continue to be paper-based and processed manually.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is: 'Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience' while helping to achieve 'A resilient organisation'.

6.0 Background Information

6.1 Allocation of funds

The Council's current Ward Grants Scheme allocates budgets of £15,000 to each ward which across the borough equates to £315,000. The funding can be spent on supplementing funding public services for the benefit of the local community.

At present both ward councillors must agree to the proposed allocation of funds which can cause delay in processing applications.

6.2 Proposal

There are circumstances where it can be difficult to obtain signatures from two councillors – for example if a councillor is ill over a long-term period or where a councillor may be taking maternity/paternity leave.

It is proposed therefore that the allocation of funds is split between the two ward councillors - ie £7,500 each. This would remove the requirement for both councillors to agree to the funding, while still allowing funds to be pooled where both councillors wish to support the same scheme.

6.3 Criteria for funding

The Council has adopted a number of initiatives in relation to sustainability and climate change for example the climate change declaration and commitment to making the Council's activities net-zero carbon by 2030. Applications for ward funding would be encouraged that address the Council's policies in relation to sustainability and climate

change.

Any applications that are in conflict with sustainability, environmental and climate change policies would not be agreed under the revised criteria for funding. This would include applications for single use products such as Christmas trees, where a more sustainable alternative can be applied for.

6.4 Carryover limits

The Scheme states that the funds should be spent within the financial year although it currently allows for funding to be automatically 'carried over' provided that it is not more than twice the annual allocation – ie £30,000 for each ward (a maximum total of £630,000 overall).

For a considerable number of years, there has been an underspend on ward funding as below:

Year	Underspend total	Average underspend
2015/16 (pre-election)	£210,941	£10,044 per ward
2016/17	£263,631	£12,553 per ward
2017/18	£317,083	£15,099 per ward
2018/19	£361,750	£17,226 per ward
2019/20 (pre-election)	£78,882	£3,756 per ward

6.5 Proposal

Given the current financial climate for the Council and the underspend set out at paragraph 6.4, it is therefore suggested that the maximum figure for carryover should be reduced at the end of the financial year 2020/21 to £2,500 carryover each (£5,000 per ward)

In a local election year (all-out local elections), there will be no carry over and any new or returning councillors will be given a starting allocation of £7,500 each.

The proposed carryover figures above would still enable committed funds to be carried forward into the following year while ensuring prudential budgeting. There will still be the option to apply to the Executive to carryover further amounts where there are exceptional circumstances eg a large scheme requiring significant funds or a number of smaller schemes the full details for which have not yet been fully finalised. This would be done as part of the normal application process and must be agreed before the year end. Councillors would be given sufficient reminder notice to take these arrangements into account.

6.6 Application process

The application process for ward funding is largely paper-based and is often lengthy, time consuming and requires a significant amount of resource to administer. To improve the process, a ward funding application is being developed which although will incur one-off costs, will improve efficiencies in processing and enable benefitting organisations to receive approved funds more quickly.

It is proposed the residual funds (after carryover has been accounted for) will be used to fund the development and implementation of the ward funding application.

6.7 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 **List of Appendices:**

None.

8.0 **Financial considerations:**

8.1 The proposals would introduce a reducing maximum carryover limit which would help to improve the budget position of the Council. The one-costs for development of the ward funding app would be met from any residual underspend as at 31 March 2021 after carryover has been accounted for.

9.0 **Legal considerations:**

9.1 None.

10.0 **Risk management considerations:**

10.1 The proposals would help to alleviate risk in relation to budget savings being met. Having an electronic system would also reduce any risk in relation to information governance.

11.0 **Equalities considerations:**

11.1 As funding is being retained, there should be no adverse impact upon particular groups as the main elements of the scheme will remain unchanged.

12.0 **Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 The proposals contained revised criteria for funding applications that are line with and do not conflict with the Council's objectives in terms of climate change, sustainability and related initiatives.

13.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

13.1 None.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None

15.0 Key decision information:

15.1 Is this a key decision? No

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number:

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? N/A

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed:

Date approved:

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1

19.0 Executive decision:

19.1

20.1 Date of Decision:

21.0 Reason(s) for decision:

22.1 **Date Decision published:**

23.0 **Executive Members in attendance:**

23.1

24.0 **Call-in:**

24.1

25.0 **Notes:**

26.1