

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 19 June 2023

Title: Grants & Subsidised Lettings

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk - Adam Clapton

Background

The Council maintains budgets for general discretionary grants and subsidised letting grants for groups or organisations which require financial assistance towards projects, costs and venue hire in order to provide services for the residents of Witney. Grant requests are usually considered by this Committee bi-annually at meetings in June and January, however there is occasion when they need to be considered at other times of the year due to Council Committee timeframes.

In the current year the budgets are as follows:

- Discretionary Grants (4100/407) - £20,000.
- Subsidised Lettings – Corn Exchange/Burwell Hall (4110/407) - £1,800.
- Subsidised Lettings – The Leys/Other (4110/202) - £10,000.

As the 2022/23 fiscal end of year is not completely finalised by the Council's accountants, these figures do not include any underspends which may be brought forward.

A copy of the discretionary grant criteria is attached for information as **Appendix A**.

There is a separate £40,000 budget retained for Youth Services as discussed by the Stronger Communities Committee.

Current Situation

Discretionary Grants

Due to time constraints, a request for funds towards an NHS 75th Anniversary event at St Mary's Church was presented to the Stronger Communities Committee on 12 June, and £500 was subsequently recommended.

In addition, the following applications for discretionary grants have been received with full information available on the accompanying forms and supporting information: -

1. Windrush Bike Project

A request for £800 has been received to fund parts to make bikes roadworthy under a scheme (already funded) to run bike maintenance courses for 16 asylum seekers.

2. Time for Art

A request for £1,000 has been received from Time for Art to establish a series of art workshops that would benefit the asylum seekers currently residing in the Witney Hotel. The grant would pay for the artists' fees and art materials.

3. Witney Ringing Society

A request has been received for £5,000 towards maintenance of the bells at St Mary's Church.

Members should note that under s8 of the Local Government Act 1894, town and parish councils are not permitted to provide funds to churches or ecclesiastical charities. This Act has not been superseded by any subsequent legislation but more recent Acts, including the General Power of Competence appears to contradict it. The National Association of Local Councils has pressed the Government to deal with this issue but as of now it remains unresolved.

Subsidised Lettings

Due to time constraints, a request for subsidised hire at the Corn Exchange from Volunteer Link Up to mark their 40th Anniversary was presented to the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee on 5 June, and £147 was subsequently recommended.

The Stronger Communities Committee recommended that the Witney Forum group be provided subsidised letting in the Corn Exchange to the value of £42.25.

1. Mayor of Witney

A request for up to two free uses of the Corn Exchange for charity fundraising events (£147 x 2) has been received. The Mayor's designated charities are APCAM and Yellow Submarine.

Youth Services Grant 2022-23

At the last meeting of the Committee, it considered reports from the Youth Services Grant awardees advising how the funds had been expended within the year.

The Committee felt further information from Got2B and APCAM was required. Got2B will cease their work later this summer and the following response has been received from APCAM,

"The funding provided to us in December 2022 has continued to fund our Young Persons Mental Health Drop-In which we run weekly from 4-6pm on a Thursday. The funding provided has ensured that we are able to provide immediate ongoing access to a psychologist for young people free of charge without needing a referral or to come with a parent."

Members may also like to discuss the allocation and breakdown of this £40,000 fund for the new fiscal year. The item was discussed at the Stronger Communities Committee on 12 June and Members referred for further discussion here and whether an amount should be earmarked for services during the summer holidays. The current terms and conditions are attached.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The Council has a policy and criteria for which it uses to award its grants to ensure public funds are allocated and used appropriately.

The Committee should note the information above regarding funding to churches and ecclesiastical charities. There is a risk that any award will be queried by the auditor, but by not awarding the Council runs the risk of not helping with community & historic infrastructure. A smaller donation would mitigate this risk if favourable by the Council.

Financial implications

At the Annual Council Meeting held on 17 May 2023, the Council invoked the General Power of Competence under which the ability to award these grants is made.

Described here or as stated in the report above.

➤ All the requests are within the agreed budgets.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Noting the discretionary grant award of £500 towards the NHS 75th Anniversary Civic Drinks Reception at St Mary's Church and,
2. The discretionary grant requests from Windrush Bike Project, Time for Art and Witney Ringing Society and,
3. Noting the subsidised letting award of £147 towards the Volunteer Link Up Anniversary Event in the Corn Exchange,
4. Noting the subsidised letting award of £42.25 towards the Witney Forum meeting on 8 June 2023 and,
5. The subsidised letting request from the Mayor of Witney and,
6. The youth services grant monitoring update from APCAM and,
7. The youth services grant criteria and allocations for 2023/24.