

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 5 February 2024

Title: Grants & Subsidised Lettings

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

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.
- Youth Services (4169/408) - £40,000

At the beginning of this financial year, an underspend of £12,100.00 was brought forward from the 2022/23 financial year, £10,000 of which was allocated towards the 2023 Witney Music Festival partnership and £810 towards other requests.

Current Situation

Discretionary Grants

*The following applications for discretionary grants have been received for the **2023-24** financial year (until 31 March 2024) with full information available on the accompanying forms and in supporting information:*

1. Witney Buttercross Scouts

A request for £7,188.00 has been received to help towards the purchase of replacement kayaks and canoes for the group. The current fleet has been reduced over 20 years and the remaining canoes are showing wear and tear.

An application has also been made to the Witney Town Hall Charity.

2. Broad Hill Pre-School

A request for £1,000+ has been received to help towards the cost of a new outdoor learning area (pergola). The total cost is £20,000.

3. Witney Day Centre

A request for £500 has been received to help towards payment for entertainers at the Day Centre during the afternoons.

4. Witney Town Band (Training Band)

A request for £500 has been received for the following:

1) The band wish to purchase a new percussion instrument called a “Mark Tree”, which consists of a row of chimes that adds a colourful effect to musical pieces during performance. Cost £110.

(2) The band needs additional “Witney Town Band” banners for music stands. The training band currently borrows “WTB” banners from the main band, and unfortunately, we are already short of main band banners with many players going without during performance. Stand banners provide an excellent visual impression and advertises that the band is from Witney and that we represent the community. Most suppliers charge £30-£40 per banner, and we require an additional 10-12 for the band.

More general purposes of the grant can be seen in the full application.

Members should note, the Council has already provided £660 to Witney Town Band in this financial year. The Training Band are a separately constituted group to the Senior Band and last year the town council provided a £300 grant award to this organisation as well to the Senior Band.

5. Oxfordshire Mind

A request for £900 has been received for help towards outdoor seating at the Witney Wellbeing Hub in Moorland Road. Further details can be found in the application.

*The following applications for discretionary grants have been received for the **2024-25** financial year (from 1 April 2024) with full information available on the accompanying forms and supporting information:*

6. Nature Now/Where the Fruit Is

A request for £7,500 has been received to fund 3 sets of local nature now sessions for carers with young children – refugees, childminders, parents, grandparents, and foster carers. The group states in correspondence, *‘The opportunities for carers from different communities to share experiences proved to be invaluable. it was wonderful to see refugee parents, childminders and local mothers sharing stories over refreshments.’*

The Council supported this initiative in the summer/autumn of 2023 which was well-received and was minded to support further in the new year. A report on their work is attached as supporting information.

The group also states, *‘Providing sessions throughout the year would build community and offer seasonal opportunities to develop nature connection.’*

Further information on this request can be found in the application. **Please note, the Autumn evaluation of the services provided and funded by the Council has a different figure/proposal than the submitted grant form.**

7. Life Education Wessex & Thames Valley (LEW&TV)

A request for up to £310 has been received to contribute towards the cost of providing health, well-being and drug prevention education to approximately 300 children at Madley Brook Community Primary School.

Subsidised Lettings

1. Mayor of Witney

A request for a further free uses of the Corn Exchange for a charity fundraising event (£147) has been received. The Mayor's designated charities are APCAM and Yellow Submarine.

The Mayor was awarded two free uses earlier in the year but would like the opportunity to hold a music event at the Hall which would have the added benefit of showcasing the facilities. Former Mayors have historically been awarded three free uses in the mayoral year.

Annual Grants

1. West Oxfordshire Community Transport 2024/25

The Town Council is currently providing a subsidy of £21,000 per annum towards this service (4167/408); this financial year marks the end of a fixed term agreement which provided stability for the organisation.

A request has been received asking for an increase of £2,500 to £23,500 in the new financial year. A document, already provided to Members at the Special Council meeting held on 11 December 2023 is attached as supporting information.

If agreeable, the Committee may like to consider a further fixed term agreement, with a breakdown of accounts provided annually to the Council.

2. Witney Carnival 2024

A request for £2,400 has been received from the Witney Carnival Committee as a town council contribution towards the event to: *sponsor and support Witney Carnival 2024 – in particular to help with the costs of essential infrastructure required for such an event. Details are at the end of the application.*

The application is £300 greater than previous years. The Carnival organisers are starting to find that some costings for this year will be greater than last year and therefore overheads are likely to be greater.

3. Oxfordshire Play Association 2024

A request for £1,000 has been received towards the running of the popular annual children's play day during the summer. The application and supporting documents provided here are for information as the Council has already pledged to support the event at the Stronger Communities Committee on 18th September 2023.

Additional Matters

An email of thanks has been received from Volunteer Link Up in respect of the £2,000 annual grant awarded by the Council at the end of 2023.

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.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates. Benefits provided by the above items are:

- The sustainable social, economic and environmental value attributed to the services provided by the groups above to residents are immeasurable.
- Benefits to Witney's community - young, elderly, disadvantaged and vulnerable people within the town are all covered both independently and jointly by several of the applicants.
- Benefits to the economy – providing employment and opportunities to support and showcase smaller businesses.
- Benefits to the environment – providing access to the environment and ingrained recognition of its benefits from an early age.

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.

- The remaining balance of the discretionary grants budget (4100/407) stands at £17,730.00*
- The remaining balance of the Halls Subsidised Lettings budget (4110/407) stands at £344.95
- West Oxfordshire Community Transport has an agreed in the 2024/25 budget as £21,000 (4167/408) as this was the sum at the time of budget setting. If in favour of the request, the Council will need to fund the additional £2,500 from the discretionary grants budget in the new financial year.
- Witney Carnival has an agreed budget of £2,100 on budget line 4104/408 for 2024/25 based on previous year's figures. If in favour of the request, the Council could carry forward an underspend of £300 from this budget.

*The 2024/25 Council budget allocated a potential underspend in this budget towards the 2024 Witney Music Festival - £10,000. If this were to be paid fully from the outstanding budget the actual remainder of the grants budget at this meeting would be £7,730.00. Members may like to consider carrying forward £5,000 from 2023/24 and using £5,000 from 2024/35 to make the remainder £12,730.00.

Recommendations

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

1. The discretionary grant request in the 2023-24 financial year received from Witney Buttercross Scouts, Broad Hill Pre-School, Witney Day Centre, Witney Town Training Band, and Oxfordshire Mind. **NB. The position of the 2024 grant to Witney Music Festival**
2. The discretionary grant requests in the 2024-25 financial year received from Nature Now/Where the Fruit Is and Life Education Wessex & Thames Valley (LEW&TV).
3. The subsidised letting request from the Mayor of Witney
4. The annual grant requests from West Oxfordshire Community Transport and Witney Carnival Committee.
5. To note the application already agreed from the Oxfordshire Play Association.
6. To note the thank you email from Volunteer Link Up for the allocation of a £2,000 annual grant.