

## **Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny** **18<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

### **Big Society - Councillor Community Budgets, report on progress**

#### Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with a progress report on the Councillor Community Budget scheme and to reflect on the process.

#### Background/Objectives

1. The fund was launched in July 2012. Each councillor is allocated a fund of £10,000. Each councillor has the discretion to support the projects they deem to matter most to their local communities. Each project application must meet a recognised community need. It cannot be used on projects which have a primarily religious or political nature. Funding is given on the understanding that it is one off funding with no on-going commitment from the county council.
2. Deadline for applications for this financial year is the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2013.
3. The objective was to better allocate funds to projects that communities would really value. The scheme was designed on the principle that councillors are best placed to recognise and meet the needs of their local communities.
4. The qualifying criteria for organisations are relatively broad. This enables smaller, local groups who do not have the level of support and organisation of established larger groups to apply to the fund. This should improve access to the fund to all groups in a locality. As long as the basic requirements that a committee exist, some form of standing orders and a group bank account.
5. There is currently no funding for this scheme in the budget proposals for 2013/14.

#### Review of spend/progress to date

6. Total Fund: £740,000
  - Amount spent: £412,665.28
  - Amount remaining: £327,334.72
  - Percentage spent: 56%
7. Applications:
  - Total number: 253
  - Average award: £1,671.60
  - < £3,000: 84% of applications are for less than £3,000
  - > £5,000: 6% of applications are equal to or above £5,000

## Observations

### 8. Grant size & volume

The average size of grants has been relatively low, but there has been a relatively high volume of applications. Many Councillors want to spread their grant around to as wide a group of worthy projects as possible within their division. This explains the low size, but high volume of grant applications.

### 9. Matched funding

There have been some projects where the CCB grant enabled matched funding to be sought. These applications have usually been for larger sums and as part of a construction project. However, this has applied to a small proportion of applications. Most grants have not been used for to seek match-funding.

### 10. Applicant type

Applications have been from a wide variety of groups. However, a majority have been registered charities (119 – 47%) or town/parish councils (47 – 18.6%). The majority of groups who have taken advantage of the scheme are organisations which were already organised and comfortable with the system of public sector grants, like Town and Parish Councils and Registered Charities. This raises the question of whether the scheme has been successful in supporting local projects which would not otherwise have been able to source funding.

### 11. Themes

Certain themes have emerged as this initiative has been used to fund a wide variety of projects:

- Playground extension: There have been a number of applications for funds repair or upgrade play areas. These applications have usually been greater than £3,000.
- Community space: A number of applications aimed at repairing and improving the fabric of the space or the community equipment therein.
- Youth projects: This has also been popular with some early intervention programmes, respite relief for young carers and improving local youth facilities being funded by the scheme.
- Sports projects: There has also been a clear need to improve the facilities and equipment used by sports teams and local sports pavilions across Oxfordshire. A number of these have been aimed at the young.
- Elderly groups: There has been a clear focus on supporting social projects for the isolated elderly with the grant being used to extend and improve social activities for these groups.
- Community cohesion: There have also been a number of projects aimed at improving community cohesion by bringing together separate groups living in the same community. For example the military and local community.
- Deprived areas: There have been projects aimed at providing financial advice and additional health support and financial advice to deprived areas.

### Issues for consideration

12. Whilst there is currently no provision for councillor community budgets in the 2013/14 if funding were to become available it is useful to reflect on the process. Scrutiny members may wish to consider the following questions;

- Spending has been quite variable between councillors. What are the barriers to Councillor spending? What support would help this?
- Should we attempt to reach out groups who are not already part of each Councillor's network? How aware are local groups of the scheme? There are a high proportion of applications by established groups.

Alexandra Bailey – Research and Major Programmes Manager

Contact Officer: Claire Phillips – Senior Policy and Performance Officer