

CABINET – 19 JULY 2011

BIG SOCIETY FUND – ALLOCATION OF WAVE 1 FUNDING

Report by Head of Strategy and Communications

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to enable Cabinet to make decisions on which bids to fund in the first 'wave' of the Big Society Fund.
2. In February 2011 Oxfordshire County Council launched the Big Society Fund. The aims of the Fund are to create an environment locally in which it is as easy as possible for communities to do things for themselves. The Fund of £600,000 in 2011/12 was created for communities to bid for start-up funding for community projects that would benefit their areas.
3. The key criteria that bidders are asked to demonstrate in their applications are that;
 - the project is innovative and creative
 - the project meets a recognised community need
 - the project has a sustainable business case
 - the local community is involved in the project

Wave 1 Bids to the Big Society Fund

4. Response to the Fund has been positive with forty one bids submitted in this first 'wave' of applications.
5. A Bid Assessment Form has been completed for each application. These Assessment Forms include the project details, an assessment against fund criteria, service-specific officer views (where applicable), as well as the assessment from the Locality Review Groups of local councillors. Assessment forms for all bids are set out in Annexes 1-3.
6. Thirty three bids were specific to a locality with 8 bids for countywide projects/projects whose target group is not locality based. The countywide bids have been assessed by officers and have not gone through Locality Review Groups.
7. The assessment forms have been used to categorise bids as follows:

Annex 1 Bids that meet the assessment criteria

A number of bids are considered to have strong potential to contribute to our Big Society vision and meet the Fund criteria. The majority of these projects are for youth provision, and a number request transfer of existing young people's centres to the community.

Annex 2 Bids that presently do not fully meet the assessment criteria, but may with further development

We have received a number of bids that align with the criteria of the Big Society Fund and show potential to deliver positive outcomes in communities, but that would benefit from further development.

Annex 3 Bids that do not meet the assessment criteria

A number of bids received in the first wave do not meet the assessment criteria, do not address the fund criteria or did not have the support of their councillor Locality Review Group.

Asset transfer

8. We have received six bids to the Big Society Fund which have an asset transfer component. These are:

Carterton Youth Provision	<p>Bid to purchase the site and funding for adaptations to accommodate ICE day centre.</p> <p>The request for funding is for adaptations work which is for almost the same as the value of the site.</p>
Glyme Hall (Chipping Norton)	Bid to lease the site
FAZE (Faringdon)	<p>Bid to lease the site with future option to purchase.</p> <p>The bid requests a peppercorn rent and full repairing lease. This is not in line with the Asset Transfer Policy which sets out a nominal rent and that community groups will assume the full running costs of the building, including repairs and maintenance.</p>
Sweatbox, Wantage	Cabinet has already agreed to transfer the building to the school
Wolvercote Young People's Club	<p>Bid to lease the site with future option to purchase.</p> <p>The bid proposes that repairs and maintenance costs continue to be met by the county council. This is not in line with the Asset Transfer Policy but Cabinet should note the potential ongoing council</p>

	interest in the building for future expansion of Wolvercote Primary school.
Oxford Boxing Academy, Saxon Centre	Bid to purchase the Saxon Centre site. Bid is for less than assessed value for existing use.
Wheatley Young People's Centre	Bid is for transfer of the building to the Children's Centre supported by a community-led management committee. Ownership of the building will remain with the county council. The management committee confirm that they wish to proceed with the transfer despite not having funding in place to carry out building alterations. The viability of the project is not dependent on the works.
Bartholomew School, Eynsham	Cabinet has already agreed to transfer the building to the school

9. For the two bids that propose to purchase sites, one has offered to purchase at the full assessed value for existing use of the site (Carterton). The other (Oxford Boxing Academy for the Saxon Centre site) has bid for an amount substantially below (35% below) OCC's assessed value for existing use which is contrary to the council's Asset Transfer Policy.
10. In the case of the Saxon Centre, a second group has submitted a bid for this facility which did not meet the deadlines for consideration at this meeting. However if Cabinet make a positive decision on the Boxing Academy proposal it is recommended that the second bid is considered as part of the cooling off period set out in the Asset Transfer Policy and delegated to the Cabinet member for Police and Policy Co-ordination.
11. The majority of asset transfers in this wave are for young people's centres. These projects are especially time sensitive, as funding is due to cease at these centres in August. Cabinet had previously agreed to waive the asset transfer policy 'cooling off' period for highly time-critical projects, on an exception basis.

Financial and Staff Implications

12. The total value of bids received is £1.2m against the fund of £600,000. Bids that meet the assessment criteria total £282,096; bids that that presently do not fully meet the assessment criteria, but may with further development total £157,459; bids that do not meet the assessment criteria total £764,614.
13. There are no staff implications in these proposals.

14. A grant funding agreement will be in place for all successful projects which will set out financial requirements and monitoring arrangements.

Legal Implications

15. Asset transfers to the community will usually take the form of a lease. Standard lease terms in line with the Asset Transfer Policy have been developed which will form the basis of any negotiation required with community groups. The County Council will typically grant leases contracted out of the security of tenure provisions of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 Part II of up to 5 years in order to provide flexibility for both parties.
16. Where community groups wish to purchase the freehold of a site, sale at a value reflecting existing use will be accepted with provision made within the transfer deeds for the County Council to recoup an appropriate proportion of any uplift in value secured subsequently through a change of use.
17. The grant funding agreement outlined above will set out all legal requirements including health and safety and safeguarding policy requirements.

Equality and Inclusion implications

18. An equality impact assessment has been carried out on the Big Society Fund. Potential impacts on equality groups have been considered (a copy of the assessment is at Annex 4). The Fund has been promoted through many channels to ensure as wide an awareness of the Fund as possible. Partners were involved in the design of the application form to make it as accessible as possible and alternative formats and submission methods are accepted. We have provided support to groups wishing to apply for funding and we have worked with Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action and Oxfordshire Rural Community Council to offer support to new and less well developed groups. The role of councillors in the process and in supporting bids has also helped to support equality groups in applying to the Fund.
19. In line with the council's responsibilities for equality the grant funding agreement with successful bidders will set out requirements for equality policies to be in place.

Risk implications

20. There is a risk to the county council that projects are not sustainable and are not able to continue in the future due to a lack of resources. This would have an impact on the viability of a project in a community and may lead to further requests for funding from the county council. To mitigate this, the application form for the Fund requires a business case and ongoing costs information.
21. It is proposed that funding will only be paid to successful bidders with a robust business case in place.

RECOMMENDATION

22. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

- (a) Approve those bids which meet the assessment criteria**
- (b) Approve asset transfers in accordance with the asset transfer policy with the exception of Wolvercote where the Council will continue to repair and maintain the property.**
- (c) Waive the 'cooling off' for the following four time-critical community asset transfers:**
 - Allandale, Carterton**
 - Glyme Hall, Chipping Norton**
 - Faze, Faringdon**
 - Wolvercote**
- (d) Ask officers to work with community groups to enable them to take over buildings to facilitate continuity of provision as much as possible from 1 September.**
- (e) Ensure a grant funding agreement that meets legal requirements is in place for all successful projects**

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Background papers: Bid application documents

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