

STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 21 JULY 2011

BIG SOCIETY FUND

Report by Senior Policy Manager, Chief Executive's Officer

Introduction

1. 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.
2. 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.

Fund Criteria

3. The Fund was established to support the council's Big Society aims and is designed to accommodate proposals for projects from communities that demonstrate the following key criteria in their applications;
 - 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

Process

4. The Fund has been designed to enable as many groups as possible to apply. There are four waves for applications to enable new and emerging groups time to develop their proposals. The deadlines for the four waves are;

Wave 1: End of May 2011 for decision by end of July 2011

Wave 2: End of August for decision by end of October 2011

Wave 3: End of November for decision by end of January 2012

Wave 4: End of February for decision by end of April 2012

5. The assessment process has been designed to include officer assessment of the bids against the criteria and crucially to involve local councillors in reviewing bids from their area to provide comments to Cabinet to support its decision making.

6. Cabinet will consider applications for the first wave of the Fund at its 19 July meeting.

Areas for Scrutiny consideration

7. By the time of the scrutiny committee meeting Cabinet will have met to make decisions on the first wave of applications to the Fund.
8. Interest in the Fund has been considerable and this is reflected in the forty one bids submitted in the first wave.
9. Having gone through this first wave it would be useful to have input from scrutiny on a number of issues;
 - i. How balanced has the interest in the Fund been?
 - By Locality
 - By Interest/Equality group
 - ii. Are there are any steps that could be taken to improve promotion of the Fund?
 - iii. How has the role of councillors in the Fund contributed to the process?
 - iv. Recommendations for subsequent waves of the Fund

Background papers: 19 July Cabinet papers (Item 8).

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