



Communities Overview
Committee

21st May 2018

Item

Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme Update

Responsible officer

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1.0 Summary

1.1 This paper provides an update on the development of Shropshire Council's Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the report, which is provided for information only.

3.0 Background

3.1 Shropshire Council's Highways and Transport team has operated the Environmental Maintenance Grant (EMG) programme for the last 8 years. The programme has operated successfully and is seen as delivering a number of benefits.

3.2 The recipients of the grants are overwhelmingly rural parish councils and a small number of town councils. There is one community group using a grant to enable local residents to carry out litter picks and environmental tidy-ups.

3.3 At its meeting of 4th September 2017, Shropshire Council's Communities Overview Committee confirmed terms of reference for a time limited Task and Finish Group to review the EMG programme.

3.4 The group's considerations were made in the context of Shropshire Council's extremely challenging financial position. Members of the Task and Finish Group wanted to consider if continuing the grant programme was a sustainable position at a time of declining revenue budgets, and what added, social and preventative impact is enabled through the investment of the grant.

- 3.5 The work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group and the recommendations confirmed at its workshop on 16th November 2017 were confirmed at a meeting of the Communities Overview Committee on 27th November 2017. The recommendations from the committee were made to Cabinet on 21st March 2018 where they were agreed.
- 3.6 The Task and Finish Group recommended that the programme should continue with the following changes to its design and delivery:
- **Changes to eligible activity** - The activity eligible for funding from the programme should be the activity that brings most added value to the delivery of Shropshire Council's Highways term maintenance contract. Highways officers should advise what this activity should be.
 - **Application eligibility** - The eligible applicants should be limited to Shropshire's rural town and parish councils. Urban town councils a population of over 10,000 should be ineligible to apply.
 - **Value for money and incentivising added value** - The grant should not be used to top up core budgets but should be used for discrete maintenance purposes. Applications should be scored according to how they demonstrate value for money and provide added value to the core funding and activity. Examples of VFM and added value should be
 - Councils demonstrating that they are committed to their effective delivery of environmental maintenance works in their areas by contributing to or matching grant funding.
 - Demonstrating that councils are working together to provide economies of scale and reduce costs, e.g. multiple parishes let 1 contract.
 - The design of activity that clearly creates social value, the appropriate use of volunteers to add value to the core activity.
 - **Design of the funding programme** - Funding decisions should be made for a three year period, for example 2018 - 2021. This will reduce bureaucracy associated with the application process and provide more time for monitoring and evaluation of applications. It should also enable local councils to let three year contracts that offer greater value for money with confidence. It is recommended that the EMG programme is reviewed in year 2 and a decision then made about the future of the scheme, from the end of year 3. If the decision is made to end the EMG programme at this point, a 12 month notice period should be given.
 - **Annual value of the funding programme** - The annual value of the programme should be £75,000. There will be no increase to this amount.
 - **Value of individual grants** - The maximum value of individual grants should be £1,500 per year. There should be no increase to this amount.
 - **Application criteria, guidance notes and monitoring** - The guidance notes accompanying the application process should be reviewed and rewritten to

ensure that there is absolute clarity about the design and delivery of the grant funded activity. There should be a particular focus on health and safety. This should also include a more robust approach to monitoring the funded activity through the completion and submission of an annual report from each recipient, and a process for this should be designed and implemented. A process should be put in place to ensure appropriate signing off of the annual reports.

- **Consultation on proposed changes to the EMG programme** - A recommendation should be made to Cabinet that it approves the delivery of a six week consultation period in early 2018 on the recommended changes to the EMG programme based on previous Committee Overview Committee reports.
- **Delegated authority** - A recommendation should be made to Cabinet to delegate authority to the Head of Infrastructure and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport to implement the revised EMG programme detailed specification following the consultation.

3.6 Within the 2017/18 EMG application paperwork Shropshire Council advised potential applicants that the EMG programme would be reviewed and that the outcome of this review would be consulted on. A consultation on the proposed redesigned scheme based on the recommendations made by Cabinet is taking place between 9th April and 21st May 2018. This consultation is attached as Appendix 1.

List of Background Papers
Cabinet report from the Communities Overview Committee on the Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme, 21 st March 2018
Cabinet Member
Highways and Transport
Local Members
All Members
Appendices
Recommendations from Communities Overview Committee task and finish group on the Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme

Appendix 1 Consultation on Shropshire Council's Environmental Maintenance Grant Programme

Q1

Changes to eligible activity criteria

The activity eligible for funding by the Environmental Maintenance Grant will be as detailed below and will take place on Shropshire Council owned land and assets **only**.

Eligible activity	Comments
Grass tidy	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented. Only if it is an area not currently being maintained on behalf of SC either to a standard or on instruction
Weed control	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented. e.g. pulling ragwort, - not to involve the use of chemicals
Clear leaves / debris from grids	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented.
Clear vegetation from culverts	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented.
Straighten and clean road signs	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented.
Remove obstructing tree and hedge growth	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented.
Litter picking	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented.
Street sweeping	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented. Footways only
Maintain street furniture	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented. Not to include electrical works.
Maintain closed church yards	Risk assessment must be undertaken and appropriate control measures implemented.

Q2

Applicant eligibility

The eligible applicants will be rural town and parish councils. Councils can work in partnership with local community groups to submit applications. Town councils with a population of over £10,000 will not be eligible.

Q3

Providing value for money and added value

The total cost of the activity to be delivered will have to be funded in part by the applicant to be eligible for support from the EMG programme – the total cost cannot

be funded wholly by the grant, for example if the total cost of the activity to be delivered is £1,000, an application to the EMG programme could be for £500 with the additional £500 coming from the applicant.

Applications should demonstrate how the delivery of the activity is providing economies of scale, e.g. local councils working together and pooling resources to let one contract.

Applications should demonstrate how the delivery of the activity creates social, economic or environmental value, e.g. the involvement of volunteer time to add value to the core activity

Q4

Design of the funding programme

Funding decisions will be made for a three year period with annual reporting and monitoring. A review will be undertaken in the second year.

Q5

Annual value of the funding programme

The annual value of the programme will be £75,000.

Q6

Value of individual grants

The maximum value of annual individual grants will be £1,500.