

REVIEW OF THE WIDER USE FUND

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor E Gifford (Cabinet member for Community Services)

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Executive Summary:

Following the Budget Review Group meeting held on 15 January 2015, recommendation 8 refers, a request was made for the Wider Use Budget (£85,000) to be reviewed and recommendations made about its future.

The Wider Use Fund has for many years supported organisations on a local level with small grants to support their rent of Council facilities.

All recipient organisations of the fund in 2015/16) were contacted and asked a number of questions. Additionally, officers met with a number of the organisations to understand what impact any changes might have on the organisations concerned.

From this, officers were able to consider the possible future options and recommend that whilst the fund is valued, organisations in the main receive small grants of a few £00s that could largely be funded from small individual increases in subscriptions. A very small percentage of organisations considered closure as the only option, and, for this it is recommended that a small hardship fund be ring fenced for possible distribution.

The Fund supports a wide variety of organisations and a change of direction that better delivers health and wellbeing outcomes would be a better use of the fund, in the future.

Funding for 2016/17 is unaffected by this review and recommendations if accepted, would be implemented from April 2017.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That from April 2017 the Wider Use Fund be used to support local groups focusing on, and helping to address the health and wellbeing outcomes in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Sport and Active Communities Strategy, in particular supporting and developing community projects that address inactivity amongst target groups.
- 1.2 That 5% of the Wider Use Fund be retained for hardship cases to enable a further phased reduction over two years.

2. Issues / Background

- 2.1 The Wider Use Fund has been in existence for many years and was formally a budget that transferred to the Council on becoming a unitary authority. The Fund's principal objective was to support community groups using Council buildings. The funding criteria has changed over time reflecting such changes as schools becoming academies and not funding holiday play schemes and a focus on older peoples groups.

The need for a review of the budget is as follows:

1. A number of organisations which hire space in schools have continued to receive funding even where the school has become an academy and in theory fall outside the criteria.
2. The budget has reduced over a number of years and it has become harder to fund all the organisations that could apply, given particularly the new housing developments across the borough.
3. Whilst the fund has tried to focus on the ten most deprived estates in Milton Keynes, many of the wider use groups fall outside these areas and there are practical reasons why this is the case. Not every estate has a community facility and not every facility has the right space such as an outside area or a space isn't always available at a suitable time and so an alternative on another estate might be the only option.
4. This budget could provide support to key projects in the community and contribute towards the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Sport and Active Communities Strategy. Such projects could include: additional support for the Walking for Health Projects in regeneration areas, development of a green gym encouraging volunteering in physically active community projects in green spaces, physical activity programme for special needs groups and/or a digital community wide programme using the Redways and other sites to get people moving.

2.2 The impact on existing groups

Responses to a number of questions within the application form and from individual groups visited by officers would suggest a number of groups would introduce small increases in subscriptions and charges that would address the shortfall from not having wider use funding. For example – a uniform group (guides, scouts etc), of 20 receiving an average grant of £400/year which runs for 34 weeks of the year would need to increase their fee per child per week by 58p.

There are a number of alternative funding sources available to support community groups and these include: parish councils, Tariff funding in new developments, the MK Community Foundation and small grants programmes from national funding bodies.

The Wider Use Fund in 2015/16 supported 60% uniform groups, 17% older people, 14% sports groups with the remaining 9% supporting special needs groups and other groups not fitting into groups listed.

2.3 Findings - Consultation and Questionnaires

Through the funding application process for 2016/17, a series of questions were asked about the impact of any change to the budget, which estates organisations are operating from, identification of the different organisations supported and what proportion were community groups and/or registered as charities. This was also supported by officer visits to a number of key organisations representing all types of organisations in receipt of funding.

A summary of the findings can be seen at Annex B.

In essence, the majority of groups meet in community centres in areas that are not necessarily estates high on the social deprivation index (though this does not necessarily mean that people attending do not come from these estates). 60% of groups will make up any shortfall of income with rises in club subscriptions and three groups indicated that closure would be their only option.

3. Options

- (a) For the Wider Use Funding to cease from April 2017 onwards and to use the funding to support the health and wellbeing outcomes (see Annex A). Working in partnership with the Physical Activity Alliance (with representation from sports development, health commissioners cycle/walking team) supporting and developing local community projects targeting key groups with practical ways of addressing inactivity.

To develop terms of reference, work programme, targets and report annually on the work that has been delivered and detail the intended future programme.

To set aside a maximum of 5% of the budget (year 1 only) for any hardship fund to allow a small number of organisations to be given an additional 12 months to address any funding shortfall.

- (b) No change. This would mean continuing with issues outlined in 2.1 above which would be difficult to manage.

4. Implications

4.1 Policy

The revised recommendation for funding would contribute to the Milton Keynes Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Sport and Active Communities Strategy outcomes and targets.

4.2 Resources and Risk

There are no additional financial implications in refocusing this budget. Approval of the recommendation to refocus the Wider Use Fund towards health and wellbeing outcomes will not release any savings to mitigate the shortfall identified in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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|---|---------|---|------------------|---|------------------|
| x | Capital | x | Revenue | x | Accommodation |
| x | IT | x | Medium Term Plan | x | Asset Management |

4.3 Carbon and Energy Management

Benefits, should the Fund be re-directed, will be seeking to get more people physically active and relying less on the use of cars for short journeys.

4.4 Legal

Groups who currently receive the Wider Use Fund have been consulted and their views taken into account. The re-emphasis on funding activities which address health and wellbeing activities meet the Councils Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Sport and Active Communities Strategy.

4.5 Other Implications

The recommendations would enable local communities to continue to benefit from funding but would better address the increasing problems of inactivity and the repercussions this is having on other local services.

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|---|----------------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|
| x | Equalities/Diversity | x | Sustainability | x | Human Rights |
| x | E-Government | x | Stakeholders | x | Crime and Disorder |

Background Papers:

Annex A : Health and Wellbeing Strategy measures

Annex B : Summary of findings