

Agenda Item: 4

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on Monday 21 December 2020 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: G Minshull (Chairman), B Bernard, V Clifford-Jackson, B Duffin, J Hornby, J Rowe, R Savage, T Spruce and J Wilby

Cabinet Member Present: Councillor: Y Bendle

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor: D Bills, J Easter and T Laidlaw

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, (M Pursehouse), the Communities Senior Manager (K Gallagher) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

1275 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

1276 MEMBER LED FUNDING

The Cabinet Member, Cllr Y Bendle, introduced the report which reviewed the operation of the member-led grant scheme, the spend from the member-led funding stream in accordance with the ground rules, and provided an update on the spend to date. Cllr Bendle explained that she welcomed any suggestions on how the scheme could work going forward.

The Communities Senior Manager highlighted the key considerations arising from her report and referred to statistics on the percentage of the funds spent, and the decision to extend the current year's member grant funding until 31 March 2021 and to roll over all underspend into the next financial year, in light of Covid-19. She also advised Members on the future plans for improving the website and online application form.

In response to figures showing the percentage of funding members had spent, one Member suggested that the overall percentage be reported on all Full Council meeting agendas, as a way of motivation, without shaming individual members. This was supported by the Committee and officers agreed to consider this further.

Some concern was expressed over whether those members not spending their available budgets, was an indication of a lack of connection with their local communities, and the Committee queried whether it was the same members failing to spend their funding each year. Officers explained that different members each year were failing to spend their funding allocation and that there were several different reasons for this; this required further investigation so that appropriate support could be provided by officers.

In response to a request for examples of how the scheme could help to reduce the demand on current or future services, the Communities Senior Manager advised Members of the Wymondham Community Kitchen, which had previously received funding through the scheme. She explained that the Kitchen helped families and individuals to receive food packages, help and advice, reducing the demand on the Council's own Help Hub service. She also advised Members that many of the community groups previously funded had provided group activities or sport, and that these had long-term impacts on physical wellbeing as well as reducing loneliness and isolation.

One Member queried whether, given the Covid-19 pandemic, additional funding could have been provided to Wymondham Community Kitchen, in addition to that already provided which had contributed to the costs of a van. The Communities Senior Manager advised members that, in accordance with the ground rules, the funding could only contribute towards specific projects, and not 'running costs'. She then highlighted the recent additional support provided to the Community Kitchen during the pandemic, which included the seconding of the Council's leisure centre staff, when its own volunteers needed to shield or self-isolate.

During the discussion, the Communities Senior Manager reminded Members of the Baby Bank Community Group, which had previously received funding through the scheme to offer advice and support to young families. Members noted that this was now a County-wide group offering an important service. The Communities Senior Manager added that this was an example of how a small amount of funding, along with member and officer guidance, could go a long way.

In response to a request to clarify the grant rule which stated "*the activity being funded: has not received funding over the past 2 years*" the Communities Senior Manager clarified that a community group could not

receive funding **for the same project** within the same two financial years; this included the year the funding was awarded and the following one.

Members questioned whether member discretion could be considered around the grant rule which stated that *“funding must not replace funding previously provided by other statutory agencies such as the County Council”* as there was a number of groups in the District such as the fire or police cadets which had received government funding, but required additional support. The Communities Senior Manager advised Members to seek advice from officers in such cases, as the way other organisations were funded was constantly changing. She agreed that such matters required further consideration for the future. The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families also agreed that this area required further thought, and stressed the importance of considering why a statutory body, such as the County Council, had chosen not to continue funding a particular group, and whether the group would continue to have the support of the local community going forward.

In response to a query regarding unspent funding at the end of the year, the Communities Senior Manager informed members that if the underspend was less than £10,000 it would be rolled into the next year's available funding, however, if the underspend was over £10,000 then the money would be transferred into the Community Action Fund to be spent. Cllr Y Bendle also reminded Members that for the current year only, in response to Covid-19, all the underspend would be rolled into the next financial year, regardless of the amount.

One Member queried whether it was possible for members who had spent their funding to put forward groups/projects for other members to fund, as this would reduce the time the group had to wait for funding. The Communities Senior Manager advised that members' funding should support projects benefiting residents of their own wards. She suggested that any departure from this would need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, with consideration given to whether there was more than one member in that ward, or whether the project would benefit residents across the District. She referred to the recent funding of the Wheelchair Rugby Group, which as the only group of that type in the District, would benefit residents across the whole of South Norfolk.

During a discussion regarding parish councils, clarification was sought regarding which projects should be funded by the parishes, and which projects were more appropriate to receive District funding. The Communities Senior Manager advised that this needed to be considered on a case by case basis and that there were no hard and fast rules regarding what a parish should or should not spend its money on. She drew attention to the fact that during the last review of the ground rules, members were clear that the District Council should be stringent to not “double fund” projects where a parish

council was also providing funding. A suggestion was then made that in future, the scheme could support the match funding of contributions made by parish councils.

It was suggested that members would benefit from additional training throughout their term in office on the type of groups and projects their funding could be spent on. The Communities Senior Manager invited members to contact her for one-to-one training on member funding specific to their ward area.

The Committee expressed its support and approval of the member led funding scheme and it was,

RESOLVED

That

1. Members funding has been spent in accordance with the ground rules.
2. The scheme has been shown to have a positive impact on the local community and is reducing the demand on Council services as outlined by the examples given.

1277 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Committee noted the Work Programme and Cabinet Core Agenda.

The Chairman confirmed to Members that a report considering the ground rules of Member led funding would be brought to the Scrutiny Committee in the new year.

(The meeting concluded at 10.39AM)

Chairman