

Classification	Item No.
Open	

Meeting:	Audit Committee
Meeting date:	6 th March 2024
Title of report:	Discretionary Grants Update Report
Report by:	Julie Gallagher, Democratic Services Manager and Data Protection Officer
Decision Type:	For Information
Ward(s) to which report relates	All

Executive Summary:

This report provides Audit Committee with an update in relation to the Member's Discretionary Grants scheme.

Recommendation(s)

That Audit Committee note the information.

Key considerations

Background

Since October 2017 Elected Members have received a Discretionary Grant of £1000. Oversight of the scheme was transferred from the Social Engagement Team to Democratic Services in 2020.

The scheme is provided by Allpay and administered through Democratic Services. The scheme includes monitoring and requires that Councillors provide information relating to their donations and/or proof of their spend through invoices.

An annual allocation of £1000 is made to each Elected Member in May of each year, this must be used to directly benefit their where projects are identified which have a wider benefit, contributions can be made to jointly fund schemes or borough wide organisations.

Each Elected Member in the Ward will have their own allocation, but at their request and following agreement with other ward Councillors, these funds can be combined to work on a Ward or borough basis.

Members are advised that all monies must be spent by the 28th February, thus avoiding any potential conflicts of interest in respect of spend during the pre - election period. If a Member fails to spend their allocated budget the money is returned to the Council.

The Scheme

The Discretionary Grant Scheme was designed to be fluid; funds may be used to make financial contributions either directly to schemes undertaken by departments of the Council or can be awarded to voluntary or community groups or constituents.

Ward Councillors are at the heart of local communities and are key to Championing the Council's 'Let's Do It' Strategy within their ward connecting people and groups into activity to deliver the desired outcomes.

The vision is for Councillors in each Ward to:

- Meet on a regular basis to agree local priorities.
- Encourage community groups to get involved in local democracy.
- Oversee the delivery of public services at neighbourhood and ward level by supporting the development of ward and neighbourhood plans.
- Be consulted on development / local application of policy and services changes, including health & care.

Support for Ward Councillors

To assist Councillors, an Elected Member Discretionary Grants Guidance has been produced explaining the grants scheme. This is provided to all Members annually.

Newly Elected Members are registered with Allpay and an account is set up for them by Democratic Services. Members cannot use the account until they have confirmed receipt of their account details and payment card whereupon the account will be activated and credited with £1000.

Members can make donations or purchases directly with their payment card themselves through their Allpay accounts or can request that payments are made on their behalf by Democratic Services.

Discretionary Grants Scheme

Ward Councillors are provided with £1000.00 as a discretionary grant to enable them to sponsor small-scale local needs quickly and responsively.

The grants can be used to contribute to the delivery of schemes within their wards, offer support to a wide range of different groups including voluntary organisations and community groups.

Members will be provided with timely data and soft intelligence to evidence where funds might best be directed to meet local need and will be sighted on opportunities and ensuring they contribute to the delivery of priorities.

Members will be supported with recording and reporting of spend which will also be published on the Council's website.

All requests for money to be transferred require a description of what the money would be used for.

Regular emails are sent to all Councillors advising on their available spend and reminding them of the cut-off date of end February for all funding requests to be received.

All Councillors are required to provide receipts for purchases made on their cards and these are recorded by Democratic Services.

Councillor Spend

In May 2023 all Councillors accounts were credited up to £1000 and Councillors were sent an email to confirm this had been done.

There has been significant advances in Member take up and Member engagement in the scheme.

All Councillors have spent their discretionary grant allocation for 2023/2024 as of 29 Feb 2024.

A by ward list of recipients benefiting from the scheme is attached at Appendix 1

Examples of schemes that have been supported is provided at Appendix 2.

Next Steps

Following agreement at Budget Council (February 2024) the scheme will continue indefinitely going forward.

All members will be issued with the Discretionary Grant guidance at the start of the Municipal Year and there will be a presentation on the scheme in at the new Elected Member induction day, scheduled to take place on 9 May 2024.

Equality Impact and considerations:

Equality Analysis	<i>Please provide a written explanation of the outcome(s) of either conducting an initial or full EA.</i>
On agreement of the Neighbourhood Engagement Framework (from which what the DG scheme originates) a Full Equality Analysis was undertaken	

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Failure to accurately evidence how and where Elected Members spend their DG may make us subject to challenge.	All spend must be evidence by receipts and recorded at the end of year on the Council's website.

Legal Implications:

This report flows from an audit recommendation it provides audit committee with an update on the exercise of the discretionary scheme by Members. The scheme is administered by democratic services.

Financial Implications:

The funding for Members discretionary grants was extended indefinitely as part of the 2024/25 budget. It is essential that proper budgetary control as outlined in this paper is exercised by all Members through the keeping of receipts and invoices for all expenditure incurred.

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Background papers:

Neighbourhood Engagement Framework

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning