

Title of Report:	Grant Governance Panel
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	21 September 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough
Lead Officer	Funding Unit Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£0
Included in Current Year Estimates	n/a
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members the establishment of a Grant Governance Panel.

2.0 Background

The Funding Unit was established in October 2015. The strategic function of the Unit is to provide funding support services which includes corporate management & administration of Council's Grant Funding programmes. The Funding Unit is a central processing unit for grant applications and has responsibility for managing the grant assessment process, the development of grant funding policy and the annual review of grant programmes and policy.

Council's grant funding policy sets out a framework for the processing of grants. The overall aim of the funding process outlined in the policy is:

"To have a consistent, customer focused process with relevant assessment and evaluation procedures with appropriate appeal and monitoring systems in place".

Elected Members have requested that officers give consideration to ways in which they can have involvement in the grant assessment process. The current process used is as follows:

- Grant applications are received by the Funding Unit via the online Funding Hub.
- Funding Unit undertake stage 1 eligibility checks on all applications to assess an organisations suitability to receive public funds.
- Grant Assessment panels, comprising Officers from relevant service areas and Funding Unit staff undertake the assessment and scoring of applications.
- A report on the outcome of the assessment process is taken to the Leisure & Development Committee and then to full Council for approval.

3.0 Grant Assessments in 2020-21

In the 2020-21 Grant Funding Period the funding Unit administered 24 Grant programmes compared to 14 in the previous year:

- 1354 applications totalling £3,364,013 were received and processed compared to 389 applications totalling £1,244,665.76 in the previous year.
- 1354 stage 1 eligibility checks were undertaken (compliance & governance - constitutions checked and verified; accounts checked).
- 1354 applications were assessed and scored.
- 1055 applications were successful.
- 1055 letters of Offer issued to date totalling £1,828,389 compared to 279 totalling £800,646.80 in previous financial year.

Due to the increased volume of applications in 2020 and the need to ensure grant-aid was delivered quickly to support the community response to Covid-19, the grant assessment process was adapted, moving from officer assessment panels to individual grant assessments being carried out by officers from the relevant service areas – the assessments were reviewed by the Funding Unit to ensure accuracy and consistency across all assessments.

This process has worked well, is much more efficient and has hugely reduced the staff time spent in assessment panels.

4.0 The Grant Assessment Process

Grant applications will continue to be assessed by Officers with knowledge of the programme requirements and subject area. The Grant Governance Panel will review the assessments and scoring. At the Elected Members Workshop held on 23 August 2021 it was agreed that

the process used to oversee the assessment and scoring of the recent NI 100 Grant programme worked well and is a model is relevant for the Grant Governance panel.

5.0 Proposed Role of the Grant Governance Panel

The role of the Governance Panel is proposed to have two separate oversight elements:

a. Strategic Oversight.

The panel will review policy, programmes, eligibility criteria and management of risk. This is generally done on an annual basis through the annual Members review workshop, it may now be appropriate for the panel members to be first part of this process.

b. Validation Function.

The panel's role is to ensure that the assessment and scoring of applications has been undertaken in an appropriate fashion and to provide validation of the scoring and the overall process. During the pilot phase it is envisaged that one grant programme will be selected for inclusion in this process.

6.0 Grant Governance Panel Membership

The purpose of the panel is not to make decisions about individual grants, but rather to ensure that the process used to assess grant applications is fair, objective and equitable, aligned to the Council's wider strategic and corporate objectives.

To do this, panel members should have a sound understanding of the Council's overarching grant programmes and alignment to the Council's wider corporate priorities and governance requirements.

7.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that a Grant Governance Panel is established, based upon the principles outlined in this report.

Members are asked to consider the size and appointment process i.e. D'Hondt or other.

Once the Panel is convened, detailed Terms of Reference will be tabled for Member's consideration, including the inclusion of a pilot programme for the 2021 / 2022 period.