

By: Ben Watts, General Counsel
To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 14 March 2024
Subject: **KCC Combined Member Grants**
Status: Unrestricted

1. Combined Member Grants

- 1.1 The Combined Member Grant scheme has run for many years and provides an opportunity for individual Members to determine projects that make a difference to their communities.
- 1.2 The Committee has a role in monitoring expenditure on Members' Grants Schemes and as such the expenditure is informed by a set of guidelines that applicants and Members adhere to.
- 1.3 Given the Council's current financial pressures, revised guidelines have been drafted with the view to strengthen the scheme and remove ambiguity. A tracked changes document is included at Appendix 1 which shows the old and revised copies for review and comment.
- 1.4 It is intended that the revised guidelines will be implemented from the beginning of the new financial year.

2. New Automated Process Development

- 2.1 Officers in Governance, Law and Democracy have been working to design and implement a new automated application process. This will enable applicants to submit requests for grant funds in a more streamlined manner.
- 2.2 We have experienced over the last year several delays due to delayed member approvals. The new system will request Member approval and will be a simplified process, built with reminders to ensure that prompt returns are made and to ensure compliance with the guidelines.
- 2.3 The system will collate data more succinctly and enable us to conduct faster reporting, both in year and for the annual report.
- 2.4 Subject to successful testing, the new system will be delivered in the new financial year.

3. Real Time Reporting

- 3.1 Committee Members have previously requested real time reporting on the exact position of Member Grant spend and this is also currently under development. In due course, Member pages will include spend to date, allocated and unallocated spend.
- 3.2 Testing on this will begin in the new financial year and Members will be notified when their page goes live.
- 3.3 An example of the report template to be presented online is available at appendix 2.

4. Closedown of Grants

- 4.1 Prior to an election year, Grant spend is always completed by December to prevent the reality or perception of council resource being used for potential promotional use in campaigning.
- 4.2 The deadline for all grant spend to be committed by Members, including previously accrued funding will be 5pm on Monday 30th September 2024. Any applications received after that deadline will not be processed and the funding will be returned to central funds. This will allow officers to ensure that all committed funding is disbursed by no later than 5pm on 31st December 2024. At the meeting the process and timescales will be outlined, including any questions that Members may have.
- 4.3 In previous years the Member Hub have been put under undue pressure in processing very last-minute returns, so we politely request that Members engage in the process as early as possible to enable as much support as possible to be provided. This includes early engagement with Highways colleagues on projects that require long implementation lead times.
- 4.4 Following Committee the Member Hub will work with Members on promoting this deadline and regularly engage in reminders.
- 4.5 Consistent with prior elections, all information relating to Member Grants will be taken down ahead of the pre-election period in early 2025 until after election results have been announced.

Recommendation:

The Committee is requested to:

- a) COMMENT and AGREE the revised guidelines with the intention to implement them from the start of the new financial year 2024 – 2025
- b) NOTE the contents of this report, including the closedown deadline.

Appendices:

1. Tracked Changes Combined Member Grant Scheme Guidelines for Applicants 2024-2025
2. Website template on Member spend

Contact details**Report Authors**

Jill Kennedy-Smith
Operational Delivery Team Manager
03000 416343
jill.kennedy-smith@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director

Ben Watts
General Counsel
03000 416814
Benjamin.watts@kent.gov.uk

Oliver Streatfield
Member Hub Supervisor
03000 421817

Jenny Leagas
Member Hub Support Officer
03000 416381