

By: Ben Watts, General Counsel  
To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024  
Subject: KCC Combined Member Grants – Permitted Spend Reinstatement  
Classification: Unrestricted

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## **1. Reason for Changes.**

1.1 On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 a paper was presented to the Committee that identified several amendments to the Combined Member Grants Guidelines. The following revisions were made and approved by the Committee:

- The threshold of grants lowered to £250 from £300.
- Applications that cross district boundaries are no longer permitted.
- Schools are no longer to apply (this does not affect PTAs).
- Further strengthen the wording regarding retrospective applications.
- Clarifying acceptable monitoring evidence.
- Expanding pilot projects from six to twelve months (with an interim report required at six months).

1.2 Following the circulation of the guidelines and during the beginning of the new grant period for 2024 a number of Members raised concerns with the Cabinet Member about the impacts that the changes were having within their local communities and a Member's ability to administer their grant.

## **2. Schools**

2.1 The main area of concern related to schools and the change to only enabling a school's Parent and Teacher Association to apply. It was identified that schools did not consistently have such associations in place and therefore restricted their ability to apply. Members were also concerned that the unintended consequence of the change was to impact where schools acted as the sole or main community coalescer in areas to pull together activities that Members could invest in through their grants.

2.2 The rationale for changes to the scheme in relation to schools was at the time felt to be prudent due to analysis undertaken. Since 2021/22, 39% of schools had returned adequate monitoring, with the remaining schools having provided either no monitoring return (40%) or 15% provided delayed monitoring. The remaining 6% failed to complete the acceptance of grant form, despite repeated attempts to contact schools, which then resulted in the offer being withdrawn.

- 2.3 There have also been instances where funds have been spent on items that were not previously agreed by the Member and this has then resulted in inappropriate spend being reported. Furthermore, the previous guidelines have always stated that schools can only apply for funding for projects that benefit the wider community with core curriculum/educational spend not being supported because of the risk of double funding.
- 2.4 The Member Hub is responsible for administering and monitoring the grants on behalf of Members. A 2020 audit into the Combined Member Grant Scheme highlighted that grant monitoring was an area for development and the team have worked hard to improve processes, with success.
- 2.5 Governance, Law and Democracy officers therefore balance reputational damage for the Member and the Council with the risk of inappropriate spend of public funds and the concerns raised by Internal Audit. It is accepted that these are also to be balanced against the concerns raised in paragraph 2.1 above.

### **3. Multi District Applications**

- 3.1 One other area of concern raised was the terminology used for multi district applications and what cannot be funded:

*'Projects that extend into other electoral districts, Member grants are designed to provide benefit to the individual Members division.'*

- 3.2 The intention was to prevent a Member from supporting an application in another district, for example, a Member from the Dartford area supporting an application from Dover. However, on reflection this would then prohibit Members who are on a boundary of another division that receives support in their area.

- 3.3 It is therefore proposed to amend the wording to provide clarity to that restriction to:

*'Projects that do not demonstrate benefit to the individual Members division.'*

### **4. Future amendments**

- 4.1 Due to the importance of the Combined Member Grants Scheme to Members and their communities, any future changes will be consulted on with **all** Members so that such matters can be raised in the draft stage prior to it coming before the Selection and Member Services Committee.

**Recommendation:**

The Committee is requested to:

- a) NOTE the reasoning for the original changes.
- b) COMMENT on the proposed reinstatements.
- c) AGREE that, whilst NOTING the risks, schools should be reinstated into the grant guidelines under who can apply, with any retrospective grants that were refused on those grounds during April and May 2024, reviewed and approved where necessary.
- d) Comment and agree on the wording on the multi-district applications revised wording.
- e) Comment and agree that future amendments shall be consulted on with Members prior to it being presented in draft to Selection and Member Services Committee.
- f) AGREE that officers will review the scheme again after the September 2024 closedown and bring back further proposals before the end of the current administrative cycle.

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