

By: Ben Watts, General Counsel

To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 29 July 2020

Subject: KCC Combined Member Grant – Whitstable East and Herne Bay West Divisions

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The Committee is invited to comment on and consider the following report that details the proposed arrangements for the distribution of the Combined Member Grant in the vacant seat of Whitstable East and Herne Bay.

1. Following the sad death of Mr Ian Thomas, Member for Whitstable East and Herne Bay West, consideration needs to be given to the way in which the Combined Member Grant should be assigned to eligible organisations and the process for determining these grants.
2. This has not been an issue previously as normally a by-election would be held within a relatively short period of time. However, under the COVID 19 Regulations there will not be any elections held until May 2021 and therefore this seat will remain vacant until the election.
3. Under our governance, Member Grants are effectively assigned to an individual Member for disbursing to the organisations and projects that they wish to prioritise in their community in the name of Kent County Council. Because it is a vacant seat, it is important to ensure that any awards do not benefit a particular party or individual in the locality so as to potentially influence the future election.
4. Our governance does not contemplate this set of circumstances. At the same time, it seems unfair to penalise the Division's constituents and local organisations. In order to prevent this from happening, a proposal is being presented to you today to submit all applications, both community and highway, for this division to the Selection and Member Services Committee for approval. This would avoid allegations of impropriety during the vacancy and ensure that community groups and projects continue to be supported.
5. Further to the above, Mr Robert Thomas has informed us directly of three major projects that merit consideration by the Committee that would have been favoured by Mr Ian Thomas. These are:
 - a. Contribute funding towards a minibus for a charity
 - b. A Graffiti cover-up project
 - c. A wildlife and environmental improvement project

6. In conjunction with the Member Hub, the Press Office will be asked to publicise the availability of this fund, highlighting a specific welcoming of applications from the major projects as aforementioned.
7. Mr Ian Thomas had planned but was yet to approve a Highways Scheme for his division that related to Tree Planting on Bridgefield Road, the details of which are attached as an appendix.

Recommendation:

The Committee is requested to:

- a) Comment on and approve the proposal for the distribution of the Combined Member Grant for the Whitstable East and Herne Bay West Division as and when the need arises; and
- b) Consider and provide a judgement on the following Combined Member Grant application:
- c) Contribute funding towards:
 - i. a minibus for a charity
 - ii. a Graffiti cover-up project
 - iii. a wildlife and environmental improvement project
 - iv. Tree Planting on Bridgefield Road

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Background Information: none