

REPORT TO: Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE: 13th December 2007
SUBJECT: Cash Grants Programme
REPORT OF: Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members on the development of the City Council's Cash Grants programme and to seek views on future developments.

RECOMMENDATION

To seek the views of Members, with particular reference to the future delivery of the Cash Grants programme

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The current Cash grants programme comprises £800,000 Revenue funding, £300,000 Service Improvement Fund and £200,000 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

Wards Affected

ALL

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Cash grants programme was set up in 1999 as a one-off scheme to support projects put forward by community groups that would contribute to the objectives of the Bright and Clean campaign or the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy. The phrase CAS:H originally meant 'Clean And Safe: Help', hence its focus on the local environment and crime and disorder.
- 1.2 Following the popularity and success of the scheme, the City Council agreed to repeat it the following year and it has been continued in each subsequent year with the annual budget increasing from an initial £500,000 to the present £1.3m. This comprises £800,000 from the Revenue Fund, £300,000 Service Improvement Fund and £200,000 NRF.
- 1.3 We are now in the ninth year of the programme and a total of over £8.5 million (Appendix 1) has been made available to fund 530 projects and activities that have been suggested by local residents
- 1.4 It was intended that the programme be simple to access, flexible in how issues are tackled and responsive to residents' needs and the overall objectives of the programme were to:-
- Produce a highly visible impact to support environmental initiatives and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy
 - Identify and resource quick and/or imaginative solutions to local problems
 - Increase resident and community involvement in, and responsibility for, environmental initiatives and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy
 - Build confidence among local people that the Council and other agencies are committed to working with them at a local level to make areas cleaner, greener and safer

2 Delivering the Programme

Community Engagement and Social Capital

- 2.1 A particular feature of the original programme was that it was available to all residents. Applicant groups did not have to be formally constituted voluntary or community organisations but could simply be a collection of friends or neighbours coming together to deal with a specific local issue. This is a continuing ethos that makes the Cash grants programme more flexible than other funding programmes.
- 2.2 The programme has also continued to evolve in line with developing strategic thinking across the Council and has been part of a wider effort to increase levels of community engagement throughout the city. We promote the scheme to residents as an easily accessible funding stream that can help deal quickly and simply with local issues or problems.
- 2.3 By empowering local residents and increasing their capacity to take direct action in their own communities the Cash grants programme has also increased the development of projects, events and activities credited with increasing levels of social capital and well-being within local neighbourhoods.

- 2.4 In addition to the increased levels of engagement between the Council and residents that investment through the Cash grants programme has generated in local communities, there is anecdotal evidence that there has been a sustained increase in the number of residents recognising a growing feeling of their sense of place in Manchester and their neighbourhoods.
- 2.5 We have developed a Sense of Place framework that aims to encourage communities to think about where they live, what is important to them and what it is that they want in their community. The framework looks at how the Council and our partners can work with residents to provide not only better services but also a better city. The accessibility of the Cash grants programme allows residents to make choices about what they want to see and do to improve their city and neighbourhoods.

Administering the Programme

- 2.6 The programme operates on an annual basis with groups completing an application form outlining their plans and demonstrating local support for the proposed project. There is a set closing date for receipt of applications after which projects are then evaluated in each ward by the Ward Councillors and Ward Co-ordinator.
- 2.7 Delegated authority from the Chief Executive has been given to each Ward Co-ordinator to make decisions on funding applications up to a maximum of £40,000 per ward after consultation with the three Ward Councillors.
- 2.8 The criteria upon which decisions are made are that the project should provide long lasting or wide community benefit and will contribute to improving the local environment, building a stronger sense of community or help to reduce crime or antisocial behaviour. More specifically, Ward Councillors and Ward Co-ordinators are also asked to consider the level of community support and involvement, the feasibility, likely effectiveness and value for money of a project.
- 2.9 The broad appeal of the programme is such that the level of funding requested by applicants will normally range from a few hundred pounds to the maximum £40,000 maximum per ward.

Integrating with Mainstream Council Service Delivery

- 2.10 Although not exclusively so, the majority of projects funded at a higher level are to improve or enhance physical features in the public realm such as in parks, open spaces or on the public highway. Almost all of these projects are undertaken by the relevant Council department in conjunction with the applicant. However, the department may carry out the work, we aim to leave the residents in control when it comes to delivering and owning their project.
- 2.11 Whilst it is recognised that the Council delegates mainstream funding for work in these areas, it should be noted that the Cash grants programme can only fund projects that are in addition to works funded centrally and cannot subsidise departmental budgets.
- 2.12 An examination of the projects funded to date shows that, although elements of some projects that are funded could be deemed to be the responsibility of departments, these works are only carried out as part of schemes that have been proposed and developed by residents.

- 2.13 In most cases projects are to install equipment or undertake hard and soft landscaping that may be several years ahead of a planned work programme but are a response to community-led demand.
- 2.14 It should also be noted that current methods of operation are often the most effective use of the Council resources available with Cash projects attracting match funding from departmental budgets to deliver what are acknowledged to be highly expensive community facilities when residents want them.

Central Investment Programme in the Voluntary and Community Sectors

- 2.15 The Voluntary Sector Policy and Grants (VSPG) team is responsible for the Council's central investment programme in the Voluntary and Community sectors.
- 2.16 Although all Cash grant applications are submitted to VSPG where the schemes are checked for eligibility and to ensure that any grants given previously are accounted for, the local Ward Co-ordinator, in consultation with Ward Councillors, makes decisions locally on which applications to fund and at what level.
- 2.17 There is no doubt that, statistically, Cash remains popular with residents with the number of applications received continuing to increase each year. However, there are still problems in a small number of wards attracting sufficient bids to spend the available budget. Where this occurs, additional time, publicity and assistance is given to help encourage further applications. Where budget underspends remain, these are aggregated and redistributed equally to all wards.
- 2.18 Over the last two years there has been an increase in the submission of more creative or inventive projects that stretch the original concept of the Cash programme and a demand from residents for more flexibility.
- 2.19 It is also felt that the way the programme has evolved and developed on the ground with residents and members has outgrown the original brief of simply environmental and safety projects. The perception of the 'clean and safe' ethos has been as much a hindrance to some applicants as it has been a motivation for others.
- 2.20 The question of how, and to whom, the programme is advertised and promoted is also an issue that needs examination. There has been a constant rise in the number of applications from previously successful groups that have looked for funding in consecutive years.

3 Potential Future Options

- 3.1 To assist with the further development of the Cash Grants programme it would be helpful if Committee had any views with particular reference to:-
- Is the 'clean and safe' general objective too narrow and is there a need to broaden it out?
 - Could the timetable be more flexible and would it be more helpful for wards to be able to determine applications at any point during the year.
 - How might communication and publicity of the scheme be enhanced at a local level?

Any suggestions from Committee will be considered in drawing up next years scheme with a further report with proposals being submitted to this Committee in due course.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 Overall, the Cash grants programme is a major benefit to both residents and the Council. While it is easy to measure the level of investment in the fabric and infrastructure of the city, the intangible effects of the programme on community engagement, social capital, sense of place capacity building and simple pride in their city cannot be underestimated and should continue to be encouraged through Cash.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 The views of the Committee would be welcome particularly, with regard to any suggestions they may have about enhancing the delivery of Cash grants in future years.

Appendix 1

Comparative annual Cash budgets and ward allocations.

1999/00

Budget £500,000
Main Programme £15,000 maximum per project
No specific allocation per ward

2000/01

Budget £500,000
Main Programme £10,000 maximum per project
Small Grants £2,000 maximum
School Grants £500 each
No specific allocation per ward

2001/02

Budget £500,000
Main Programme £10,000 per ward with a £2,000 maximum per project
School Grants £250 each

2002/03

Budget £625,000
Main Programme £10,000 per ward with a £10,000 maximum per project
Small Grants £9,000 per ward with a £1,000 maximum per project
School Grants £250 each

2003/04

Budget £1,000,000
Main Programme £25,000 per ward with a £25,000 maximum per project

2004/05

Budget £1,500,000
Main Programme £40,000 per ward with a £40,000 maximum per project

2005/06

Budget £1,300,000
Main Programme £40,000 per ward with a £40,000 maximum per project

2006/07

Budget £1,300,000
Main Programme £40,000 per ward with a £40,000 maximum per project

2007/08

Budget £1,300,000
Main Programme £40,000 per ward with a £40,000 maximum per project

Appendix 2

Breakdown of the different types of group that have submitted applications in the last two years.

Type of Applicant Group[2005/2006		2006/2007		Total	
	Received	Funded	Received	Funded	Received	Funded
Arts	5	3	11	5	16	8
Church	23	18	8	6	31	24
Community	133	117	143	117	276	234
Culture	5	4	9	3	14	7
Elderly	12	12	11	10	23	22
Environment	26	19	25	22	51	41
Festival	4	4	6	6	10	10
Health	5	3	5	2	10	5
Other	6	4	13	8	19	12
Park	35	27	36	32	71	59
Play	16	13	19	12	35	25
Refugee	0	0	1	1	1	1
School	16	12	21	19	37	31
Scout	1	1	3	2	4	3
Society	11	8	10	8	21	16
Women	4	2	5	3	9	5
Youth	18	14	29	13	47	27
Totals	320	261	355	269	675	530