



Full Council Meeting 12th January 2021

Report Title : Grant Funding for Belper

Approval/Noting
For Approval

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present for approval recommendations on the resources and approach to help increase the amount of Grant Funding investment into the Town

2.0 Background

2.1 The Council has ambitious plans and aspirations for the future prosperity and well being of the town but as a small Council its resources are understandably limited. Therefore Councillors have expressed a desire to explore how external grant funding can be more successfully secured to help deliver on its aspirations.

2.2 One of the tasks appointed to the Marketing, Economic Development and Tourism co Ordinator is to explore ways in which grant funding can be identified to invest in the Town Centre and Heritage projects and activities. This report provides a summary of the research carried out to date which looks more widely at securing grant funding and recommends an approach for the Council going forward

3.0 Grant funding in the UK

3.1 The Directory for Social Change estimates that there are approximately 8,000 funding sources available in the UK yielding £8 billion in potential grant funding for a wide range of activities. This is possibly an underestimation; a Google search yields a massive amount of information on schemes, funding agencies, search tools etc. Indeed, the major difficulty with grant funding appears to be knowing where look for the best results to ensure that the best opportunities are not missed.

3.2. Community Groups and businesses locally access grant funding as part of their everyday activities and some are very good at it. Like the Council though, they only have a limited amount of time available to search for funding and may be missing out on opportunities.

3.3 Furthermore, community organisations have greater potential access to funding opportunities than Local Authorities do so there is a sensible argument which suggests that the Council should focus its approach on supporting the community / voluntary sector rather than focusing exclusively on Council only projects and activities.



3.4 Grant finding can be a very time consuming activity, not just the process of searching for grants but also maintaining up to date information as new schemes are opened on almost a daily basis. Added to this is the process of completing an application which requires, in most cases, a certain amount of research and evidence to support any bid. Added to this is the skillset needed to compile a convincing bid in what is a very competitive environment. There are specialist bid writers available but this resource comes at a cost.

3.5 There are a range of funding search tools available of varying quality which are discussed below. Whilst these tools can be helpful they require people to examine the information and assess its appropriateness. For example, Frome Council in Somerset use a combination of an online tool and various newsletters and alerts; but out of a staff of 28 approximately 10-12 of these have roles where there is an expectation on them to look for sources of funding relevant to their area of community activity. Significantly, even with this resource their ongoing approach also incorporates the following :

“We have, in the past, contracted a freelance fundraiser to support organisations to identify potential funders, support application filling and provide a supportive but enabling training role to create ongoing sustainable solutions. We encourage all organisations to diversify their income streams and provide a training programme which covers lots of this.”

3.6 As part of the preparation for this report a number of community groups were invited to complete anonymously a short survey on grant finding. Although the sample size was fairly small, 70% of surveys were completed and a number of clear conclusions emerge from the findings :

Grantfinding is considered as being extremely important to Community Groups but the majority do not feel they are expert at it

None use any online tools at present but would be interested in having access to one if it were to be supplied by the Council

Community Groups are interested in receiving training and guidance on accessing grant funding

With the right tools and support Community Groups believe that they would be more effective at seeking grant funding

3.7 Research for this report included the examination of a number of on line tools used to help search for Grants. A full list of each of the tools examined is attached at Appendix 1. The tools range in quality and cost, some being free to use and some being subscription based. In late 2020 a number of Members attended a webinar on “Grantfinder”, a comprehensive grant finding tool with many features, which, by their definition, require time and effort to refine in order to make best use of them.



3.8 Sampling of each of the tools (where permissible) reveals search results which are not the same in every instance; that is to say that not one of the packages can claim to have details of all of the funding opportunities available to the Council and communities in Belper so none are perfect. The attached Appendix contains a brief description of each tool and summary comments on their suitability for the Council are listed below :

Tool	Comment
DSC Funds Online	Comprehensive search tool but possibly too expensive for the Council.
Grantfinder	Similar to DSC above and would take time to develop in to an effective tool.
Grantsonline	<i>More affordable and would allow some community groups to have access in addition to the Council and its Members. The database is probably less comprehensive than either of the above</i>
Funding Central	<i>Much more affordable and would allow community groups to have access alongside the Council. More users would make customization much more of a challenge</i>
GRIN	Much more affordable but probably not sufficiently advanced at this time and the search information is not very user friendly
Get Grants	Probably not suitable as a grant finding tool but some very useful training and support services
TNL Community Fund	Not suitable as a grant finding tool but one which all Community Groups should be signposted to if they are not already aware
Gov Grants Hub	Difficult to ascertain what they provide and the costs involved
Turn 2 Us	Not really suitable for a Council to use but making the public aware of it would be entirely appropriate
Rural Services Network	Not suitable as a Grantfinding tool but circulating the monthly funding bulletin is an easy task

Analysis and Conclusions

3.9 The Council does not have the resources to comprehensively survey the grant funding opportunities available in the UK but an online tool would be of assistance if it could be made available to Councillors and staff. This might help to share the workload and mean there was not an over reliance on a single individual.

3.10 The Council should not underestimate the amount of time and effort needed to complete applications which have a good chance of being successful. In some ways finding an eligible funding stream is only the tip of the iceberg and some up-skilling may be required to equip the organization with the necessary skills.

3.11 Belper is blessed with many active community organisations and grant availability in the UK is focused towards applications from the community and voluntary sector. Furthermore, Community Groups locally would be pleased to receive training, support and access to online tools if the Council was in a position to provide these. Developing Community capacity is in line with the Council's desire to be supportive and enabling of the many community groups and organisations in Belper.



3.12 It would therefore make sense to subscribe to one of the online tools which could also be made available to community groups; organize some training to help improve skills and techniques for grantfinding, and, to share information on free to use resources (eg Free newsletters /bespoke resources etc)

3.13 The two online tools which best fit these requirements are *Grantsonline* and *Funding Central*, both of which have their advantages and disadvantages.

Grantsonline have a subscription package which allows up to 20 users which would allow for some Council and Community Group subscriptions with an absolute limit on the numbers. This holds the possibility of the Council not being able to provide the tool to every group which may request it. What it does do is enable the Council and Community groups to learn together about the functionality which would be very useful for ensuring no organization gets left behind in terms of developing expertise.

Funding Central is a cheaper option and for the subscription (£120) allows unlimited numbers of users from the same organization. This would possibly preclude some of the shared learning experience with the community groups through being users on the same system. However, the tool is free to use for groups with a turnover below £100k per annum (the vast majority) so it would still be possible for Council and the community groups to work in tandem. The added bonuses here are that each group would not be restricted on the numbers of individual users and Community Groups would not be dependent on the Council should it subsequently decide to cease its annual subscription. Furthermore, the Council could customize its searches to match some its own projects which could not be delivered by Community Groups.

3.14 On balance therefore, Funding Central, is probably the better of the two options to run for an initial trial period of a year. With the saving made on the subscription compared with Grantsonline the money could be re invested in training and support for the Council and community groups on areas such as bid writing, establishing Charities and CICs, etc. In this way the Council can best demonstrate and fulfil its community empowering and enabling approach.

3.15 The Council can also supplement the above by circulating various free newsletters which are available from some of the online resources and providing advice on which other free to use tools would be worth community groups subscribing to e.g. National Lottery Community Fund.

Legislation

The Localism Act confers a general power of competence on Local Councils and many take a pro active approach towards grantfinding

Financial Implications



The subscription to the Funding Central online tool could be met from the operational budget for supporting the local economy as could the cost of any training courses which require payment.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Council:

- (a) Supports the recommendation to purchase a year long license for the Funding Central online tool and reviews its effectiveness before deciding whether or not to renew in a years' time
- (b) Contacts Community Groups to encourage them to take out a subscription to Funding Central.
- (c) Sets up a learning pool so that the Council and Community Groups can learn together how best to make use of the tool.
- (d) In consultation with Community Groups arrange a series of training sessions on various aspects of the grant finding process

Reasons for recommendation(s)

The recommendations support the aim of the Council to improve its arrangements for attracting external funding and helps to empower communities in Belper by helping them to bid for funding to help support their projects and activities