



**Southampton City Council**

**Small Grants Scheme  
(Community Chest)**

**Consultation Feedback  
June 2013**

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## **Introduction**

Southampton City Council has been running a Community Chest small grant scheme for more than 25 years. The scheme primarily supports small, volunteer led community groups in the city.

Following feedback from voluntary organisations and the Big Society Scrutiny Inquiry it was felt the time was right to explore alternative options for administering small grants. Consultation was carried out between 25 February and 19 May 2013.

Respondents were asked who should run the scheme, who should be involved with making recommendations, how often the scheme should be run, what it should fund, whether separate budgets should be pooled to create one scheme and for any other comments they wished to make.

This document presents the feedback received during the consultation.

## **Key findings**

- Nearly two thirds of respondents thought the council should continue to run the small grants scheme. The main reasons for this were the council's impartiality and overview of the city and the cost of the administration fees being taken from the budget.
- Over 80% of respondents thought that people from the local community should be more involved in making the grant recommendations. Around 65% of respondents felt this could be achieved by having community representatives on the recommendation panel.
- More than 85% of respondents thought the small grants should have at least two rounds per year.
- Respondents were divided over whether to pool separate budgets. Just under 50% agreed this was a good idea, but 35% disagreed and 16% were unsure.
- Overall respondents thought the existing grant scheme criteria and funding priorities are right.

## Consultation Feedback

### Respondents

The consultation survey was available on the council's website to the general public, available for any interested party to take part. However, the promotion and publicity of the consultation was targeted at the following groups:

Community groups – as potential applicants and beneficiaries of the scheme

Voluntary organisations / social enterprises – as potential administrators of the scheme<sup>1</sup>

The majority of responses were submitted by representatives of community groups or voluntary organisations (73%). Two-thirds of these were from community groups, which represents 49% of the overall number of respondents. 3% of responses were submitted by representatives of the council or other statutory agencies and the remaining 24% of responses were submitted by individuals.

### Who should administer the grant scheme?

The key question of this consultation was who should administer the small grants scheme in the future. The options offered in the survey were:

- A local voluntary organisation or social enterprise
- The council
- A private sector company

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) thought the council should continue to administer the small grants scheme. Reasons given included the council's wide knowledge of the city, impartiality and leaving voluntary organisations free to support potential applicants without a conflict of interest.

The reasons given by the 35% of respondents who thought a local voluntary organisation or social enterprise should administer the scheme included the expertise and experience of the voluntary sector in administering small grant schemes and greater community ownership of the scheme.

No respondents thought a private sector company should administer it.

Community groups and individuals would prefer the council to administer the scheme, with the majority of voluntary organisations preferring a local voluntary organisation or social enterprise.

<b>Respondent type</b>	<b>The council</b>	<b>Voluntary organisation or social enterprise</b>
Community groups	61%	39%
Voluntary organisation	44%	56%
Individual	89%	11%
Council / Statutory agency	100%	0%

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this consultation 'community group' has been defined as a small volunteer led not-for-profit group and 'voluntary organisation' has been defined as a not-for-profit group that has at least 1 member of paid staff (excluding sessional staff).

## Community involvement in recommendations

The respondents were clear in their desire to involve the local community more in making grant recommendations, with 84% of respondents agreeing this.

How to involve local people caused more debate. The options offered in the survey were:

- Community representatives on the recommendation panel, for a fixed term of 1 or 2 years
- Community representatives on the recommendation panel, permanently (until they choose to leave)
- Public vote on the applications (Participatory Budgeting)

The majority (62%) thought community representatives on the panel for a fixed term was the best option, with an additional 3% suggesting community representatives should be on the panel permanently. It was felt the grant decisions are too important to leave to council officers alone and respondents welcomed the opportunity for community representatives to be included in making recommendations.

Only 11% of respondents wanted to see a public vote on the applications using Participatory Budgeting. Those in support of Participatory Budgeting felt it is an equitable way to allocate the money and would increase the role of the community in delivery. Those against Participatory Budgeting felt it could be open to significant bias with only popular groups (such those working with children) getting funding. Groups which are less popular, but still valuable to the diversity of the city, could lose out.

Some respondents (8%) felt that any of the options would do, as long as the local community were able to participate.

16% of respondents were either unsure if local people should be involved or felt the council should continue to make the recommendations, again because of a concern about bias.

## Merging the council's small grant scheme with other small grant schemes

Consideration was given to merging Community Chest with another small grant scheme in the city, but this was postponed due to changes with the funding of that scheme. However the council believes that increasing the available budget for community groups by merging grant schemes is still a good idea in principle. Therefore a question about it was included in the consultation survey.

Respondents were divided on this option. Although 49% felt it was a good idea, 35% disagreed and 16% were unsure.

## How often should the scheme run and what should it fund?

The current Community Chest scheme runs twice a year and 86% of respondents felt this should continue, with some respondents suggesting it should be more often (5%).

Respondents were given information on how and what the current scheme funds and offered the opportunity to comment on what they thought the scheme should fund. The

majority of respondents (78%) agreed with or suggested things that were within the existing criteria and funding priorities.

Suggestions of other things that the grant could fund were:

- Projects that bring in match funding
- Helping with a wider range of costs, such as essential building repairs or the costs of maintaining areas of land to the public
- Seedcorn funding for new initiatives that the council believes will help build the sort of city that can be successful and resilient in the future, and that has confident and aspirant communities and people
- One off projects and continuing work. Subsidising short falls in core funding.
- It could be developed to have a clearer focus on:
  - The seed funding to help start up small "For Local – By Local" initiatives that community activists want to deliver
  - Encouraging some risk taking and a sprinkling of innovation – to be the norm in successful bids
  - Projects that lessons can be learnt from to inspire others into action in their communities
  - People having fun in their communities
- Anything not considered mainstream. It's uniqueness lying in it being local.

### Additional comments

The consultation offered respondents the opportunity to make any other comments they wished to make about the Community Chest small grant scheme and the proposed changes. The comments have been grouped into common themes and are reproduced as given.

- Concerns raised
  - 1). If this exercise is aimed at cost saving and not effective use then there will be significant losers 2). If a third party takes over not only is there a financial loss to the scheme but external bias will occur. 3), If any "Public Participation" occurs it will be open to significant bias and potential misuse as other such schemes, potentially cost more and automatically rule out many "non-popular" groups that are essential to the diversity of Southampton. 4). As they say.....If it ain't broke don't fix it!
  - It is important that decisions are not left entirely to council officers. Panels of the public and elected members supported by officers are to be preferred
  - Don't agree with reducing the maximum grant to £2,500 for 2 reasons:-
    - (i) It can take groups a lot of effort to put together an application - will they be motivated for £2,500?
    - (ii) Some projects will need £5,000 - and should receive it if their bid is good enough and backed by valid evidence.I don't support reducing the amount of money below the requested amount to "spread it further". Participatory Budgeting is an equitable way to allocate the money as requested, and also increases the role of the community in seeing what is actually delivered for the money - which is as important as making the decision. It is a method that really holds groups to account.
  - I would not be in favour of public votes. The projects with the most instantly appealing presentation would be more likely to get votes than unpopular or

unfashionable causes. Children and animals are far more likely to get votes than the elderly or homeless, for example.

- Wording the consultation about outsourcing to say that admin costs would come from the grant biases the responses to leave in house - although there are admin costs attached to that which have not been identified.
  - Without further detail of the process criteria for amalgamating other grant pots it is not possible to comment on whether this is likely to be beneficial to the sector or not.
  - Any panel must be independent and non political. A knowledge of sport is essential. Who ever sits on this panel must be able to look at each case on its merits. To make a wrong decision now will cause major problems in future, and in some cases the demise of some long established sports clubs.
  - If there is an element of participatory budgeting then its value needs assessing against the time and cost to organise it. It is a good idea, but if it costs too much and takes too much time then maybe the benefit doesn't warrant the cost.
- General comments in addition to survey responses
    - I think it is a very good idea to get more local people involved
    - The focus on support for volunteering is particularly important in the current climate. The advantage of the Communities Team running the grant process is that they are in touch with many of the organisations in the city and have the best view of their prospective aims, delivery, outcomes etc.
    - [Our] experience of administering the Community Empowerment Grant demonstrated the value of involving local people in decision making as our experience with young peoples panels for the Children's Fund grants and has the recent Big Local initiative - however the full participatory budgeting process for a sum this size is probably not the best option. Administration and decision making about the grant, by and within the sector, helps build capacity within the sector by raising awareness of grant application and funding processes - but there needs to be proper support and training for panel members as part of this process.
    - The local council knows the area best and should therefore keep the community funding. It's impartiality ensures that everyone gets a fair share.
    - I feel that the city council should offer grants to community groups that have interests in and support the city's culture, heritage and natural environment.
  - Support for the existing small grant scheme
    - The scheme is a very good source of funding for small community groups in the city, and SCC should continue to provide this funding.
    - Community Chest is still a beneficial grant scheme especially for smaller local charities who find it difficult to fundraise.
    - Overall Community Chest has been an invaluable help for many community group across the city and even a modest grant can make a massive difference to some groups. It is a very worthwhile scheme which helps foster community cohesion and social inter-action. PLEASE LET IT CONTINUE!

- Suggestions for other changes to the scheme
  - The total amount of funding available could be split into 3 different locations, East West and Central of the city, this would allow projects to gain match funding from other funders who have specific pots of funding available for specific area, i.e. Bitterne Ward Community funding panel, Participatory Budgeting in Thornhill
  - I understand that Community Chest grants are already very well subscribed, but I believe that the grant period should be extended so that a voluntary, community organisation can use its funding over two years. At present, an organisation can have one year funded followed by one year with no funding.
  - More dialogue between the council and applicants on questions/queries about applications in progress would be helpful!
  - The Grant Scheme, instead of just processing applications, could provide added value to applicants and to the city as it could also:
    - Signpost applicants to other grant and funding opportunities
    - Link applicants with other community activists so they may achieve more through collaborative working, peer mentoring and other networking activities
    - Develop good links with local businesses to encourage them to demonstrate their Corporate Social Responsibility by contributing resources and skills support to individual projects; or even to support the wider scheme through funding.
  - I imagine that in future there will be a bigger demand for the grants from services which have had public sector funding reduced or cut. I think you might want to have some policy decision on this  
 Also what about ensuring an age, area and type of activity allocation across the whole year. It may be that some parts of the city are better resourced with community work support and so can apply more successfully. Finally I think the community reps should serve for 2 years for continuity purposes but imagine that this may be a problem as presumably those involved in decision making will have to come from groups who are not applying for funding, otherwise there will be a conflict of interest.
  - We think that the council is best placed to run the scheme. This leaves vol/com sector organisations free to support community groups to apply without there being a conflict of interest.
  - I think this scheme is great and anything to better a non-funded organisation is a great help. I personally don't feel the grants should be used to cover the wages or salaries in an organisation
  - I think the scheme should be a rolling programme with people able to apply at any time of year, not restricted to once or twice.



## Consultation Methods

The consultation was carried out online and by email, with paper copies available on request. Support was offered via phone or email for any respondents who wanted further information.

The consultation was open to the general public, however, community groups (as potential beneficiaries of the scheme) and voluntary organisations and social enterprises (as potential administrators of the scheme) were especially targeted.

The survey was available in MS Word and PDF format in the grants and funding section of the council's website. It was also linked to the council's main consultation pages. The consultation was promoted in the following ways:

Who	What	When
1750 contacts (internal/ external) on Communities and Improvement contacts database	Emailed direct link to the consultation	25/02/2013 14/04/2013 15/05/2013
Community Chest applicants in past 2 years	Emailed direct link to the consultation	16/04/2013
Attendees at Funding Advice drop-in	Consultation promoted and paper copies of survey available to take away	17/04/2013
Various local voluntary sector orgs / Housing Associations	Emailed direct link to the consultation	25/04/2013
Communities Newsletter and Communities Facebook	Promoted consultation, providing a direct link to the web page	27/03/2013 03/05/2013 17/05/2013
@SouthamptonFund Twitter followers (294)	Promoted consultation, providing a direct link to the web page	Every few days throughout the consultation period

## **Organisations that provided feedback**

Some surveys were completed by individuals and some were completed by people representing more than one organisation. Below is an alphabetical list of all the community groups, voluntary organisations and councils/statutory agencies that responded to the consultation.

- Channel Isles Tenants & Residents Association
- Chrysalis
- City of Southampton Society
- CLEAR
- Coxford Community Association
- Friends of Deep Dene
- Friends of Riverside Park
- Hampshire & IOW Community Foundation
- Herbert Collins Estates Residents Association
- Inner City Boxing Club
- Keeping Pace with Pain
- Lumsden Avenue Residents Association
- Melting Pot
- North Southampton Community Forum
- Plus You Limited
- Positive Action
- Sapphire Acro
- Southampton City Council - City Services
- SEEDS Home Education
- Shirley Quilters
- Sholing Valleys Study Centre
- Solent Youth Action
- Southampton Heritage Federation
- Southampton Voluntary Services
- Sportsmanship First
- St Denys Parochial Church Group
- Stepacross
- Swaythling Junior Netball Club
- THAWN - Thornhill Health and Wellbeing Network
- The 3AC Collaborative Community Hub
- The Millennium Third Age Centre
- TWICS