



Local Area Agreement (2006-2009) Performance Reward Grant

Grant Pot: local community capacity building

Update from OSCA following meeting 14 October 2009

Background

Oxfordshire County Council is the Accountable Body for the Reward Grant, on behalf of the Public Service Board (PSB).

The PSB has agreed that it wishes to allocate £500,000 towards a Community and Voluntary Sector Grants Pot (subject to final agreement of the criteria, administration and implementation processes).

It has been agreed that delivery of the Reward Grant will be devolved to the relevant Thematic Partnerships, in this case OSCA. OSCA will need to report / be accountable to the Public Service Board for the delivery of the relevant targets and expenditure in relation to the Reward Grant.

OSCA have agreed in principle that they would like to take this role on.

The Public Service Board at its meeting in September requested OSCA clarify how the administration of the proposed £500k grants pot for voluntary and community groups would be managed.

This was discussed at the OSCA meeting on 14 October 2009.

Grant criteria

OSCA was concerned that attention was being paid to the administration of the grants pot rather than the criteria for allocating the major percentage of the money that will be given out in grants. We therefore first sought further clarification on the criteria from the LAA steering group at a meeting on 27 October.

1. In the original submission OSCA suggested that:

Priority will be given to projects that :

- *support vulnerable and/or deprived communities (people, groups or places) and/or*
- *proposals identified in local community-led plans and/or*
- *support LAA or local targets or issues identified by District Local Strategic Partnerships.*

Projects shall do one or more of the following :

- *enable local solutions to local issues.*
- *propose new solutions to ongoing problems.*
- *Improve access to services.*

- *Increase participation of local people in decision making.*
- *Increase volunteering*
- *Help local people to achieve better outcomes for their communities (training / capacity building).*

OSCA therefore expects to fund projects that potentially meet any of the priorities set by the PSB:

- *Targets skills improvement.*
- *Targets job creation.*
- *Improves health and well-being for people in the most deprived communities.*
- *Improves the physical environment in the most deprived communities.*
- *Improves public involvement and engagement in the most deprived communities.*

We understand that the LAA Steering Group recommends that there should be no geographical restriction on the grants (i.e. they are not expected to target only those areas of greatest deprivation).

2. OSCA further proposed that:

Grants will be for a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £20,000.

Applicants shall

- *be a not-for-profit organisation*
- *Be able to demonstrate evidence of need to support their application,.*
- *Meet one or more of the criteria above.*

The LAA Steering Group recommends a lower limit of £3,000 in order to produce more impact and reduce administration.

The description ‘not-for-profit organisation’ will be expanded to clarify that this covers parish councils as well as voluntary, community and faith organisations and other ‘third sector’ bodies such as social enterprises.

3. We have understood that 50% of grant funding awarded should be for capital projects.

We understand that a standard definition of capital will be provided to all partnerships in receipt of LAA reward grant monies.

4. We have taken on board the requirement that:

- *funding is not for “business-as-usual” activity, it is for activity to deliver something new or different.*

and therefore expect to award funding for new or additional work or projects.

The LAA Steering Group reassured us that in view of this overriding guideline, existing local grants pots (i.e. ‘business as usual’) are not expected to be reduced because of the availability of this new money. However, there can be no guarantee that cuts may not happen for other reasons.

If there is any other input that the PSB would like to give OSCA around the criteria this would be welcome.

Award of grants

Final criteria, the scoring system and application forms will be designed by the managing body once appointed and will be approved by OSCA and submitted to the PSB.

OSCA members (from both voluntary and statutory sectors) will volunteer to form a grants panel to consider applications and award grants according to the criteria. OSCA will aim to ensure balanced representation on this panel.

The grants officer from the managing body will be expected to join the county grants officers' group (if not already a member) in order to ensure that any assessment of applications takes into account other funding applied for or awarded.

Management and administration

It is standard practice for government grant pots to be offered with a % fee for management. A fee of up to 15% was originally proposed following guidance from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, our local grant-giving body. However, OSCA acknowledges that on a grant pot of £500,000, 15% probably represents too large a sum of money in absolute terms. We have therefore agreed 10% (£50,000) to be a more appropriate limit, subject to costed bids from potential managing bodies.

The fee would cover, for example:

- Design of the criteria, scoring system and application form for approval, and if necessary revising these after the first round
- Advertising of the grants
- Guidance to applicants on eligibility and completing the application
- Training of the grants panel
- Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses to grants panel members
- Arranging panel meetings and securing a suitable venue
- Initial sifting of the applications and making judgements on eligibility
- Copying and distributing applications to the panel
- Producing summaries of eligible applications for the panel to guide decision making
- Obtaining any extra information or evidence requested by the panel from the applicants
- Checking applicants' documentation such as constitution, bank account, policies
- General secretariat for the panel with quarterly reports to OSCA on progress
- Making staged grant payments
- Overall financial management with quarterly reports to OSCA
- Designing the monitoring process for successful applicants and ensuring that reports are submitted on time and in the correct format
- Site visits to successful applicants
- Support for successful applicants that are experiencing difficulty in delivering their project (with the authority to recommend withdrawal of funding in extreme cases)
- Collection of case studies to showcase the success of the grants programme

There are several organisations within OSCA's membership (that includes the voluntary and public sector) that would be interested in bidding for the work of administering the grants and monitoring the funds once awarded. A process of competitive bidding will therefore be established so that a fair and transparent decision is made about which organisation should undertake the management and administration. This will be drafted by a working party of OSCA representatives from organisations not intending to bid for the work. Val Johnson has offered to lead the

process. The working party will seek advice from colleagues with experience in designing such a bidding process. The criteria will probably include experience of grant giving, strong financial management and added value.

Possible timetable

This assumes that the managing body is in a position to undertake work ahead of funding being released in order to give sufficient time for the application process.

- Appointment of managing body in time for OSCA meeting 13 January 2010.
- Progress report to PSB 18 February 2010.
- Design of final criteria, scoring, application forms etc. in time for applications to open in spring 2010 (when reward money is expected to be released).
- First grant panel meeting by June 2010 (earlier if possible).

Alison Baxter, OCVA

28 October 2009