

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Leader and Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services
Date:	13 July 2023
Title:	Rural Programme 2023/24 Grant Spending
Report From:	Director of Hampshire 2050

Contact name: Lisa Wood, Rural Programme Support Officer
Emma Noyce, Assistant Director Regeneration and Growth

Tel: 0370 779 5211 **Email:** lisa.wood@hants.gov.uk
0370 779 8373 emma.noyce@hants.gov.uk

Purpose of this Report

1. The report considers the Rural Programme's grant spending plan for 2023/24 and proposes revised grant criteria for the Rural Communities Fund grant stream.

Recommendations

2. That the Leader and Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services approves the spending plan as set out in paragraph 9, including the approval of the annual grant to the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC).
3. That the Leader and Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services approves the revision of the grant criteria for the Rural Communities Fund (RCF), increasing the grant limit from £5,000 to £10,000.

Executive Summary

4. The Rural Programme is overseen by the Leader and Executive Member for Hampshire 2050 and Corporate Services. Work programmes include grant investment via the Rural Communities Fund and Parish and Town Council Investment Fund, and to manage the Council's annual infrastructure grant payment to Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC).
5. Further background and performance on each of the grant streams and HALC infrastructure grant payment can be found in Appendix 1.

Contextual information

6. The Rural Programme is a key tool in the Council's delivery of the priorities highlighted in the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry, with a focus on 'rurality'. This includes grant investment and support to target the Council's rural priorities, which are:
- community resilience – the County Council wants to help communities address and resolve local challenges themselves, such as supporting older and vulnerable people, or responding to extreme weather events;
 - rural transport – the County Council wants to support rural communities to tailor existing transport options (e.g. bus, minibus, volunteer drivers etc.) to better meet the needs of residents without cars;
 - self-help – the County Council wants to support volunteering and community-led initiatives in rural communities;
 - communications – the County Council wants to support the provision of broadband and mobile communications in rural areas; and
 - economic development – the County Council wants to support rural enterprises and forge strong links with Local Enterprise Partnerships and LEADER groups.
7. The RCF currently provides small grants up to £5,000 to develop projects to address local rural priorities as described above. In 2020, the maximum grant limit per application was reduced from £10,000 to £5,000 to allow for more applicants to apply against a reduced grant budget (£66,000 in 2022/23). However, evidence suggests that this reduction in maximum grant did not give rise to an increase in applications, as demonstrated by a reduction in the value of approved grant applications throughout 2022/23, totalling only £37,000. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, with increasing costs, the scheme could be more impactful if the grant limit were once again increased. This paper therefore seeks to re-introduce the maximum available grant of £10,000 to enable the RCF to be implemented to best effect.
8. Further information regarding the RCF can be found [here](#).

Finance

9. For context, the total Rural Programme approved budget is as follows:

Rural Programme Budget	Agreed Budget
	2023/24
Infrastructure grant to HALC (Revenue Budget)	£57,000
Rural Affairs Budget (Revenue Budget)	£214,000
Total	£271,000

Performance

10. The Rural Programme has delivered against its objectives of supporting communities through grant awards and maintaining the external partnership with HALC. Specific performance results are given in Appendix 1.

Consultation and Equalities

11. This is a financial report for the Rural Programme and therefore does not require a consultation. The Local Member and other relevant officers are consulted on individual grant awards.
12. A high-level Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken.
13. The corporate terms and conditions for grants require that for any grant applications, any organisation in receipt of funding shall ensure that at all times it complies with the Equality Act 2010 if applicable and shall ensure that it does not discriminate against any person or persons on the basis of protected characteristics. This report has no direct effect on service users, so has a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

14. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
15. The decisions in this report are financial decisions in relation to a programme of spending and grant opportunities. Therefore, the Climate Change Impact Assessment tools are not suitable for this decision and have not been used.
16. However, the tools will be used to assess the impact of any future grant application, for example The Parish and Town Investment Fund is partly used to fund Energy Efficiency grants for community buildings. As and when any grants are put forward for approval, the Climate Change Impact Assessment tool will be used to demonstrate any impacts and potential adaptations.

Other Key Issues

17. Legal Implications: Section 1 (1) of the Localism Act gives the County Council the power to do anything that individuals may generally do. This includes the power to make grants.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
EMPR Report - Update on the Parish and Town Council Investment Fund and Associated Rural Issues	25.04.2019
EMCRA Report – Rural Affairs – Rural Programme update and priorities	18.09.2020
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

A high-level Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

The corporate terms and conditions for grants require that for any grant applications, any organisation in receipt of funding shall ensure that at all times it complies with the Equality Act 2010 if applicable and shall ensure that it does not discriminate against any person or persons on the basis of protected characteristics. This report has no direct effect on service users, so has a neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics.

Appendix 1 – Details of Rural Programme

1. Annual infrastructure grant payment to HALC - the County Council's partnership with HALC is set to continue for the financial year 2023/24. The infrastructure grant of £57,000 to HALC will support the ongoing partnership and provide a valuable period to assess the partnership. HALC supports 246 member parishes with access to training, HR and operational advice for Parish Councillors, clerks, and other local council staff. HCC's grant subsidises the membership fee for Hampshire's parishes, thereby giving them free access to these resources.
2. Rural Communities Fund – provides grants to encourage community resilience and self-help to address local needs against our rural priorities, referred to in paragraph 7 above.
3. In 2022/23 funding from the RCF was awarded to 10 projects providing a total award of £37,000, with match funding totalling over £200,000, demonstrating a leverage of over 5:1. This includes support for two community events promoting rural Hampshire – The Romsey Show and Whitchurch Arts and Crafts Fair, and six rural business applications which are projected to increase income in total by £560k annually, and rural employment by 10 people annually.
4. Parish and Town Council Investment Fund (PTCIF) – provides grants up to £30,000 to encourage innovation by investing in locally led initiatives which help build community capacity and resilience, whilst reducing pressure on County Council Services. Successful approval of grants relies on a clear demonstration of how applicants will ease pressure on HCC services, for example supporting our Climate Emergency goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. Further information regarding the PTCIF can be found [here](#).
5. In 2022/23 grant funding from the PTCIF was awarded to 25 projects providing a total award of £220,000. This includes £170,000 relating to Climate Change improvement projects in 16 of Hampshire's community buildings. These projects are projected to deliver an annual energy saving of 132,609 kWh, annual financial savings of £42,880, and annual carbon saving = 32.91 tCO₂e, with match funding totalling over £2 million demonstrating a leverage of 10:1.