

Equality Impact Assessment: Proposed removal of community grants

Officer responsible for completing EIA: Funding Officer	Manager responsible for EIA: Louise Strongitharm
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1. Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal with the aim of assessing whether it would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated, any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and where this could be reduced in their impact this will be noted in the attached action plan. The Council also recognises that it may not completely remove all negative impacts.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy which has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans.

To address these severe financial challenges the Council must make significant saving alongside taking steps to 'live within its means' in the future.

Widespread reductions and changes to public-facing services, alongside reducing management and internal costs, have been set out in the [Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy](#).

The Council is no longer able to allocate funding to distribute to the voluntary sector in the form of Woking Borough Council Community Grants, which is a discretionary service. Removal of these grants will result in a £152,000 saving year on year plus the fee for the administration of the grants which is currently a commission of £3,000. This is a total of £155,000.

This Equality Impact Assessment seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal on the local charities and the residents they support.

Impact on services

The Council has distributed grant funding to the local voluntary sector to enable them to provide support services to residents for over 30 years.

Impact on retention: The Council's aspiration to retain support for vulnerable residents at a reduced cost to the council resulted in the administration of the Community Grants process being transferred to [The Community Foundation for Surrey \(CFS\)](#) last year. Since CFS is a specialist charity administering grants

across Surrey, they can manage the process more efficiently than the Council and at a lower cost. An additional benefit of this has been that a single application to CFS qualifies applications to be considered for funding from approximately 91 potential funds, substantially increasing the charity's chance of receiving the financial support needed at no additional cost.

The loss of the Council's grants reduces the pot of funding available to charities in Woking at a time when the Council will be reducing services and focus on delivering statutory services. It is hoped that the voluntary sector will be able to provide additional support to vulnerable residents but with less money. Grants may be available from other sources, but the voluntary sector will need to allocate additional resources to identifying and applying for available grants at a time when sources of data tell us that charitable donations plummeted by £5 billion last year and trusts and foundations are directing funding to parts of the country considered to be in greater need. Furthermore, charities are facing increased demand for their services due to the cost-of-living crisis and the financial challenges faced by local authorities who are cutting back on funding for social services.

2. Engagement and consultation

The Council has carried out engagement on all proposed savings to ensure a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year.

The **first phase of the engagement** took place in **summer 2023**. Residents and businesses had the opportunity to have their say on how to tackle the budget shortfall. [View the consultation feedback](#).

Community grants are discretionary and therefore the Council does not have a legal responsibility to offer them, but the grants are specifically targeted at voluntary sector organisations working with the most vulnerable residents and these organisations will be expected to take over many services that will no longer be provided by the council. With the cost of living rising, there is increased demand for funding from trusts and foundations with most funding being directed to what are more deprived parts of the UK in the interests of levelling up.

The organisations funded by Woking Borough Council have **been informed for a number of years** that they must not rely on the Council for future funding and identify alternative sources. Some grants have been reducing over the years. Charities are facing higher costs themselves so it is likely that some of these organisations will have insufficient funding to survive in the absence of these grants.

Phase Two consultation started on 2 October until 12 November. [Read the full consultation report](#).

Further one-to-one meetings took place with organisations to discuss other funding options and support from the funding officer.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative, how can it be mitigated? (action) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Gender	Men				x		In the current financial year, a grant was awarded to an organisation offering a space for men to meet and socialise to combat isolation whilst using their skills to contribute to their community. The Volunteer Woking Funding Officer is working to direct organisations to alternative funding, where possible, and to alert funders to the issues. There are free resources and advice available on the internet and from sources like Charity Excellence, The Community Foundation for Surrey, Surrey Community Action, and The Surrey County Council Community Link Officers. NCVO membership is free to small charities and non-profits and chargeable to those with income more than £30,000. Advice is available for a fee from professional fundraisers and funding search tools such as Grant Finder and Grants Online.
	Women				x		In the current financial year, grants have been awarded to two charities working with women experiencing domestic abuse, isolation, and the resultant mental health issues. Funding provides a helpline for women in Woking to access and to fund a support worker to operate a project to combat isolation, develop skills leading to employment and for users to obtain advice. Mitigations as above.
Gender reassignment						x	No applications were received for projects specifically impacting gender reassignment in the current financial year.
Race	White				x		Woking is a very multicultural borough, and all ethnicities are

	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups				x		affected but some projects specifically target those from communities who are in need of support at the time, such as Afghans, Syrians, Ukrainians and Asians.
	Asian/Asian British				x		
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British				x		Mitigations as above.
	Gypsies / travellers					x	No applications were received for projects specifically impacting gypsies or travellers in the current financial year.
	Other ethnic group				x		Some of the grants awarded are for projects specifically designed to support immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from a range of ethnic groups, as referred to above.
Disability	Physical				x		In the current year, grants have been awarded to a charity providing respite care for Woking children with complex special needs, courses, and counselling for those with acquired brain injuries; hydrotherapy sessions for Woking residents with Parkinson's disease; core costs of a charity supporting people with mobility issues to help them access vital services, socialise, and visit the shopping centre. Mitigations as above.
	Sensory				x		In the current year, grants have been awarded to fund a benefits advisor for residents with sight loss and an aphasia support group for those with difficulty speaking and understanding language. Mitigations as above.
	Learning difficulties				x		In the current year, grants have been awarded for vocational training for some young people in Woking in danger of becoming NEET and a relational support worker to help children who have struggled with education and are also on this path. It has also funded places on a creative workshop for teenagers with learning difficulties. Mitigations as above.

	Mental health				x		<p>In the current year, grants have been awarded to several projects providing hope and support through counselling, a telephone helpline, signposting, training, and combatting isolation by providing opportunities for all ages to socialise, create new friendships and learn new skills such as a project to bring young and old together in music workshops and a project to support bereaved children.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>
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Sexual orientation	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					x	No applications were received for projects specifically impacting lesbians, gay men, or bisexuals in the current financial year.
Age	Older people (50+)				x		<p>In the current year, grants have been awarded to an elderly befriending organisation, an organisation that develops connections between young and old through music making thereby combatting isolation and developing community cohesion, and an organisation providing mobility services which tend to be more essential as people age.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>
	Younger people (16 - 25)				x		<p>In the current year, grants have been awarded towards a late-night weekend patrol by volunteers helping people who may be vulnerable after becoming separated from friends or due to intoxication and vocational training for those who have struggled with education.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>
	Children (0-15)				x		<p>In the current year, grants have been awarded for a support worker to work with vulnerable young people in crisis, respite care for children with complex needs, to bring together children with the elderly developing community cohesion and combatting isolation and grief support for children who have suffered a bereavement and the core costs of a charity working with volunteers to support families with children under 5 who are struggling to cope.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>

Religion or belief	Faith groups					x	No applications were received for projects specifically impacting specific faith groups in the current financial year.
Pregnancy and maternity						x	In the current year, a grant was awarded for the core costs of a charity providing a wide range of services to the community including food, toys and clothing for infants plus mental health, chat, cookery classes and money advice. Mitigations as above.
Marriage and civil partnership						x	No applications were received for projects specifically impacting marriage and civil partnerships in the current financial year.
Socio-economic background						x	In the current year, most of the grants awarded were for projects that support the most vulnerable residents including busarries to enable Woking residents to access long-term subsidised counselling when they are unable to pay; funding for the core costs of a specialist technical advisory body that provides its service to the Citizens Advice Bureau on the most technical debt and benefits cases; a benefits advisor for those with sight loss; core costs for a community hub supporting the most vulnerable residents in a part of the borough with a high rate of deprived households; a project co-ordinator supporting women from ethnic minority backgrounds to address the problems they face and learn new skills leading to employment and the core costs of a project providing employment for people with special needs by recycling furniture and equipment at very low cost to those referred by social services. Mitigations as above.

Carers			x		<p>In the current year, grants were awarded for bursaries to pay the balance needed to enable families with children with special needs to access respite care and to provide support to families with young children who are struggling to cope; funding for hydrotherapy sessions for those with Parkinsons helps them with mobility for a period which relieves pressure on their carers for a while and the grant to the mobility service allows the carer some respite whilst it allows the person requiring care more freedom of movement.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>
Other identified groups	Immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.		x		<p>In the current year, a number of the grants have been to organisations that provide services to this group including one that currently hosts meetings of Ukranian refugees, has helped Syrian refugees into employment and supported all in this category in many different ways; the project co-ordinator working with vulnerable women mainly works with this group; the furniture project provides low cost furniture and equipment for most in this category; and a large part of the work of the specialist debt and benefits advice service is working on the most technical cases for this group.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>

Generalised negative impacts

It is hoped that the voluntary sector will be able to provide additional support to vulnerable residents but with less money. It should be noted that there are options for some of these organisations that will mitigate the impact, but charities are facing increased demand for their services and suffering with higher costs themselves at a time when there is increased competition for funding from trusts and foundations.

Grants may be available from other sources, but the voluntary sector will need to allocate additional resources to identifying and applying for available grants at a time when sources of data tell us that charitable donations plummeted by £5 billion last year and trusts and foundations are directing the available funding to parts of the country considered to be in greater need. Surrey County Council funding for social services and financial support for some of the charities which might have taken on some of the services the council will no longer be able to provide, is also reducing. In this climate it is likely that some of these organisations will have insufficient funding to survive without these grants. This is reflected in the responses submitted to the second consultation exercise.

Action plan

Actions identified from EIA	Target completion date	Responsible officer	Comments
Volunteer Woking Funding Officer to contact grant recipients offering support to identify alternative funding.	31 st March 2024	Funding Officer	
Volunteer Woking Funding Officer to contact grant recipients to offer 1-2-1 meetings with the local National Lottery funding officer	31 st March 2024	Funding Officer	
Volunteer Woking Funding Officer to prepare a document listing source of free advice and support to be shared with organisations, as requested.	31 st March 2024	Funding Officer	
Recipients of grants to be notified of the likelihood that community grants will not be available from 2024/25	31 st March 2024	Strategic Director	Legal to draft letters.
Alternative sources of funding and advice to be signposted on the WBC website.	31 st March 2024	Funding Officer and Marcomms Team	

Sign off

LEGAL SERVICES: Completed	DATE: 8 January 2024
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: Completed	DATE: 22 January 2024
REVIEW PANEL MEMBER: Completed	DATE: 4 January 2024