

Briefing Note

Climate Change Budget 2022/2023

1.0 Background

1.1 At its July 2021 meeting, councillors agreed to adopt four policy commitments as part of its response to the challenge of climate change. Policy 3 states that:

The parish council can establish an annual budget for projects that can mitigate the impact of climate change and support movement towards a zero-carbon environment.

The funding could be drawn from reserves and determined in November as part of the council's annual financial review.

1.2 This note will set out the options for meeting this commitment. The current system of grants and donations can be viewed here: www.menheniotparish.org.uk/the-council/grants/

2.0 Option 1 Increase the budget for exiting grants and donation

2.1 The budget for small Donations (amounts up to £100) can be awarded at any public meeting and are drawn from an annual budget of £500 which is funded from the precept in November. Applicants are typically from annual parish events that require small sums at short notice. Requests for donations to regional charitable groups (for example, Air Ambulance and Hospice care) are made from this fund.

2.2 The Community Grants Fund is for sums larger than £100 and has limits on the amount (percentage of project cost and an absolute cash limit) that may be applied for. Applications are assessed biannually in April and November and must be supported by detailed evidence of need and accounting information.

2.3 Applicants may request funding to support specific expenses, and the guidance notes published give examples of what projects are suitable for support. This system relies on residents and volunteering groups knowing that funding is available and being active in making an application. Both schemes are currently undersubscribed.

3.0 Option 2 Set up a new fund for climate change and environmental projects

3.1 The council already has a template model for grants and donations detailed above, and it would be relatively simple to duplicate the system. Terms and conditions could remain the same and the schemes may be differentiated from the current ones by amending the examples of what the funding might be applied to.

3.2 Because both current schemes are in credit, councillors may conclude that there is either a lack of interest or lack of demand for funding to support community groups. Historically, the council has used its grants budgets to manage windfall bonuses arising from S106 planning consents which are given for 'community benefit'. In this sense, the council is obligated to use its reserves to give the widest community benefits, and councillors would be cautioned against reducing or restricting its current schemes. The low uptake may be a result of the lack of public volunteering activity since March 2020 when the first lockdown was introduced at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.0 Option 4 Increase the maintenance budget

4.1 Throughout the discussions around the setting up of a working group that would manage the council's response to climate change (now called Menheniot Green), leading councillors have been made aware of the range and variety of volunteering schemes across the parish which have never asked for financial support. More recent meetings have identified a number of projects that would attract wide support and community engagement and which councillors would wish to fund. However, many of these projects are carried out by individual people working alone or in informal unconstituted groups who would not qualify for funding from the existing streams. Additionally, much of the work they undertake supports the council's delivery of its climate change policy commitments, effectively carrying out unpaid work which they fund themselves.

4.2 The proposal is to formalise the funding of this project work in the council's budget by setting up a separate funding stream that can be proactive in awarding money to individual people, informal groups and others who support delivery of climate change and environmental policies. The council has a successful precedent for a scheme such as this in its Covid-19 Community Grants Fund which has awarded over £4,000 to a range of volunteering groups since its inception in May 2020.

4.3 Discussions with Menheniot Green has already identified work in progress that the council has previously committed to supporting (and funded) and new projects identified in the Residents' Ground Maintenance survey that was carried out in September 2021. The proposal is that the sum of £1000 be set aside from the general reserve and used for projects that are endorsed by Menheniot Green as part of the annual maintenance budget. By setting aside a separate budget for Menheniot Green, it raises the profile of the council's climate change work and establishes a clear and simple route that volunteers may follow to have approved expenses reimbursed and allows the council (through the working group) to make proactive donations to projects it wishes to support.

4.4 Agreeing to set up a ringfenced budget for Menheniot Green does not affect the current funding schemes, and other environmental projects may continue to make application to both the Donations Fund and Community Grants Fund.

5.0 Recommendation

5.1 That councillors continue to support the existing Donations & Grants schemes and set up a Menheniot Green budget to fund projects that support delivery of its objectives.

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