

Budget and Grant Allocation - Proposal

Introduction

St Albans Parish Council have traditionally issued grants to local groups and services based on applications for funding submitted to the Parish Council. Applications for funding have been discussed at Parish Council meetings and either agreed or denied depending on the outcome of Councillor votes. Traditionally, applications have been received from a small number of external providers with short term impacts on a limited number of focused areas within the Parish Council boundaries. In September 2023, a new Grants Policy was adopted by the Parish Council to limit the amount of grant that services could apply for at any one time.

The current approach to spend and grant allocation by St Albans Parish Council is not sustainable. Monies are often allocated on short term decisions and are not always needs led. It doesn't include long term planning and has no evidenced impact on improving community wellbeing or providing better services. The approach relinquishes the Parish Council from their responsibilities of delivering services to meet local needs with an over reliance on small, consistent number of local Providers. The current approach promotes a view that the Parish Council is a body that should redistribute monies to any local Providers that apply for it despite there being no clear steer in what is required. In turn, this has created unnecessary tension and ill feeling across Councillors, Providers and residents especially in instances where additional information has been requested or applications have been denied.

The objectives of this proposal are to;

1. Enable St Albans Parish Council to **take the lead** in fulfilling its duty as a local council to work towards improving community well-being and providing better services.
2. Set out a clear strategy on how funding is allocated by St Albans Parish Council from 2024 and going forward in the future.
3. Encourage wider engagement from businesses, providers, schools and local community groups across the Parish Council area.
4. Deliver services to impact on Parish Council priorities across the Parish Council area and provide sustainable improvements for Parish Council residents.
5. Provide value for money for St Albans Parish Council residents.
6. Promote a positive representation of St Albans Parish Council across the local community and improve communications and engagement between the Parish Council and its residents

Proposal

"Local councils work towards improving community well-being and providing better services. Their activities fall into three main categories; representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; striving to improve quality of life and community well-being."

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/about-local-councils>

A significant proportion of the Parish Council's budget is currently allocated to local services from applications for grants submitted. These have been submitted by local Providers for activities that the Provider has decided to offer and often form one off events / activities. Traditionally, applications have been received from a small number of Providers and have focused on specific areas in the Parish Council. This proposal is not calling in to question the validity of the events /

activities that are being delivered by the Providers, often formed by volunteers who are passionate in what they are doing on behalf of Parish Council residents and an integral part of the community.

This proposal seeks to build upon the engagement of Providers in their delivery of local activities and services and to extend to include a wider representation of the community with clearer direction and steer from the Parish Council. This will be achieved by the Parish Council adopting a need led, commissioning approach to allocate grants / budgets.

The Parish Council should agree their key priorities for delivery for the year 2024/25. As an example, this may be improving community safety, providing activities for children and young people, supporting vulnerable adults and improving community cohesion. In line with these priorities, the Parish Council will then agree a number of projects to help achieve progress against those priorities. Again, as an example, this may include installation of CCTV, keeping the alleyways clean and well lit, providing defibrillators, providing events and activities throughout school holidays, facilitating local parent and baby groups, seasonal community events e.g. Easter, Christmas, Diwali and running community fayres. Whilst some of these projects would be agreed by and delivered by the Parish Council (similar to the installation of benches and noticeboards), others would benefit from a community partnership approach. This may include engagement with the local Police / Community Safety Officers, businesses, nurseries and schools, Youth Service, Churches and the local voluntary action groups. In these instances, the Parish Council would provide a clear brief as to what the project is and the outcomes it aims to achieve and then would invite local services to bid for funding and resources to deliver that project. There may be instances where only one Provider is required and others where a partnership approach would achieve the best outcomes.

By adopting this approach, the Parish Council will have stronger control of its available budget and how it is used to improve service provision across all of the Parish Council area. It will help the Parish Council become more robust in its duty to improve community well being and to provide better services and will elevate the presence of the Parish Council across the area. In turn, this will help facilitate engagement between the Parish Council and residents which would lead to a stronger representation at Parish Council meetings.

It is proposed that a percentage of the budget continues to be ringfenced for applications for grants in line with the Grant Policy. This will still allow for one-off, short-term activities to be delivered in the community where that application can support any of the agreed priorities of the Parish Council and can provide evidence of the outcomes after delivery. This allocation should not form the main focus or proportion of the Parish Council budget.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This proposal sets out a new approach for St Albans Parish Council to decide on their budget and grant allocation. Whilst still providing opportunities for local Providers to submit applications for grants, this will no longer form such a large percentage of the budget spend. Instead, bids will be encouraged from Providers to support specific projects steered by the Parish Council to improve community wellbeing and provide better services across St Albans Parish Council.

This proposal recommends;

1. That this approach is agreed along with the 2024/25 budget at the next St Albans Parish Council meeting on Tuesday 30 January 2024
2. That at the next St Albans Parish Council meeting on Tuesday 30 January 2024, the key priorities for 2024/25 are discussed and agreed

3. That the focus for the St Albans Parish Council meeting on Tuesday 27 February 2023 should be agreeing a number of activities / projects that the Parish Council would like to deliver during 2024/25 and the process by which they will deliver those activities / projects
4. That the Grant Policy is reviewed to support this proposal and agreed by the St Albans Parish Council meeting on Tuesday 26 March 2023