

To: City Executive Board
Date: 17 April 2018
Report of: Head of Finance
Title of Report: Extension of OxLEP Community Grants Programme

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To seek approval of an extension of the OxLEP Community Grants programme.
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Customer & Corporate Services
Corporate Priority:	Strong and Active Communities
Policy Framework:	Financial Inclusion Strategy
Recommendation: That the City Executive Board resolves to:	
1. Approve the proposed extension of the OxLEP Community Grants programme	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Community Grants Prospectus
Appendix 2	Summary of funded projects
Appendix 3	Case Studies
Appendix 4	Risk Register

Introduction

1. In May 2016, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) awarded Oxford City Council the contract to deliver the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (OxLEP) Community Grants Programme. The contract's value is £430,000 and is provided by the European Social Fund (ESF), and match funded by the ESFA. £390,909 of the funding is to be provided as grants, with the remaining £39,091 available for the costs of administering the programme. The programme has been run by the Council's Welfare Reform Team.
2. The ESFA have recently announced an extension of the programme which had been due to end on 30 June 2018, but will be extended until 31 March 2019 and

will be making up to an additional 50% of the original funding award available. The amount will be confirmed in April, but as this is likely to increase the total project value to more than £500,000, this report seeks CEB approval to proceed with the project extension, as required by the Council's Constitution.

3. The aim of the grants programme is to make small grants to community based organisations in Oxfordshire, operating in areas of economic and social deprivation to help disadvantaged and unemployed people into work or training. Given the high levels of employment in the county (80.2% against a national average of 74.5%), and high numbers of job vacancies, most people not in work have complex barriers to overcome in order to access the labour market. As such the programme's main objective is to help people overcome these barriers.

Background

4. The Welfare Reform Team bid to run the Community Grants Programme ("the Programme") in order to influence the way in which the funding was used across the County. The Team's experience of providing employment support to residents on low incomes means that they understand the different challenges faced by target participants of the Programme, and the types of interventions that could be successful. Although the Programme is county wide, there are more potential project participants in Oxford, so the Programme represented an opportunity to ensure that appropriate provision was funded in the City. The Programme also contributes to meeting the Income and Skills themes of the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy.
5. In 2015 the Welfare Reform Team successfully delivered an ESF funded project, so the team had experience of managing the high levels of compliance associated with the ESF. The Team have utilised this experience to support third sector organisations to benefit from ESF funding, which would otherwise be challenging for them to access.
6. The Community Grants Programme has a target of delivering 325 Individualised Learner Records (ILRs). This requires 325 separate participants to engage in a learning process of some kind. There are no targets in relation to specific types of training or employment outcomes. However, these outcomes are being captured in order to properly evaluate the effectiveness of the Programme.

Programme Operation

7. Funding from the Community Grants Programme has been disbursed through three funding calls. Each funding call was advertised countywide through existing community and voluntary group networks, and organisations were invited to apply for funding. The funding calls were carried out in November 2016, January 2017 and July 2017. Further details about the structure of the funding calls can be found in the Grants Prospectus at Appendix 1.
8. Grants awards have been determined by a panel comprising the Welfare Reform Manager and Revenues and Benefits Programme Manager at Oxford City Council, the Strategy Manager at OxLEP, an OxLEP Network Navigator for Social Enterprise and a representative of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. West Oxfordshire District Council and

Cherwell District Council were also invited to participate, but have been unable to attend.

9. The Programme received 34 applications for funding, and 16 awards have been made totalling £392,591, which is slightly in excess of the budget of £390,909. This is possible because by the time of the third funding call, underspends had been identified in projects funded in the first funding call.
10. A wide range of projects have been funded both in terms of the types of participant targeted, and the range of activities on offer. For example, Film Oxford and Fusion Arts are offering training with industry professionals which will involve participants in planning and running one of the performance stages at the Common People Festival in May this year. Incredible Edible Oxford are delivering horticultural, agro-ecology and eco-building skills courses through activities catering to a range of interests and abilities, to help participants acquire the skills to be ready for professional work in this field. A summary of all of the awards and projects can be found in Appendix 2. Two case studies are also provided at Appendix 3.
11. Grant funded organisations have reported that 201 individuals have participated in their projects, up until the end of January 2018. Of these, 98 are Oxford residents. Outcomes for participants at the end of projects are not usually received until the end of the project, and so these have only been received for a small number of participants so far, and are as follows:
 - 31 completed basic skills course in English and/or Maths
 - 10 of the above 31 moved on to further English and/or Maths courses
 - 2 moved into Volunteering/mentoring
 - 2 completed a Level 1 Food Safety & Hygiene course
 - 2 moved into other Education or Training opportunities

Options

12. The only two options are to proceed with the extension to the project, or not. The additional funding which comes with the project extension represents new money coming into Oxford and Oxfordshire, to spend on supporting disadvantaged people into training and employment. If we do not proceed with the extension, the funding will remain in the ESF and ESFA, and will not be spent locally. As such the City Executive Board is recommended to approve the project extension.

Financial implications

13. A separate cost centre has been established to manage the funding of the Programme. This is managed in accordance with ESF rules to ensure that funding that has been disbursed isn't clawed back by the ESFA. The programme has been subject to 5 audit and compliance visits from the ESFA which have all been successful, with no funding being clawed back.

14. Project administration costs of £39,091 have been provided by the programme. Funding for administration of the project extension will also be available. This will be 10% of the additional amount provided for grants.

Legal issues

15. Organisations which are awarded funding enter into contracts with the Council. The form of these contracts has been agreed with Legal Services.

Level of risk

16. A risk register is attached at Appendix 4.

Equalities impact

17. The OxLEP Community Grants Programme is designed to support people from disadvantaged groups and so an impact assessment is not required.

Report author	Paul Wilding
Job title	Revenues & Benefits Programme Manager
Service area or department	Welfare Reform Team
Telephone	01865 252461
e-mail	pwilding@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None