WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services

Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee - 29 April 2009

Subject : Old People's Welfare Grant Funding

1.   Purpose

1.1   The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with options regarding the best use of grant funding for elderly welfare organisations.

2.   Background

2.1   A report was submitted to the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee on 25 February 2009 providing information on the Focus Group (held in January 2009). This Committee asked that a further report be brought to allow further discussion.

2.2   A Focus Group meeting was requested with the old people's welfare groups who presently receive a distribution, to allow open discussion of the current procedures and possible improvements. In the formal setting of the Focus Group, those present unanimously agreed that the status quo remained. However, informally, there have been a number of adverse comments made to the Council from elderly people and their families over the inconsistent use of the grant monies.

2.3   Historically, elderly members from Dumbarton and Alexandria benefit from the grant mainly through social events – such as a Christmas lunch or outing. Whereas, elderly members within a wider area of Clydebank and Old Kilpartick benefit mainly from a cash payout.

2.4   From census information, within the West Dunbartonshire area, there are approximately 20,000 residents over the age of 60.

3.   Main Issues

Use of funds

3.1   It is recognised that some elderly residents are members of more than one group and, as such, can benefit from Council grant funding more than once. However, this is no different from any other grant funding provided by the Council to voluntary groups.

3.2   It is also recognised that there are some elderly residents who are members of no groups – be this through choice or due to personal circumstances, such as physical ability to leave their homes. In this case, it is difficult to ensure that all relevant residents receive some benefit from the Council's funding.

3.3   It is also recognised that winter weather proves more difficult for elderly residents to leave their home, for events or for collection of money. However, this aside, the Council aims to ensure social inclusion for as many elderly residents in the area as possible.

3.4   As previously stated, the Council approached a number of other local authorities with similar funding arrangements in an attempt to identify the most beneficial use of funds. The methods considered were considered with a view to ensure that there would be a consistent approach throughout the authority. These included:

(a) Payments to individual elderly persons (through e.g. crossed/ uncrossed cheques, bacs payments, postal orders, vouchers for local shops, credits on utility bills). However, it is felt that the disadvantages of this method outweigh the benefits (this included issues such as risk analysis for both the individuals collecting and those administering large sums of money; insurance cover for large sums of money; the challenge regarding the administration and maintenance of the currency of information held).

(b) Area office distribution of individual payments – similar to the methodology used at present by the Clydebank and the Old Kilpatrick Christmas payouts. For the reasons noted in (a) as well as the strain on Council staffing resources, it is felt that the disadvantages again outweigh the advantages.

(c) In relation to (a) and (b), with the funding available from the Council and the number of residents aged 60+, any payout would be minimal. With approximately 20,000 elderly residents and a 2009/10 budget of £180,070, this would equate to £9 per head. Any additional cost of administering these options would require to be borne by the Council – e.g. Council and Policing staffing costs, bank charges, stationery and postage charges, etc. Risks have previously been considered for options (a) and (b) by local police contacts and it was felt that there were challenging risks to vulnerable members of society due to cash sums being held, transported and received at times known widely by the public.

(d) Social events by organisations.   Although the security aspects and the need for details of 20,000 individuals should no longer be an issue, the main remaining issue would be to ensure maximum benefit to as many of the elderly population in the area as possible. This could be maximised a number of ways (and should not be only through one method):

(i) Different types of events offered to all elderly residents through out the year. Making available certain events during the year to housebound by availability of transportation. It may be difficult to offer all events to all residents due to numbers within the area. However, with various events being organised during the year, organisations could attempt to cover all categories of residents;

(ii) Christmas (or Easter, summer, etc) gifts to be offered to all elderly residents, or possibly concentrating on those not attending other events during the year;

3.5   Organisation would require to provide the Council with an action plan to evidence their attempt for social inclusion of all categories of elderly residents.

3.6   Administering and monitoring of the elderly welfare grants would continue through the Council, with the grant allocations being approved at Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee.

3.7   At present, most of the organisations who apply for funding on an annual basis appear to be the same year on year, with minimal new organisations applying in the past few years. The Council should ensure additional advertising (through e.g. web site/ local newspapers/ Council newspaper/ posters in libraries and community centres) at appropriate times each year, with firm deadlines for applications and decisions identified. Any organisation missing these deadlines would not be included in the allocation. Any charges for advertising should be met from the grants budget prior to allocation of the remaining funds.

3.8   Spend within each organisation would require to be monitored to ensure money was spent appropriately and per the plan submitted prior to funding being agreed by the Council. This is in line with current grant conditions.

3.9   Any unspent grant funding (or funding not appropriately used) should be returned/ refunded to the Council. Again, this is in line with current grant conditions.

Allocation of funds

3.10   At present, organisations have different age groups included. For the purposes of grant funding, members require to be 60 +. No differential should be made between male and female.

3.11   At present, the Council asked for membership numbers but verification of these numbers is challenging. It would appear that there are inconsistencies in what is provided by the organisations – i.e. some give numbers based upon membership and others numbers based upon elderly residents in the area. The Council requires to ensure the allocation is made on a fair basis. The Council hold information from the census by ward – this cannot be broken down to take account of organisational boundaries and, as such, cannot be evidenced by groups. An approach which could ensure consistency through-out is on actual membership numbers. However, organisations would be required to provide evidence of this – through means such as attendance records, membership records. As this may hold information on private individuals, this should be made clear to groups and appropriate authorisation from members should be sought.

3.12   Clydebank OAP (an organisation which has historically received over 50% of the grant funding is in fact an affiliation of a number of (approximately 20) local groups. These local groups provide a number of various 'services' to elderly residents e.g. sequence dancing, art, bowls, etc. With 7,000 members being quoted by Clydebank OAP group, the size of the affiliation is potentially not workable for provision of events. As such, an alternative option is for each organisation to apply for grant funding, rather than through an affiliation.

4.   Personnel Issues

4.1   There are no personnel implications at this stage.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 No additional risk analysis was necessary at this stage.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Council recognises that the recommendations from the Focus Group of the status quo does not benefit all residents and is not consistent through authority. Thus, is not a fair method of grant funding to continue on an ongoing basis.

8. Recommendation

8.1 The Committee is asked agree:

(a) **The allocation of funds on the basis of membership (aged 60+ years) of the individual groups (not affiliations), with evidence being provided to the Council on this membership.**

(b) **The funding should no longer be classed as Christmas grants, but instead be annual funding. The grant provision should be advertised widely at an appropriate time, with the grant funding being agreed by Members annually in April. For 2009/10 only, due to the timing of these changes, August 2009.**

(c) **Any advertising charges should be funded from the OAP grants budget.**

(d) **There should be no cash-payouts.**

(e) **The grant funding should be used consistently through-out the authority, with a view to maximising social inclusion. Organisations should provide an annual action plan of use of funds to the Council, which will be monitored. Any funding not used appropriately or unspent by the end of the year (i.e. 31 March) should be returned to the Council.**

(f) **The Council should continue to administer these grants.**

Joyce White
Executive Director of Corporate Services
Date: 3 April 2009

_____

Wards Affected:	**All Wards**
Appendix:	**None**
Background Papers:	**Committee report October 2008 'Christmas Payments to Elderly People's Organisations'** **Responses from questionnaire to other local authorities**
	Community Participation Committee Report and Feedback January 2009 'Old Peoples' Welfare Grant Funding'
	Notes from the Focus Group held January 2009
	Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee report 25 February 2009
Person to Contact:	**Gillian McNeilly Manager of Accounting** **Council Offices, Garshake Road** **Telephone: (01389) 737194** **e-mail: gillian.mcneilly@west-dunbarton.gov.uk**