

Title of Report: DfI Greening of Alleyways Scheme	Officer Presenting: Regeneration Manager Author: Regeneration Manager
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 To update Members on details of the DfI Greening of Alleyways Scheme and to seek approval to prepare and submit a funding application.

2 Background

- 2.1 Members will recall the items presented to February 2021 E&R Committee summarising correspondence received from the DfI Minister, Nichola Mallon MLA, in relation to proposals by her Department to bring forward a new funding programme, entitled 'Greening of Alleyways' - designed specifically at promoting environmental improvements to alleys and spaces within existing neighbourhoods.
- 2.2 Whilst welcoming the announcement of funding designed to promote positive physical improvements to alleys and green spaces, the report to E&R highlighted the need for further clarity around a number of key matters in relation to this funding programme. In particular, Members were advised that prior to Council preparing a funding application to DfI, then it would be important to understand matters such as; the overall programme budget; the maximum sum available per project; match funding requirements; any geographical boundaries (urban/rural); eligible activities.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Prior to the February E&R Committee, Officers have been contact with DfI to seek clarity around these issues and have recently received a response to the queries raised as well as having a subsequent discussion with a DfI official also.
- 3.2 In response to the queries raised by Officers, and whilst there is no specific overall figure allocated towards this programme, it is understood that there may be potential for grant support up to a value of £100k available for individual Councils to apply for. DfI advise that this is a rolling programme with the potential for funding to be made available in subsequent years, subject to available budgets on a year-to-year basis.

- 3.3 In terms of the other queries raised by Council Officers, it appears that there will be no match funding requirement with the grant rate estimated to be 100% as well as the grant programme being made available on a District-wide basis.
- 3.4 This clarification is helpful in terms of informing an application from Council, now that the parameters of the funding programme have been established. Based on the potential available budget of £100k per Council in the current financial year, it will be important to distribute this as equitably as possible in the design of any programme.
- 3.5 The available budget is such that it will only be able to support modest environmental improvements to alleys and green spaces such as planting, landscaping, tidying-up, painting, new boundary treatments etc. As previously advised, the scheme will not be able to support revenue/recurring costs associated with any projects delivered under this programme. Similarly, the budget and funding timescales are such that it will be unable to support any construction elements of scale that are likely to involve statutory consents and complex procurement processes. In the design of any scheme, staffing and maintenance costs are ineligible.
- 3.6 Due to the practical and legal complexities associated with the locking of alleyway gates, it is proposed that the grant support does not directly support this activity and is instead focussed on delivering tangible environmental improvements to existing spaces.
- 3.7 It is proposed that Council's role in the scheme is to administer grant to interested parties, namely bona fide constituted groups/organisations. In order to maximise the grant availability to groups throughout the District, it is proposed that Council does not directly deliver any projects.
- 3.8 Given the limited budgets available (in the region of £100k), it is proposed to structure the funding programme to allocate a portion to each DEA - namely c£14k per DEA - and to support a minimum four projects based on a maximum grant value of £3500 per applicant at a rate of 100%.
- 3.9 In the event of demand being greater than the budget availability, eligible schemes will be prioritised for support in the order of the nature, scale, impact and benefit with the possibility of project promoters having to wait for the next round of funding to be made available in subsequent financial years.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

- 4.1 As previously advised, the grant scheme offers funding at a rate of 100% and there are no direct financial impacts upon Council in terms of any capital works. However, supporting such schemes may generate potential for requests for revenue interventions such as cleaning, maintenance etc with the expectation that Council absorbs some of these costs. At this stage it is too early to estimate the potential for any recurring revenue implications and this will be dependent on the type and scale of projects that are applied for.
- 4.2 Members may recall previous items setting out the challenges in securing budget specifically for mews lanes as in the majority of cases these are owned by private individuals or companies and therefore not in Council ownership. Council has undertaken waste clearing activities from lanes across the city and district in consideration of fly-tipping / indiscriminate dumping regulations.

5 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of the report and to approve the design of the scheme based on the details above in relation to the types of projects that can be supported as well as the distribution of the grant throughout the District based on 4 schemes per local community play partnership to a maximum value of £3500 per project.

Background Papers