



Report to: Cabinet
Subject: Parish Council Support
Date: 14 January 2010
Author: Deputy Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report feeds back on discussions with Parish Councils about their activities, their relationship with Gedling Borough Council and the level and administration of parish aid.

2. BACKGROUND

In June 2009, all Parish Councils were invited to attend a meeting at the Civic Centre to raise awareness about the financial challenges facing the Council and the potential implications for future levels of parish aid.

Following this meeting, individual discussions have taken place with each Parish Council about future financial support and other matters of mutual interest.

3. FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

Although Parish Councils are very different from each other, it was evident from discussions that there are a number of common characteristics:

- significant local knowledge
- a strong sense of 'pride' in their patches
- delivery of a wide range of community initiatives
- drawing in external funding to the Borough
- generating substantial voluntary action

Set out below are the current levels of parish aid which, not surprisingly, are highly valued by Parish Councils.

	Revenue £ 2009/10	Capital £ 2009/10
Bestwood	25,632	7,393
Burton Joyce	29,499	4,929
Calverton	49,161	9,939
Colwick	17,742	4,021
Lambley	7,267	5,476
Linby	1,690	4,046
Newstead	8,156	1,781
Papplewick	4,203	940
Ravenshead	41,767	11,884
Stoke Bardolph	875	220
Woodborough	12,608	6,471
Total	198,600	57,100

To assist with the setting of their precepts, Parish Councils have already been advised that, subject to the final decision on the 2010/11 budget, their current level of parish aid is to be frozen and may need to be reduced in the future.

Consideration has also been given to the administration of parish aid and an updated version of the current scheme is attached for approval. Cabinet's attention is drawn, in particular, to two proposed changes. Firstly, parish aid is currently allocated to Parish Councils in three separate payments. This is not helpful to parishes and is administratively time-consuming for Gedling's staff. It is therefore proposed to pay parish aid and the parish precept at the start of each financial year. Secondly, and in response to feedback from the Audit Commission during the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, parishes are to be asked to provide information about how their activities and expenditure fit with our own priorities. It is not the intention to turn this into a hugely time-consuming, bureaucratic exercise. Instead, a simple, user-friendly template is to be worked up with parishes that satisfy our need to clearly see and demonstrate the value of parish aid.

Finally, there was a consensus amongst Parish Councils that it would be helpful to meet collectively with members and officers of Gedling, two or three times a year, to build relationships, share good practice and consider items of mutual interest. The first meeting will take place in March 2010.

4. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is recommended to note this report and to agree the updated scheme of parish aid that is attached.

Parish Aid – Revised with effect from 1 April 2010

(Subject to approval)

(1) Introduction

- Each year, starting 2010/11, Gedling Borough Council will determine the total sum to be made available for parish grant aid. At the Council's discretion such amounts may comprise revenue aid, capital aid, or both.
- For 2010/11, the sums available for revenue and capital aid have been retained at £198,600 and £57,100 respectively. In future years the Council may reflect any cut imposed, or increase given, on its funding by central government in the sums made available to parishes.
- In order for Gedling Borough Council to understand how parish aid is used to improve the quality of life for local residents, parishes are asked to provide information about their activities and expenditure in relation to a number of themes. This information may also be helpful for the purpose of sharing good practice between parishes, and for avoiding the duplication of activity with Gedling Borough Council.

(2) Revenue Aid

- Any available revenue aid will be allocated 50% on a per capita basis and 50% on a net expenditure basis.
- The basis for the per-capita element will be the latest available population figures.
- The basis for the net expenditure element will be the Form As for the year preceding the one for which the allocation is being calculated, ie. the allocation for 2010/11 will be based on the profile of net expenditure taken from the Form As for 2009/10.
- Each parish will submit a Form A to Gedling Borough Council by the last Friday of January each year, indicating its proposed expenditure and income, including any revenue aid made available, and accordingly the anticipated precept requirement. Form A is a provisional notification only, and may be amended upon written (including email) request from the parish clerk.
- Together with financial information on Form A, each parish will provide a short summary report of its planned activities for the forthcoming year, linked to the following themes:

- community safety
 - community involvement
 - environmental improvements
 - leisure, health & well-being
 - employment, education & training
 - parish administration
- Each year, once parish councils have agreed their budgets, Form C must be returned to the Borough Council by 1 March at the latest. This form will represent certification of the precept requirement to be collected by the Borough on behalf of the parish.
 - Payment of revenue aid will be made in full by 30 April of each year, together with the full amount of the precept set by the parish.
 - Shortly after the end of each financial year, parishes will complete Form B as certification that they have incurred net expenditure in excess of the revenue grant paid to them, since no parish is entitled to receive more in grant-aid than it spends.
 - Form B is to be returned to the Borough Council each year, by 31 July at the latest. Upon receipt by GBC of Form B, should the amount paid to a parish exceed the total of its final net expenditure, such overpayment will be refunded to Gedling Borough Council as soon as possible, and in all cases by 31 March. In the event that a parish does not qualify for its maximum grant-aid, the unused sum will be treated as an under-spending on the Borough Councils budget. No carry forward of unclaimed amounts will be allowed, and no reallocation to other parishes will be made.
 - Together with the summary financial outturn information on Form B, each parish will provide a short summary of its activities and achievements for the year just ended. This summary should again link activity to the following themes:
 - community safety
 - community involvement
 - environmental improvements
 - leisure, health & well-being
 - employment, education & training
 - parish administration

(3) Capital Aid

- If Gedling Borough Council resolves to make capital aid available to parishes in addition to, or instead of, revenue aid, the following arrangements will apply.

- Any available capital aid will be allocated partly on a per capita basis and partly on the basis of a longstanding matrix arrangement. The intention of this is to ensure that smaller parishes periodically receive a more substantial sum than would be available under a purely per capita arrangement, allowing it to undertake more extensive projects.
- When a parish has determined the schemes on which it wishes to spend its capital aid it will contract and pay for the work to be done, then send a copy of invoices paid to Gedling Borough Council for reimbursement up to the maximum aid available. In the case of the smaller parishes, if this arrangement is not practical, it may, at Gedling Borough Council's discretion, be possible to pay the capital aid sum to the parish prior to the work being paid for by the parish. In such an instance, copies of all relevant invoices must be submitted to the Borough Council as soon as possible.
- If by the end of each financial year capital aid remains outstanding parishes may submit a request for a carry-forward. However, only sums in respect of schemes to which the parish council are formally committed will be considered. No guarantee is given that Gedling Borough Council will approve such requests, and should approval not be given, the outstanding sum will be forfeited.