

# **Grant awarding policy - discussion paper for Berkswell PC**

## **1. Introduction**

At its meeting on 11 September 2020, the Council agreed to revisit the fundamentals of how it grants monies.

My perspective has developed as a result of becoming a trustee of one of the local charitable bodies concerned with welfare and education.

In the past, most local government functions were discharged by the parish. However, responsibilities have now largely been transferred to central government and the borough. The Council can carry out a wide range of activities with Section 137 funding etc., but the specific powers given to parish councils suggest where perhaps our concerns should be focused.

## **2. Suggested Council focus**

I would suggest the Council's main concerns should be on assisting projects that are easily accessible to our residents in general - for example the general amenity of the area, public spaces and recreational facilities, public access, heritage assets, public meeting rooms, public art, drainage and flooding, burial grounds, and traffic calming.

In the area of welfare, the parish has no responsibility for education, the relief of need, and health services. However, we all know there are large gaps in state provision, and I would see these areas as needing both private giving and well organised local charities. Often, assistance needs to be given to individuals, which the Council is unable and unequipped to do. I think the Council should not normally be involved in this area - see §4 Exceptional circumstances.

In between these categories of "public amenity" and "welfare" is a significant grey area covering social and personal development activities where it's difficult to set rules. Beneficiaries might be smaller subsets of our residents, the purposes might be thought of as worthy but not essential to well-being, and perhaps the activities could be considered affordable without public support. I'd suggest a case-by-case assessment would continue to be necessary.

## **3. Local charities**

### **3.1 *The Lant Charity***

The Lant Charity has the purposes of: "relieving hardship or distress to persons living in Berkswell, Balsall Common or Temple Balsall. The provisions and maintenance of recreation ground, open space, reading room, library and village hall for the use of the inhabitants of the area of benefit. To make grants towards the stipends of Ministers."

The annual turnover is around £35000.

### **3.2 *Berkswell Charities***

The purposes of the Berkswell Charities are: " Provision and maintenance of a site for the School. Advancement of education of pupils in the principles of the C of E. Relief of poverty among inhabitants in area of benefit. Further religious & charitable purposes of the C of E by maintaining & repairing the fabric & contents of the parish church of Berkswell."

The annual turnover is of the order of £250000.

#### **4. Exceptional circumstances**

Events like the current Covid-19 pandemic create huge increases in the need for support, while impairing the resources available to charitable bodies. The Council has the ability to borrow money if required and to replenish its funds through the precept. I think it's entirely proper (and desirable) for the Council to widen the scope of its funding in these abnormal circumstances.

In addition, I would think it's unnecessary to apply strict rules to token payments of say £100 or less for beneficiaries such as the Royal British Legion.

#### **5. Suggested way forward**

I think the Council should open discussions with the local charities to see if we can agree on a clearer division of the spheres of activity.

In exceptional conditions, such as the current pandemic, the Council could provide additional "welfare" funding to the local charities, in the belief that they are better able to distribute it equitably, fairly, and speedily.

As with all grant assistance, it's essential that affairs are properly managed, and I think it would be good to hear more from the charity trustees on how they're identifying and servicing local needs, and how the Council can support them in ways other than funding.

Finally, I'm aware that the local charities don't seek donations from the public. However, I feel they should be open to the receipt of bequests, as they were at their foundation, and this should be publicised.

(These thoughts are put forward on an individual basis to stimulate discussion rather than dictate solutions.)

Richard Lloyd

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