

## **BISHOPSTONE PATRISH COUNCIL**

### **GRANTS FOR VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS – BPC(12)21**

#### **Introduction**

1. The Parish Council has a long record of providing annual grant support for village organisations which provide services to the local community. However, the Council's policy on such grants says that: "The Council may require information on the need for the funding as necessary".
2. At the meeting in July it was agreed that I should write to all the organisations in receipt of regular annual funding from the Parish Council to ascertain their future needs for support, and to report back before the budget is set for 2022/23. The letter asked whether grant funding was still required, taking account of the current state of the organisation's finances and expected future income and expenditure. It accepted that circumstances change over time and any decision to end funding for 2022/23 would not preclude any organisation from re-applying for support in the future.
3. It should be emphasized that this is not a cost cutting exercise – the Parish Council will be able to maintain grant spending at its current level if it wishes. However, the Parish Council does have an obligation to ensure that public funding is used effectively and that value for money is achieved. It should therefore not continue spending which cannot be justified.

#### **Responses**

4. Letters were sent to the Village hall Management Committee (VHMC), the Parochial Church Council (PCC) for both churchyard maintenance and STaB and to the Chalke Valley Sports Centre (CVSC). Responses are set out in Annex A. In summary:

VHMC – thanks to Covid related grants from Wiltshire Council their finances are in good shape and they have no need for a PC grant at the present time;

PCC (churchyard) – the cost of churchyard maintenance is increasing and they would like an increased grant for 2022/23 (£450 - £550);

PCC (STaB) – they would like the annual grant to STaB (£450) to continue;

CVSC – again they confirm a funding request for 2022/23.

#### **Consideration**

##### **Village Hall**

5. As indicated by the VHMC the Village Hall has benefitted significantly from Covid related grant support from Wiltshire Council. Operational costs have also been lower during lockdown. Given the current healthy state of Village Hall finances it is difficult to justify a grant for 2022/23. This position is accepted by the VHMC.

## Churchyard

6. The Parish Council is prohibited, by law, from funding religious institutions. However, it can help meet the cost of maintaining burial grounds. No doubt operational costs will have increased over the years so an increase to £550 a year may well be justified.

## STaB

7. The situation on support for STaB is more complicated. There was a point a few years ago when the support of the Parish Council kept the magazine going. The initial representation from the PCC in support of continued funding appeared to be no more than that it is appreciated by the community and "The PC grant of £450 gives the STaB team the flexibility of balancing changes in revenue with any increases in running costs." However, the published PCC accounts for 2020 show that income to STaB from advertising and donations was £3,512 and expenditure on the production of STaB was £1,903. I therefore asked the PCC for further justification for continuing with the Parish Council's grant at the present time.

8. The further response received is in Annex A. This indicates that, for 2021, income is expected to exceed expenditure, even if the grant from the PC is excluded. However, the response indicates that there are a number of uncertainties over printing costs and the extent to which the PCC can subsidise STaB. It would therefore be helpful for the PC grant to continue, or for it to be available on a contingent basis if the financial position deteriorates.

9. Taking account of the further representations, it seems to me that there are three main options:

- (i) continue with an annual grant as before;
- (ii) continue with an annual grant for 2022/23 and review the position again next year when some of the uncertainties might have been resolved;
- (iii) withdraw automatic annual funding and indicate that the PCC should make an application for a grant if and when required. It could be made clear that a grant was likely to be forthcoming if justified.

## CVSC

10. The Council has discussed the justification for providing support for the CVSC several times in the last few years. There is no doubt that the facilities there are used by Bishopstone residents (pilates, indoor bowls etc). This is the only facility of its type within the Chalke Valley and with the demographic shift currently happening in Bishopstone (more younger families moving in) it could be of increasing use. The current grant of £250 has been in place for a number of years and could reasonably be increased to £300.

## Recommendations

11. I recommend that:

- (a) the grant to the VHMC be discontinued for the present time. This would be without prejudice to re-introduction if required in future;
- (b) the grant to the PCC (churtyard) be increased to £550 per annum;
- (c) support for STaB should be on the basis indicated in para 9 (iii) above; and
- (d) the grant to CVSC be maintained and increased to £300 a year.

Mike Ash  
Clerk and RFO

October 2021

## **ANNEX A**

### **Responses from relevant organisations**

The responses received from the relevant organisations were as follows:

#### **Village Hall Management Committee (Grant 2021/22: £350)**

“The village hall has received significant financial support from Wiltshire Council during the Covid 19 lockdown to the extent that the hall is financially secure and can manage without a grant from Bishopstone Parish Council in 2022/23”.

#### **PCC – Churchyard Maintenance (Grant 2021/22: £450)**

“The PCC requests that the Parish Council gives consideration to increasing the contribution to churchyard maintenance from the current £450 (set in 2011) to £550.

The PCC is responsible for the maintenance of two churchyards in the Parish: St John the Baptist, Bishopstone and St Mary & St Lawrence Church, Stratford Tony. Both are open for burials and require regular grass and hedge cutting and tidying round gravestones. This involves the payment of a contractor and the use of volunteers. As the band of available volunteers ages and decreases, the reliance on contractors increases. We are fortunate that, at present, the PCC receives a generous annual grant from a Stratford Tony resident that covers the maintenance of the small churchyard. However, the larger, ‘busier’ and more visible churchyard in Bishopstone makes a greater call on the PCC’s finances and the energy of volunteers. An increase to £550 will enable the PCC to continue to maintain the churchyard and clear overgrown areas at a standard which might be expected by general visitors and relatives tending family graves.”

PCC – STaB (Grant 2021/22: £450)

“The PCC requests that the current contribution of £450 to the costs of STaB is continued by the Parish Council. The PCC values the visible contribution which the Church can make in the community through STaB. The feedback that we have received from individuals and parish organisations confirms that this magazine is much appreciated for the role it plays in our common life. This is particularly so under the management of the current editorial team. The team has not only maintained an excellent standard of content and presentation, but has managed to both contain printing costs and increase advertising in what is a difficult financial climate. The PC grant of £450 gives the STaB team the flexibility of balancing changes in revenue with any increases in running costs.”

Further response:

“In our accounting year 2021, including the Parish Council grant of £450, the estimated income is £2,730 with expenditure (printing costs) of £1,940.

The main reason for the stabilisation of STaB's finances was the change to a new printer. However, this arrangement is precarious because, due to illness, the future of this small business is uncertain.

There is no alternative printer to offer similar rates. We therefore request that the PC grant of £450 continues in 2022 in order to provide the STaB Team with the flexibility to cover any increase in running costs and an anticipated fall in advertising revenue. This would act as a positive incentive to the Team to maintain the high editorial and presentational standards of STaB without the distraction of financial concerns.

Because of the pandemic, the PCC's overall income is estimated to be down by £3,300 in 2021, reducing our ability to subsidise STaB. There is the option of introducing an annual subscription, as is the case with the Express in Coombe Bissett. However, this is not a choice we wish to make.

If the Parish Council decides it does not wish to make a grant in advance for 2022, would it be prepared to underwrite a deficit up to a maximum of £450 in 2022 while reviewing the level of future grants?"

### **Chalke Valley Sports Centre (Grant 2021/22: £250)**

"Many thanks for your email and the information on 2021/22 funding to CVSC ....This is very much welcomed and is being put this year as partnership funding to the Getting our Community Active project.

The CVSC Executive .....would like to confirm a funding request for next year. We are planning to further develop what has proved to be a successful Friday evening social event based around the new Petanque facility, and to organise all year around activity on a Friday evening that is open to members and guests alike.

We are .....considering the purchase of an indoor skittles ally as well so we can extend activities and get more people in the Valley involved. If we were successful with a funding request to BPC for 2022/23, we would use the funds towards this.

We have regular attendance from Bishopstone families to the Petanque evenings ... we are thinking that an inter village event might be worth investigating and would welcome your thoughts."