

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**MONDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2017 AT 2.00PM**

**REVIEW OF CURRENT FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH GROUNDWORK EAST AND THE HERTS AND MIDDLESEX WILDLIFE TRUST**

*Report of the Chief Executive & Director of Environment*

**Author:** Simon Aries, Assistant Director, Transport, Waste & Environmental Management [Tel: 019992 555255]

**Executive Member:** Derrick Ashley, Environment, Planning and Transport

**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the current funding arrangements for Groundwork East (GE) and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) and seek Cabinet agreement with some options on future support.

**2 Summary**

- 2.1 Both GE and HMWT have been provided with annual grant aid and project funding support from the County Council for over 3 decades. Over the years this financial support has diminished but both still receive annual contributions; GE £41,000 per annum; and HMWT £10,000 per annum. The County Council ceased all other direct financial support to other Hertfordshire based environmental trusts/charities over a decade ago (although continued annual financial support is provided to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).
- 2.2 GE has always invited and welcomed Member level representation on its management Board and currently that is Councillors Derrick Ashley and Ralph Sangster. The HMWT does not have any Hertfordshire County Council Members as part of its management board or other structures. The allocation and administration of financial support is overseen and managed by officers in the Environment Department.
- 2.3 It is timely in light of budget pressures to review the financial support provided to both organisations and section 5 of this report sets out 3 options; continued support at current levels; one off withdrawal of support; and a phased withdrawal of support.

### **3 Recommendations**

3.1 The Environment Planning and Transport Cabinet Panel considered a report on this item of business at its meeting on 1 November 2017. The Panel noted the report and supported Option 3 as set out in the recommendation at paragraph 3.2 below.

3.2 It is recommended that:-

*“Cabinet agrees:-*

- (i) a phased withdrawal of financial support from Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Groundwork Hertfordshire with effect from 1 April 2018 as follows:-*
  - (a) Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust – a £5,000 reduction in 2018/19 and a further £5,000 reduction in 2019/20; and*
  - (b) Groundwork Hertfordshire – a £10,000 reduction in 2018/19, a further £15,000 reduction in 2019/20 and a final reduction of £16,000 in 2020/21*
- (ii) that the Chief Executive and Director of Environment be authorised to give notice to Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Groundwork Hertfordshire of the decision to withdraw funding, as set out in (i)(a) and (b) above, in December 2017”.*

### **4 Background**

4.1 The last review of grant aid provided by the Council to a range of environmental organisations (mainly trusts and charities) was over a decade ago. That resulted in the withdrawal of grant from a number of outside bodies but continued financial support for both GE and the HMWT, albeit at reduced levels. Also, at that time there was a move away from the provision of grant to funding attached to specific negotiated projects or work.

4.2 Since then, although funding has been reduced further, the County Council still provides annual project based funding from the Environment Department. In addition, both organisations (especially GE) work on one-off projects with other parts of the Council for which funding may be made available. This is dependent on them ‘winning’ or bidding for work while the Environment Department support is annual, assuming performance is acceptable.

4.3 Arrangements and agreements to administer and manage this support are in place but best described as informal although the expectation and accepted practice is that any change to funding arrangements would necessitate a notice period of at least 3 months.

- 4.4 Working with GE, the Council contributes financially for the delivery of a broad, non-statutory work programme in collaboration with the Environment Department's Countryside Management Service. This follows a process by which the Council and Groundwork East agree a series of priority development areas which support the Council's wider objectives.
- 4.5 The HMWT is supported to coordinate and update information on the condition of the County Wildlife Sites to ensure that data on these circa 1,800 sites is up to date and can be used to inform decision making in relation to development and the planning system. The designation of County Wildlife Sites is non statutory and is used to recognise the importance of these sites and to their contribution to local biodiversity.
- 4.6 While the Council is represented at the Member level on GE board there is no Member involvement in the HMWT governance structure.
- 4.7 It is anticipated that any changes to annual financial support would not jeopardise wider relationships and partnerships and in the case of GE the hope is that there would remain County Council Member representation at the Board.
5. **Options**
- 5.1 **Option 1**  
Continue annual financial support at the current levels of £41,000 for GE and £10,000 for HMWT.
- 5.2 **Option 2**  
Full withdrawal of financial support from 1 April 2018 (which allows at least 3 months' notice if notice given in December).
- 5.3 **Option 3**  
A phased withdrawal of financial support from 1 April 2018 e.g. HMWT - £5,000 reduction in 2018/19 followed by a further £5,000 reduction in 2019/20; GWH £10,000 reduction in 2018/19 followed by a further £15,000 reduction in 2019/20 and a final reduction of £16,000 by 2020/21, with notice of this or any other level of reduction to be given in December 2017.
- 5.4 The three options presented above are examples and can be tailored as necessary. Phasing of any reductions in financial support would allow a period of transition and acclimatisation which would help mitigate impacts.
- 5.5 While a reduction in funding or withdrawal of funding would be a cause of concern to both organisations it is unlikely to represent a serious financial dilemma for either. There would be no direct impacts to any County Council services or activities and any external funding

leveraged in through this funding does not contribute directly to the County Council activity or budgets.

## **6 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 A reduction in funding or complete withdrawal phased or not, would effectively deliver an efficiency saving to the County Council as there would be no impacts on any of its services.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 There are no additional legal implications as a result of this report.

## **8. Equalities Implications**

- 8.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.
- 8.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.
- 8.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.4 No EqIA was undertaken in relation to this report.

### *Background Information*

Report to the Environment, Planning and Transport Cabinet Panel, November 2018

<http://cmis.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertfordshire/Calendarofcouncilmeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/737/Committee/52/Default.aspx>