

WELSH CHURCH ACT ESTATE COMMITTEE

Minutes of an Extraordinary Remote meeting held on 6th November 2023.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor M.R. Wilson (Chair); Councillors C.E.A. Champion, H.C. Hamilton, M.J. Hooper, and M.J.G. Morgan.

489 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing.”

490 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors P. Drake (Vice-Chair) and J.E. Charles.

491 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

492 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

493 APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE 2023/24 TRANCHE 3 (DCR) –

The Operational Manager for Accountancy presented the report, the purpose of which was to consider applications for financial assistance funded from the Welsh Church Act Estate. A revised budget of £47,880 had been set for issuing grants during 2023/24 following consideration of investment income and potential valuation costs.

An unallocated budget amount of £12,120 carried over from 2022/23 was also available for allocation during 2023/24. Therefore, the total grants budget for 2023/24 was set at £60,000.

Grants allocated at Committee in June 2023, for tranche one, totalled £10,150. Grants allocated at Committee in September 2023, for tranche two, totalled £13,813. A further award of £3,000, relating to a single grant application for tranche three (Appendix A), was recommended in principle until the outcome of a Welsh Government Communities Facilities Grant application was known and therefore a remaining sum of £33,037 was available for a fourth tranche.

In conclusion, the Officer advised that it was proposed that, in order to help improve the volume of grant applications received and the applicability of the funds to capital works on religious buildings in the context of the rising costs of construction, the maximum award amount should be increased to £10,000 on a trial basis of one year.

Following the Officer's proposal, Councillor Hooper expressed his support for increasing the maximum grant award amount but queried if the proposal had been made following applicant feedback or officer opinion. In response, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that feedback had not been received from grant applicants, however officers were aware of pieced together applications being received which could be indicative of applicants being mindful of the current smaller grant award amount. The £5,000 grant award limit had previously been agreed by the Committee however, the financial climate had changed significantly since that decision was made.

The Chair then highlighted that the Committee was not receiving many applications for its consideration and therefore, to invite applications relating to capital and more sustainable schemes, it could be beneficial to increase the grant award limit. As a supplementary point, the Chair proposed that the grant award amount be increased to £10,000 on a trial basis for the current financial year, which could then be reviewed by the Committee.

Following points of clarification raised by Committee Members, it was agreed that the trial period of 18 months would span until the end of the 24/25 financial year (31st March 2025).

The Chair subsequently suggested that a third report recommendation be raised to promote the grant application process via the Council's corporate social media channels. In response to a supplementary point raised by Councillor Hooper, that the grant award increase also be promoted via the Council's Shared Prosperity Fund Team, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that finance officers would already ensure that officers in Place were aware of Welsh Church Act Estate funding available and therefore the Officer would ensure that the Shared Prosperity Fund Team were made aware of the trial change period and amount following the meeting.

With no further comments, questions, or points of clarification the Committee subsequently

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the single application for financial assistance, as set out in

Appendix A of the report, be approved.

(2) T H A T the maximum award amount be increased to £10,000 on a trial basis until the 1st of April 2025.

(3) T H A T the process for grant application be promoted via the Council's corporate social media channels.

Reasons for decisions

(1) Having regard to the content of the report and subsequent discussion at the meeting.

(2) To accommodate a trial period of 18 months with the hope of increasing the amount of applications received related to larger financial schemes.

(3) To increase the number of applications for Welsh Church Act Grant funds, raise awareness on the availability of the fund and invite further applications for consideration by the Committee.

494 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2022/23 (DCR) –

The purpose of the report was to consider the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2023, as set out in Appendix A of the report, and required by the Charities Act 2011 Section 162. The Officer apologised for the delay in the report being presented to the Committee.

The Committee had been presented with the report for approval to forward to the Council's external auditors, Wales Audit Office, for independent examination prior to the Charity Commission deadline of 31st January 2024.

The Operational Manager advised that the net value of the fund, as of 31st March 2023, was £5.176m which was a reduction of £79k when compared to the previous year. This was due to a reduction of £98k in the value of investments and a transfer to reserves of £19k.

The value of investments at year end was £1.780m reflecting a reduction of £98k. during 2021/22 the value of investments had increased to a £1.905m and dropped back to £1.878m at year end.

Income received was broadly in line with income received in 2021/22 however continued to be approximately £2k short of the £40k income target. The grant allocation was £45k in year and £35k was allocated in year with £2k returned by an organisation and £12k was carried forward for allocation in 2023/24.

The Officer added that Trustees' plan to transfer the investments from Evelyn Partners, invested under a discretionary managed basis, to CCLA Ethical Collective Investment Fund during 2023/24, as per the resolution of the Committee in January 2023. The CCLA investment account had now been set up and Evelyn

Partners were liaising with CCLA to arrange the transfer subject to relevant signatures being obtained.

In response to a question from Councillor Hooper as to when the fund loss, as a consequence of the change in management of the investment, would be definitive in the Trust's accounts, the Operational Manager for Accountancy advised that the loss would be definitive within the 2023/24 accounts. The Officer added that Trustees had previously resolved that the liquidation of the Evelyn Partner funds would be liquidated all in one tranche to minimise multiple costs over multiple tranches and therefore it was officers' expectation that this was still the case. To which, the Committee agreed, and the Officer confirmed that they would confirm as such with CCLA following the meeting.

Councillor Hooper then referred to page 16 of Appendix A and note 4 relating to creditors amounts payable within one year and noted that the grants agreed in 2021/22 unpaid as of 31st March 2023 was £10,000 and asked the Officer if they could provide further details on this amount. In response, the Officer advised that the amount of £10,000 related to two grants, both to the value of £5,000, being held over from the previous financial year and that they would email the details of the specific funds directly to Committee members after the meeting.

With no further comments or questions, the Committee subsequently

RESOLVED – T H A T the Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23, as set out at Appendix A to the report be approved, and that the Chair be authorised to sign the same on behalf of Trustees.

Reasons for decision

Having regard to the content of the report in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011, and the Charities (Accounts & Reports) Regulations 2008 that the Annual Report and Accounts be approved by the Trustees as a body in accordance with their normal administrative procedures.