

JOINT WORKING MEETING – LCT / TGDDC / GDCC

Date: 24th May 2022

Present:

Lochluichart Community Trust (LCT)

Uisdean Menzies Margaret Ross Carol Smith

Garve & District Community Council (GDCC)

Kenny Maclean Jennifer Haslam Bob Moir Sadie Harris Caroline Gamble

The Garve & District Development Company

Sue Tarr Heather Green John Fenwick Heather Donaldson Tina Hartley

Apologies: Karen Grant (LCT) Hamish Leslie Melville (GDCC) Joe Stewart (GDCC)
Pam Morrison (LCT) Mike Franklin (TGDDC)

Uisdean Menzies agreed to chair the meeting and welcomed all attendees. The meeting was held via Zoom and all participants agreed to the meeting being recorded for the members of the community organisations that were not able to attend.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the household energy grants that had previously been paid to the community using LCT community funds. The process had been that the Garve and District Community Energy Group had applied to LCT for a grant to enable a payment to each household of £250. The process and grant payment was first paid out in November 2017 and replicated the scheme used by the Strathnairn Community Benefit Fund (SCBF). To claim the grant the householder had to complete the form and attach an energy bill as proof of expenditure and residency.

In November 2021 SCBF informed its residents that following information received from Foundation Scotland and OSCR they were no longer able to pay out a household energy grant to every household as it was deemed to be a payout rather than a grant. Carol Smith, (LCT Company Secretary) is a resident of Strathnairn and passed this information to the LCT Board. The LCT board forwarded the information to Alpin Stewart, LCT Solicitor, for his advice which was that the information provided meant that LCT would no longer be able to pay out grants to every household in this manner. Grants could continue to be paid if they complied with the criteria of OSCR and also the developer agreements. LCT also sought advice from OSCR who also did not see the grant was of public benefit. The 2021 household energy grant had already been paid to residents and was not rescinded.

Following the information from OSCR and the solicitor LCT approached Eneco, the developer of the Lochluichart Windfarm to ascertain if they would be able to offer an alternative solution, potentially paying the funds direct to the Garve & District Development Company or to householders directly. Whilst Eneco were initially willing to review this they concluded that the funds were to continue to be paid direct to LCT and that they were unable to pay the funds to the Garve & District Development Company as this would mean a complete change to the community benefit agreement. LCT has also contacted EDF-re, the owner of the Corriemoillie windfarm, but there has still been no response.

However, LCT can still continue to pay the Community Support Grant which can be paid to residents of the Garve and District Community Council area. The grant is available to those who residents who fulfil the criteria of requiring support for ill health, the elderly and the vulnerable. Each household can claim a grant of £500 per year paid in 2 instalments by completing the community support grant scheme which is administered by TGDDC. The grant is not means tested and the applicant is asked to tick a box to state that they meet the criteria. The applicants and the information received remains entirely confidential and is not shared outwith the TGDDC Company Secretary and CEDO. In rare instances the information may be shared with the TGDDC Board. LCT does not receive information as to whom the payments have been paid to but just the total value of grants.

CS attended the recent Garve Coffee morning as the LCT Company Secretary and chatted to the attendees. There were a considerable number of attendees that were not aware of the community support grant, did not use IT, or were uncomfortable applying for it. CS handed out forms and helped people to complete them. It was evident that although most people have an ability to use online those that most need the grant are not always able to access it. Where possible CS will continue to attend the coffee mornings, where there will be a printer made available for local residents to use if required, courtesy of LCT.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Have any community grant applications been turned down?

HD explained that she has received 1 application that she took to the TGDDC board for advice as it was for IT equipment for homework but the IT is provided by the school

2. Do we need more guidelines as to what can be applied for?

HD explained that the form states that applicants are expected to have explored other possibilities before applying for the grant. The form asks the applicant to confirm they are in need due to vulnerability due to disability, ill-health or the elderly, no of children within the household and what the grant will be used for. JF asked if as some people did not fit the criteria to get the smoke alarms that were recently provided would they be able to apply for a community support grant. It was agreed that provided they fit the criteria they would be able to apply.

It was suggested that the wording on the form is reviewed to explicitly include children.

It was agreed that as the economic situation is worsening there may be more people who now need help and will apply. TH explained that the form does not use the term poverty as this potentially has a negative connotation and that the grant is for those that require support, as per the LCT developer agreement criteria.

3. Can we increase the value of the grant?

Unlike the household energy grant the community support grant can be used for multiple uses. Those who are working are not exempt from applying.

ST suggested that if the rate was to be increased it could be based on inflation which is expected to rise by 9% this year. ST also suggested that the increase could be looked at more than once a year. UM commented that we know energy prices will increase by 50% by November and this is coupled with increases in the price of food.

It was recommended that the increase value should be looked at by all community groups twice a year so that it is in real time.

UM stated that LCT cannot say to put up the grant and that this would need to come from the development company.

SH asked how the original value was arrived at. CS commented that the value of £250 each 6 months was considered a middle ground

CS asked whether, from an admin perspective, the grant should be paid out once a year.

KM suggested putting a questionnaire in the newsletter to ask the community what value they felt was appropriate.

4. Could we provide a community foodbank?

CS suggested that the community could consider providing a foodbank with the costs being incurred by LCT. Other ideas included providing community lunches, taxi to the coffee mornings, and provision of food at the coffee mornings.

UM agreed that anything that brings the community together is worth it. With 3 halls in the district it would offer the opportunity for people to get together to eat and be warm in the hall. A third party provided could be used to do the catering rather than relying on volunteers.

SH suggested that a bus could be used to pick up people and take them to the Midge Bite Café and other café venues thereby supporting local businesses.

5. How do we get the community support grant to those that need it?

Attendance at the coffee morning and talking to the community about the grant removes the perceived stigma and provides a human touch.

HD offered to attend the coffee mornings and provide a confidential form filling service.

CS suggested that the community could provide transport to and from the coffee morning for those that require it.

HD will put information regarding the community support grant in the new community newsletter which will be delivered to every household in the GDCC area. SH asked how personal and bank details are safeguarded within GDPR regulations. HD explained that once the information has been used to pay the grant the paper copies are not kept.

CG asked the scope of the garve.org website and the number of hits. There were 700 hits

UM suggested that the community support grant form could be attached to the back of the newsletter. CS suggested that an envelope and stamp were also provided. UM agreed that the LCT admin budget could be used to pay for this. The admin budget cannot be used for grants but is used for LCT Admin costs.

TH explained that there is a lot of things going out to the community currently and it is important to balance the information in the newsletter to ensure it is not too busy.

6. Can the wording for the community support grant be changed?

It was suggested that a definition of vulnerable is used within the grant form and that examples of what the grant can be used for would be helpful.

COMMENTS FROM ATTENDEES

KM – All aspects have been covered in the discussion. LCT is bound by rules and is interpreting them as necessary. The forms may need to be tweaked to reach a wider audience. The community support grant value should be reviewed twice a year

BM – We need to remove any possible stigma surrounding applying for the community support grant. It is essential that we make it a community lunch and not a soup kitchen

CG – Could we also consider how we help residents when their appliances break down as with the rising costs they may not be able to afford to replace them

JF – As a way forward are there other grants that could be considered. CS explained that in Strathnairn they are now providing a household energy grant for those who claim pension credit, universal credit or spend more than 10% of their income on fuel. This is not means tested and the applicant ticks a box on the form to state they fill the criteria.

JF – SCBF continue to pay a renewable energy grant. BM commented that once there has been improved insulation it may increase the value of the house and the householder could then sell it. JF replied that although it may add value to the house it may encourage someone to purchase it and bring new people in to the community.

ST – The community support grant will help those that need it

HG – Like the idea of the community lunch rather than a foodbank. HG suggested that a gift bag could be provided to attendees at the end of the community lunch and they could choose to take it or not.

SH – Happy with the comments and suggestions

MR – Agreed with all of the suggestions. The elderly are proud and we must ensure that this is considered. The community support grant could be used to replace broken freezers/fridges etc