
Community Solutions Fund

Committee considering report:	Executive on 30 April 2020
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Rick Jones
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	16 April 2020
Report Author:	Jo Naylor, Principal Policy Officer
Forward Plan Ref:	EX3901

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report is to recommend to Members of the close of the current Community Solutions Fund (2017-2020) and the proposed utilisation of the remaining budget for the development of the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in West Berkshire.
- 1.2 This proposal links to the report on this agenda 'Working with the Voluntary Sector' and the Strategy Board discussion of the 20th February at which a number of actions were proposed including mapping of the existing voluntary sector activity and the future commissioning of a Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO).

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To close down the Community Solutions Fund (2017-2020) and to propose that any unspent budget goes into supporting initiatives which will reframe and develop the VCSE sector in West Berkshire.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There is currently £100k unspent in the budget which could be redistributed for other purposes. There will be one final funding round after the end of March so it's possible the £100k will be slightly diminished if these grant applications are successful.
Human Resource:	There are no immediate foreseeable HR implications arising from this report.
Legal:	At this stage there are no immediate foreseeable legal

	implications arising from this report.			
Risk Management:	There are no major risks to redistribution of this funding. This proposal has the support of Greenham Trust which has committed £200k. Greenham Trust have been kept well informed of recent discussions and will continue to commit this level of resource to the new realigned proposals to work with the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise sector.			
Property:	There are no immediate property implications.			
Policy:	This proposal conforms to all local Council policies regarding supporting local communities and the voluntary sector.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		This proposal has a neutral impact on those with protected characteristics.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			Stronger capacity in the voluntary sector could increase the support available to those with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:		X		There is no anticipated environmental impact.

Health Impact:	X			It is likely that future programmes and initiatives with the voluntary sector could have a positive health impact, on both physical and mental wellbeing.
ICT Impact:		X		Not applicable.
Digital Services Impact:		X		Not applicable.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			This report is suggesting steps which will enable the Council to deliver greater investment into supporting communities and match the Council priorities of delivering sustainable services through innovation and partnerships and supporting everyone to reach their full potential.
Core Business:		X		Neutral impact on the Councils core business
Data Impact:		X		Neutral impact in relation to data protection.
Consultation and Engagement:	This report has been discussed with the Building Communities Together Team Manager, Council Leader and Council Chief Executive.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The report is to notify the Executive of the intention to close the Community Solution Fund at the end of March 2020 and to utilise the remaining funds for the development of new working arrangements between the Council and the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise (CVSE) sector in West Berkshire.
- 4.2 The Community Solutions Fund (CSF) was originally created from Local Area Agreement (LAA) reward funding which had been received by the authority. The close working relationship and good cooperation with Greenham Trust meant that the Council's funding was matched by the Trust in supporting the scheme. When originally set up both organisations offered to contribute £200k (approx.) to the scheme to create a total budget of just over £400k.

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- 4.3 The CSF fund was launched at the District Parish Conference in April 2017 to support the devolution of services and encourage communities to take over the running of assets and services. The scheme details were jointly publicised by the Council and Greenham Trust.
- 4.4 Funding decisions were determined by a Panel comprising of two WBC elected Members and two Greenham Trustees supported by the Greenham Trust Chief Executive and Council officers.
- 4.5 The criteria stated that it was to support proposals that fall into any of the following categories:
- (i) **Service Delegation** - taking on services (e.g. road sign cleaning, grass cutting etc.) from West Berkshire Council and delivering these with volunteers and other resources at a local level.
 - (ii) **Transfer of Community Assets** - transferral of West Berkshire Council owned assets (e.g. libraries, public toilets, community centres, open spaces, playgrounds etc.) to town and parish councils or community groups, to be run and maintained.
 - (iii) **Responding to Community Need** – to provide funding for vulnerable groups that need support and finding create effective solutions to help these residents. This fund is about developing services, (e.g. tackling social isolation of the elderly by establishing luncheon clubs, providing volunteer driver schemes to assist taking patients to doctors/hospital appointments) or any other community-based practical help scheme. Proposals surrounding your community's response to future severe or adverse weather events will also be considered in this category.
- 4.6 This fund however did not generate many applications with only four bids received during the three year period, and of those, only two applications were successful in meeting the criteria in order to receive any funding.
- 4.7 During 2018/19 £100k of the Council's portion of the Community Solutions Fund was diverted to support the Health and Wellbeing Priority Fund, leaving £100k remaining in the budget.
- 4.8 The proposal is now to hold a final funding round after March 2020 for the pending applications but after this to officially close the scheme and repurpose budget for further development of the CVSE sector. By doing so, it's hoped the CVSE sector can help support delivery of the priorities identified within the Council Strategy and the West Berkshire 2036 Vision, particularly supporting the delivery of ambitions around the environment, culture, health and social care.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 This report seeks to close the Community Solutions Fund and obtain approval for the use of any unspent budget for the future development of the VCSE sector in West Berkshire.

Background

5.2 This report is being brought to Members to describe the unused money which exists and which has remained unspent under the previous Community Solutions Fund for the last three years.

5.3 The grant stream was created from Local Area Agreement (LAA) reward money which was matched by Greenham Trust. The proposal for a new scheme has been discussed with Greenham Trust and they will continue to contribute their unspent £200k to the new arrangements as being proposed as part of the 'Working with the Voluntary Sector' report.

5.4 Few applications had come forward under the Community Solutions Fund since it was launched. This is likely to be for two reasons; many devolution deals with towns and parishes progressed without the need for grant support, and secondly, potential applicants did not necessarily meet the scheme criteria to be successfully awarded funding.

5.5 The two successful applications were for the provision of a replacement community minibus in Bucklebury and equipment for the Hungerford Library to enable this venue to be run as a community hub. The total spend for both projects came to £24k (i.e. two maximum grant awards of £12k).

5.6 The proposal for future spend of this money links to a recent Strategy Board discussion on 20th February where Members considered different models and approaches to working with our voluntary sector in the future. By utilising this money to invest in the CVSE sector this would remain consistent with the original intention of the LAA reward money, in that it is channelled back into communities to address the most important West Berkshire issues and priorities.

Proposals

5.7 It is recommended to transfer the unspent Community Solution Fund budget to support the VCSE sector in West Berkshire as outlined in the Head of Commissioning's 'Working with the Voluntary Sector' report.

6 Other options considered

6.1 It was considered appropriate to review the existing Community Solution Fund particularly as this fund had remained unspent for some considerable time. Equally, it seemed appropriate to ensure future spend is closely aligned to Council Strategy priorities. This proposal particularly fits with the Council's goal to work to deliver sustainable services through innovation and partnerships. Equally, it's clear many other

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of the priorities outlined in the West Berkshire Vision 2036 and Council Strategy 2019-2023 require a strong VCSE to support community resilience and reduce demand on Council services.

- 6.2 Another approach would have been to revise and reshape the criteria for the Community Solutions Fund to allow it to become a more general grant stream. Demand for grants is always high and by making the fund more accessible, it would be relatively easy to deplete the budget in a small number of funding rounds.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 It's recommended the Community Solutions Fund is now closed to all future applications and the remaining budget is passed to the Head of Commissioning to help shape the Council's overall approach to future working with the VCSE sector in West Berkshire.

8 Appendices

None.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

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