

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**LEADER****DATE: 16 JANUARY 2014****LEAD OFFICER: JANE LAST, PROGRAMME MANAGER AND LEAD MANAGER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PARTNERSHIP****SUBJECT: COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS FUND – PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

To consider the recommendations of the Community Improvements Panel (9 December 2013) and agree which projects will be funded from the Community Improvements Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Leader of the Council approves the proposed grant funding set out in Annex 2 from the Community Improvements Fund Budget, and notes the position of the applications agreed within the previous meetings held on 11 September and 14 November 2013.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Approval of the proposed grant funding will enable the Community Partnerships Team to progress with facilitating the payments relating to the Community Improvements Fund.

DETAILS:**Business Case**

1. On 12 February 2013, an increased Community Improvements Fund of £1 million for 2013/14 was announced for further investment in local projects, making a real difference to people's lives and helping residents independently enhance where they live.
2. Bids for between £10,000 and £50,000 were invited for one-off capital schemes for community improvements (in exceptional circumstances bids for start-up revenue projects would be considered).
3. During the first round, which invited bids from 1 April until 28 June 2013, a total of 94 bids were submitted. Seventeen of these bids were approved at the Leader Decision meetings on 11 September and 14 November 2013.
4. The second round of bidding to the Community Improvements Fund for 2013/14 opened on 29 June and closed on 24 October 2013. During this period, a total of 90 bids were received from across the county totalling requests for £2,829,194 of funding.

5. Bids to the Fund were submitted via the Community Partnerships Team and considered by a Community Improvements Panel consisting of Members supported by officers. Member representatives on the Panel are Mr Nick Skellett (Panel Lead), Mrs Pat Frost, Mr Peter Hickman and Mrs Fiona White. The Panel considered all bids submitted against the evaluation criteria outlined in Annex 1. Following the evaluation, which included site visits where appropriate, the Panel met on 9 December 2013 to form their recommendations to the Leader. These recommendations, along with recommended conditions for the funding, are set out in Annex 2. There are 15 recommended projects, which total £443,750.

Update on the bids agreed in September and November 2013

6. In September, 16 bids to the Community Improvements Fund were agreed for a total of £562,750, and a further bid was approved for £17,000 in November. Of these 17 bids, payment has been made to six organisations and funding agreement forms have been sent to three organisations. When these are returned, funds will be released. The conditions set for eight of the bids, which include relevant planning permission and remaining funding being in place, have yet to be met. Officers are in contact with these organisations on a regular basis to review progress against the conditions and will release the remaining funding as soon as the conditions are satisfied.

Background

7. In December 2011, the Leader of Surrey County Council announced the introduction of a Community Improvements Fund of £750,000 to be allocated to community projects in Surrey in 2012/13.
8. The aim of the fund was to give local groups the chance to improve their areas, make a real difference to people's lives and strengthen the ability of residents to independently enhance where they live. In the first year of operation, the fund proved extremely popular with approximately 200 bids submitted and over 30 community groups successful in their applications.

CONSULTATION:

9. All bids submitted have been considered by the Community Improvement Panel. The Community Partnerships Team liaised with applicants in developing their bids by providing guidance regarding the criteria.
10. Local Members and Local Committee Chairmen were consulted on the bids in their areas. Where bids had an implication on Surrey County Council services, officers within these services were asked to provide objective comments on the bids.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

11. There are no identifiable negative risks attributed to the processing of the Fund. The Council needs to ensure that the payments are processed in a timely manner for the projects approved. Each of the successful projects will be asked to report back on the outcomes of the funding within twelve months.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

12. The cost of funding the projects identified within Annex 2 will be £443,750. There is £443,750 of unallocated funding remaining in the Community Improvements Fund Budget for the 2013/14 financial year. This proposal is within the agreed revenue budget.
13. Given the requirement for grant recipients to meet specified conditions before funding is released, it is likely that a proportion of the allocated funding will not be paid within the current financial year. This will be requested as a budget carry forward into 2014/15 in order to meet the committed funding.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

14. The Section 151 Officer's representative has considered all applications listed in Annex 2 and has attended meetings with the advisory panel to provide objective financial advice in relation to the proposed projects.
15. The Section 151 Officer confirms that all material, financial and business issues and risks have been considered / addressed.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

16. The Scheme of Delegation includes reference to the Fund and authority has been allocated to the Community Partnerships Manager to process the approved funding. There are no further legal or legislative requirements relating to this Fund.
17. These grants are being made by the Council in accordance with its general powers of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, under which it is empowered to do anything that individuals generally do and this includes the power to do things for the benefit of persons resident or present in its area.

Equalities and Diversity

18. The Fund is open to groups (not individuals) who are applying on behalf of the community, but is not restricted to any specific groupings within the county.
19. The Community Partnership Team is currently reviewing progress of all projects successful in securing funding in 2012/13. As part of that review, the Community Partnership Team will request feedback from applicants on how they felt the funding process worked to identify better methods of communicating with hard to reach groups.
20. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on criteria and process for applying for this Fund. It is available to view on the council's website.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

21. Applicants will be informed whether they have been successful and if so what course of action they need to undertake to receive the funding that has been allocated. This will include asking successful applicants to provide a copy of relevant quotes, where these have not been provided as part of the application. Where bidders have been unsuccessful, then they will also be informed of the decision, and will be offered feedback on their application.

22. Each of the successful applicants will be asked to provide evidence within 12 months of expenditure and the achievement of the outcomes set out within the bid form. This will then be included in a future report for the Leader.
23. Information on successful bids are included on the Council's website – www.surreycc.gov.uk/communityimprovementsfund.
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Contact Officer:

James Painter, Community Partnerships Manager
Tel: 01372 832539 Email: james.painter@surreycc.gov.uk

Consulted:

Nick Skellett (Panel Lead), Pat Frost, Fiona White and Peter Hickman, Susie Kemp (Panel Members).
Service Officers where appropriate, and other agencies where appropriate.

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Criteria and Guidance for Community Improvements Fund
Annex 2 – Community Improvements Fund Panel Recommendations

Sources/background papers:

- Community Improvement Fund Application Forms
- Community Improvement Fund Criteria and Guidance
- Community Improvement Fund Assessment summary documents