

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**LEADER****DATE: 9 NOVEMBER 2016****LEAD OFFICER: JANE LAST, HEAD OF SERVICE FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PARTNERSHIP****SUBJECT: COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS FUND (INCLUDING THE LOCAL CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS FUND) – PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

To consider the recommendations of the Community Improvements Fund Panel (12 October 2016) and agree which projects will be funded from the Community Improvements Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Leader of the Council:

- (i) approves the proposed grant funding set out in Annex 2 from the Community Improvements Fund budget, and Annex 3 from the Local Centre Improvements Fund budget.
- (ii) notes the position of the applications agreed within the previous budget 2015/16.
- (iii) delegates authority to the Community Partnerships Manager to make any minor amendments to the conditions of funding for agreed schemes which may be required in advance of funding being released.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

DETAILS:

1. The aim of the Community Improvements Fund (CIF) is 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. Bids are invited for one-off capital schemes for community improvements (in exceptional circumstances bids for start-up revenue projects are considered). This year a new fund has been set up to support projects that improve the environmental quality of local shopping and village centres (LCIF), and is being run alongside CIF due to the similarity of the criteria.
2. The Community Improvements Fund budget for 2016/17 is £500,000 with an additional £250,000 for the Local Centre Improvements Fund.
3. For 2016/17 applications for both funds have been accepted in a single round. Bids were invited from April to July 2016 for amounts between £10,000 and

£30,000 for community improvements projects and for between £5,000 and £30,000 for shopping and village centre projects. A total of 49 bids were submitted for the CIF, totalling £1,105,768, and 17 bids were received for the LCIF, totalling £277,270.

4. Bids to the Fund were submitted via the Community Partnerships Team and considered by a Community Improvements Fund Panel consisting of Members supported by officers. Member representatives on the Panel are Pat Frost (Panel Lead), Margaret Hicks, Peter Hickman, Fiona White and Natalie Bramhall. The Panel considered all bids for both CIF and LCIF submitted against the evaluation criteria outlined in Annex 1. Following the evaluation, which included site visits where appropriate, the Panel met on 12 October 2016 to form their recommendations to the Leader. These recommendations, along with recommended conditions for the funding, are set out in Annexes 2 and 3.

Recommendations for CIF bids

5. Annex 2 sets out a total of 21 recommended projects for CIF which total £413,663. Although bids totalling £1,105,768 were received, the Panel has only recommended those projects that clearly meet the criteria as set out in Annex 1.

Recommendations for LCIF bids

6. Annex 3 sets out a total of seven recommended projects for LCIF which total £49,986.
7. The LCIF is a new fund created in April 2016. Criteria and guidance is set out in Annex 1 (with further information for the applicant included on the application form) and, whilst aligning closely to the CIF criteria, in particular seeks to improve the environmental quality of the local shopping parade by improving facilities and providing benefits to the community. The Panel have made recommendations for those projects that clearly meet the criteria.
8. Bids (or elements within bids) that were not approved were as a result of them not meeting the criteria for example:
 - applications made to provide grant funding to an individual for the purposes of improving their property where that improvement will add direct value to the property and will directly benefit that individual;
 - improvement to highways/pavements which are considered to be highways maintenance, in particular those areas that are deemed not to be in poor condition when compared to other areas in the County;
 - any design work where the subsequent capital implementation would not be completed within the same phase of work
 - creation of any new local funding schemes where there are no tangible outcomes; and
 - purchase and installation of Christmas lights which, whilst creating an attractive environment, the benefit of which is only for a specific time within the year and is therefore not considered a sustainable position.

9. The stated minimum amount of funding is £5,000. However, where elements of any bid did not meet the criteria the Panel have taken a pragmatic approach and agreed a lesser amount.

Update on the bids agreed in 2014/15 and 2015/16

10. In 2014/15 a total of 23 projects were approved for funding from the Community Improvements Fund which totalled £566,286. Table 1 in Annex 4 sets out the progress on the 2014/15 bids which had not been paid when the last report was considered by the Leader in October 2015. It shows that one of the agreed projects is no longer proceeding and that all remaining funding has been released with the exception of £58,000 for two projects.
11. In 2015/16 a total of 29 bids were approved for funding totalling £556,861. These are listed in Table 2 of Annex 4. The table shows that funding for 20 of the projects has been released, six projects are still to meet their conditions and three projects are not proceeding.
12. Since October 2015, a total of £643,851 has been released to successful community projects which have met their conditions and are now, or will shortly be, benefitting local communities. Officers are in regular contact with the remaining eight organisations who are still to receive their funding and continue to review progress against the conditions and will release the remaining funding as soon as the conditions are satisfied.

CONSULTATION:

13. The Leader of the Council introduced the scheme and Members, appointed by the Leader, sat on the Panel with the support of the Community Partnerships Manager. In the case of the LCIF, the Deputy Leader was also consulted to gain agreement on criteria in view of it being a newly launched fund. The Senior Principal Accountant for Customers and Communities and the Audit Performance Manager were consulted on the bids.
14. Local Members and Local Committee Chairmen were consulted on the bids in their areas. Where bids had an implication on Surrey County Council (SCC) services, officers within these services were asked to provide objective comments on the bids.
15. Officers within the Community Partnerships Team provided guidance to applicants on the criteria to enable them to develop their bids to the fund.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

16. 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 and for the projects approved. Each of the successful projects will be asked to report back on the outcomes of the funding within 12 months.
17. Ongoing evaluation of the CIF takes place with amendments to process and associated documents being made to improve the customer experience and success of the fund – this will in future include the LCIF.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

18. The cost of funding the projects identified within Annex 2 will be £413,663 and within Annex 3 the cost will be £49,986. This amount falls below the allocated budget in both cases.
19. 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 2017/18 in order to meet the committed funding.
20. All offers of grant funding agreed are conditional on the applicant satisfying the key requirements of the grant. All applicants are required to supply three competitive quotes where required for procurement over £5000 for the project and or specific elements. Any additional conditions are included in Annexes 2 and 3. Grant funding will only be released once all requirements has been met, all funding for the project (or a specific element within a larger project), is in place and a funding agreement has been signed. Where the grant is funding one element within a larger project, the project commencement relates to the element being funded, as assessed by officers.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

21. The Section 151 Officer's representative has considered all applications listed in Annexes 2 and 3 and has provided objective financial advice in relation to the proposed projects.
22. The Section 151 Officer confirms that all material, financial and business issues and risks have been considered / addressed.
23. The County Council is facing a very serious financial situation, whereby it is forecasting a significant revenue budget overspend in this year, and does not have a balanced nor sustainable budget plan for future years. Although this planned expenditure has been included within the current Medium Term Financial Plan, agreeing to this recommendation will reduce the Council's options to create a balanced and sustainable budget in the future.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

24. These grants are made by the Council in accordance with its general powers to do things for the benefit of the residents of Surrey under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. The Council's Scheme of Delegation delegates authority to officers to authorise and manage expenditure from the Fund in accordance with the Leader's decisions. There are no further legal or legislative requirements relating to this Fund.

Equalities and Diversity

25. 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.
26. The Community Partnership Team is currently reviewing progress of all projects successful in securing funding in 2015/16. 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.

27. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on criteria and process for applying for this Fund. It is available online for viewing.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

28. 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 they will also be informed of the decision and will be offered feedback on their application.
29. 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.
30. Information on successful bids are included on the Council's website – www.surreycc.gov.uk/communityimprovementsfund.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

Pat Frost (Panel Lead), Margaret Hicks, Peter Hickman, Fiona White and Natalie Bramhall.
Service Officers where appropriate, and other agencies where appropriate.

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Criteria for CIF & LCIF
Annex 2 – Community Improvements Fund Panel Recommendations
Annex 3 – Local Centre Improvement Fund Panel Recommendations
Annex 4 – Summary of the Progress on Bids in receipt of CIF funding

Sources/background papers:

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

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