

Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee



Thursday 18 June 2020

Community Projects Fund

Purpose of report:

To provide the Committee with an update and overview on the development of the Community Projects Fund which is also the subject of a Member Task Group of the Committee.

Introduction:

1. This report provides an overview of the Community Projects Fund (CPF) which is being developed to provide capital funding to community projects across the county, and which has been developed with input from a Member Task Group of the Select Committee. A further meeting of the Task Group was scheduled on 10 June, and the findings and conclusions from that meeting will be provided by verbal update to the Committee.

Details

Background

2. The Community Projects Fund (CPF), which is to be considered at Cabinet in July, is being developed in order to bring place-making or place-improving projects to life which are:
 - Community-led projects, advocated by Surrey County Council or;
 - Surrey County Council projects, advocated by the community or partners
3. The Fund is designed to support the aims of the Community Vision for 2030, where Surrey is a place in which communities feel supported and people are able to support each other, where people feel able to contribute to their community, and no-one is left behind.
4. However, it is recognised that the Vision cannot be delivered alone - communities should feel empowered to help shape their local area. The partnership commitment of the Community Vision sets out that we will seek to involve everyone in the design of solutions, and actively encourage people and organisations to participate in community activity. The CPF will play a key role in this building of active and participatory communities, where people feel a genuine

sense of ownership of the environment around them and where a voice is given to new and underrepresented ideas.

5. The CPF builds on the lessons learned from the Council's previous experience of the Community Improvements Fund which was administered in 2014. The aim of the fund was to give local groups the chance to make bids to a funding pot of £500,000 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 were invited between the value of £10,000 and £30,000 for one-off capital schemes for community improvements.
6. The CPF is obviously a significantly larger fund, and the intention is to make a significantly greater impact with the projects that it will fund.

The Fund and its aims

7. The CPF consists of £100m of capital funding to be allocated to community projects over a five-year period. It is intended to:
 - Enable local communities to directly identify, propose and deliver projects which make Surrey's places better;
 - Make the most of community assets, upgrading facilities in order to improve cohesion and bring people together;
 - Upgrade the infrastructure around communities, to make Surrey a more connected place;
 - Build on the strength of the vibrant local communities that already exist in the county, in both urban and rural areas
 - Make Surrey a more sustainable place, addressing the challenges highlighted in the declaration of the climate change emergency
8. The Fund will support a series of projects during its lifetime that meets a set of criteria, designed to ensure the deliverability and sustainability of the proposals put forward. Residents and community groups will be invited to submit proposals, as well as post feedback on the ideas generated through a digital engagement map of Surrey, where proposals can be matched to locations across the county.
9. The Fund provides the opportunity to invest directly in communities; however, it is important to note that this is capital funding, and applications cannot be made to use the funding for revenue costs, such as for the running and administration of an organisation. It is separate to funding for programs of work where the council is carrying out its statutory function (such as highways maintenance), but where possible, the aim is for it to be allocated in coordination with, or used to leverage other funding such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or funding from other external sources.
10. The aims of the Community Vision 2030 and principles of Surrey County Council's Organisation Strategy will guide the use of the fund:
 - "Focus on ensuring no one is left behind"

- “Take a fresh approach to working in partnership”
- “Support people to help themselves and each other”
- “Involve and engage residents earlier and more often in designing and delivering services, and responding to challenges”

11. In the context of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Fund takes on new importance. Critically, the CPF could be an important tool in the recovery phase in helping to stimulate local communities and groups that have been affected. However, the continued uncertainty as a result of Covid and the negative impact on the economy does raise potential risks to the delivery of the programme that will need to be factored into the design and delivery of the Fund.

Member Task Group

12. It was agreed in March 2020 that the proposed approach to the delivery and administration of the CPF would go to the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee, and that a Member Task Group would be formed from Members on the Committee. The aim of the Task Group is to advise the officer steering group on:

- How can we ensure that the process for applying to the fund is streamlined, simple and accessible?
- How can we ensure the criteria provides the highest quality applications and delivers excellent community improvements?
- How should the governance and administration of the Fund be developed?

13. The first meeting of the Task Group took place on 21 May 2020 and provided input to the early stages of the development of the Fund. The Task Group were asked to consider the shape of the Fund, along with the process and criteria with a view to the Fund’s outcomes. The Group identified a series of themes and ideas which are captured in the appendix to this report, along with the work that has been or will be done to address the points raised.

14. The next meeting was scheduled for 10 June, which does not allow for the outcome of that meeting to be included in this report given Committee report deadlines. As such, a verbal update will be provided from the second Member Task Group session to the Committee at its meeting by the Chairman.

15. The following proposals reflect the input of the Member Task Group’s first meeting.

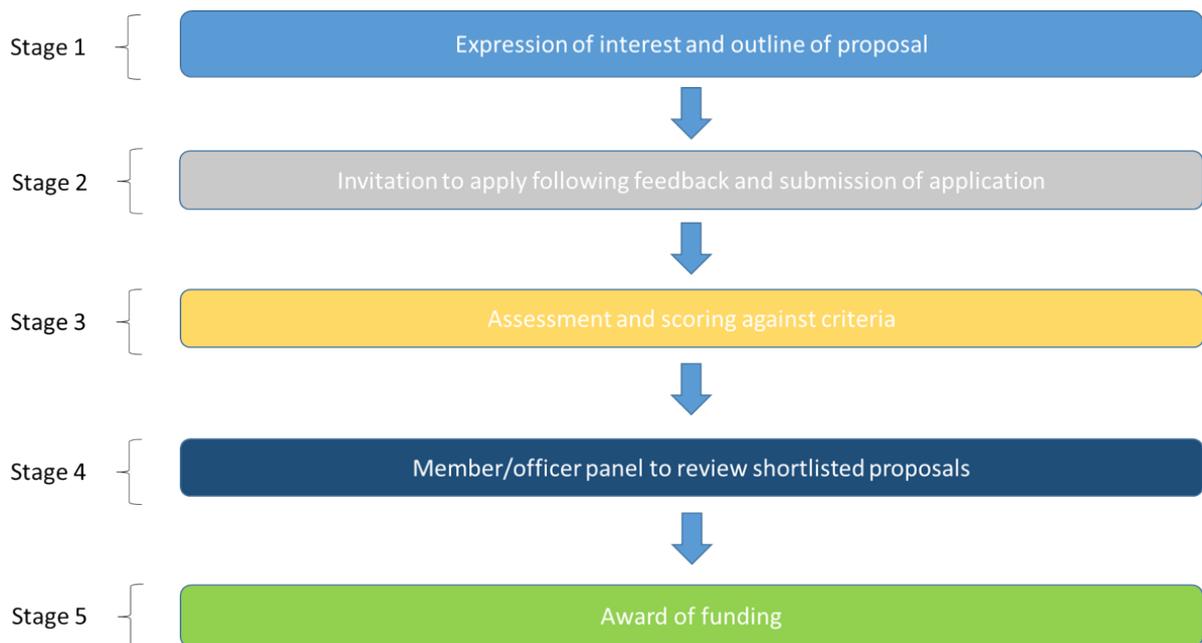
16. The process for the fund will be as streamlined as possible. It is anticipated that there will be broadly five stages to the process, although this is subject to further development with further input to be received from the Member Task Group and from Cabinet:

- **Expression of interest** – Communities will be asked to submit their ideas to the Fund via an expression of interest which will be kept as streamlined as possible.

These ideas will be assessed against the key criteria to identify those that broadly fit the criteria and which will be asked to develop further detail

- **Invitation to apply following feedback and submission of application** – Depending on the level of funding requested, the project will be required to supply further details, including evidence against the key criteria (see below), including evidence of community backing. An online platform for ideas to be posted on a map and for communities to be able to indicate their support for projects is one opportunity for demonstrating this backing, as will be letters of support from relevant local stakeholders such as the County Divisional member, the parish council (where it exists) and other local organisations
- **Assessment of applications** – There will be a scoring of projects against the full criteria by officers, and against the soon to be developed social progress index which will help to determine where community needs are greatest.
- **Member/officer panel to review shortlisted applications** – A member and officer panel will review and make a final decision on the shortlisted applications.
- **Award of funding** – As soon as possible, an award of funding will be made, with a funding agreement and monitoring programme put in place to ensure the delivery of agreed outcomes

Figure 1: Proposed process for CPF



17. The intention is that there will be multiple rounds of the CPF in a year. This will allow for the Fund to evolve over time, and for monitoring in between rounds to determine if there are parts of the county that are not receiving funding that otherwise would have been expected to be benefiting. In some cases, applications not successful in one round will be encouraged to apply for future rounds.

18. The draft criteria to be used to assess projects is set out below:

Criteria	Scoring
Reflect the aims of the Community Vision 2030	Pass/Fail
Meet financial viability checks	Pass/Fail
Do not meet any of the restrictions set out for the use of the fund	Pass/Fail
Deliverability	1 – 5
Evidence community backing	1 – 5
Potential for leverage and additional resources	1 – 5
Legacy	1 – 5
Have measurable positive outcomes	1 – 5
Value for money	1 – 5

19. Reflecting some of the comments raised by the Member Task Group, informing the assessment of bids will be an evidence base about where community needs are greatest. This is likely to be in the form of the emerging social progress index which is being developed by the Council's insight team, but which may also be supplemented by other sources of data. Best practice examples of how this has been done elsewhere for similar projects is being collated, and these examples will be shared with the Member Task Group on 10 June to inform its recommendations to Cabinet on this point.

20. Where projects are not successful for CPF funding, the intention is that, rather than SCC simply saying "no," constructive feedback is provided, and where possible, projects are connected to other funding opportunities and/or wider opportunities for further development. This development of a dialogue with communities as part of a broader conversation with communities to help connect them to opportunity is an important part of the development of the Fund.

21. An online platform will be created to support the roll out of the Fund. This platform will enable the plotting of ideas submitted, and for communities to engage in expressing their support for these projects via the platform. Reflecting the need to ensure that the Fund links to a wider reframing of the conversation with our communities, the platform will be designed and specified in a way that ensures it is joined up with other such SCC online engagement with communities where possible. However, the Fund itself will have a clear and distinct identity within that wider conversation.

Consultation:

22. A Member session was held on the Fund in February 2020. Since that time, a Member Task Group of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee has been engaged in one meeting to date, and a further meeting scheduled for 10 June. Further meetings will be scheduled if required to enable the Member Task Group to provide recommendations.

Conclusions:

23. The development of the CPF represents a significant opportunity for SCC to invest in a meaningful and lasting way in communities. It is clear that there will need to be a clear balancing act between ensuring the right level of due diligence in ensuring value for money is achieved from the Fund's investments, and ensuring the opportunity to engage with the Fund and to submit ideas is as accessible as possible. The work of the Select Committee's Member Task Group will continue to provide critical input to the development of the Fund to support the achievement of this delicate balance.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Select Committee:

- a. Discuss the contents of the report and the proposals
- b. Receive a verbal update from the Member Task Group

Next steps:

24. The Task Group meeting on 10 June will further review the process and criteria in more detail, as well as the kinds of projects that Members feel the Fund should ideally be supporting. In addition, the Task Group will be asked to consider how funding can be fairly allocated.

25. The Member Task Group will make its recommendations when ready, which will be used to inform the final proposals developed for Cabinet's consideration of the Fund in July.

26. The CPF steering group will also be developing the governance, communications plan and resourcing plan to support the development of the Fund, an overview of which will also be reported to Cabinet in July.

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