

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**DATE: 29 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**REPORT OF: MR MARK NUTI, DEPUTY CABINET MEMBER TO THE LEADER**

**LEAD OFFICER: KATIE STEWART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY PROJECTS FUND**



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#### **SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

On 21 July 2020, Cabinet approved the development of the Community Projects Fund (CPF) – a unique and potentially transformative capital fund of £100m over five years designed to deliver place-making and place-changing projects led by residents and communities on a significant scale. At the time, Cabinet agreed to an initial phase of community co-design to test key aspects of the Fund prior to the formal launch of the Fund in the Autumn. This report sets out the findings from the co-design and resulting changes proposed to the Fund.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Note the key findings from the community co-design work carried out;
2. Consider and agree the proposed updates to the process, criteria and framework for delivery of the Fund;
3. Note the recruitment of the officer roles to manage the CPF process;
4. Note the communications and engagement approach for the launch and delivery of the Fund; and
5. Agree the suggested timescales for the launch of the Fund and the opening of the first funding window.

#### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The development of the Community Project Fund (CPF) represents a significant and exciting opportunity for Surrey County Council (SCC) to invest in a meaningful and lasting way in communities, and for communities to drive projects that will make a real difference to where they live. Crucially the Fund fills a unique gap in the market for investment in truly resident and community-led projects to have a positive impact on the places in which they live.

The recommendations in this report will enable the Fund to be launched and to be delivered in a way that ensures the Fund is accessible to all, supports successful projects and that communities' benefit.

## DETAILS:

### Background

1. The Community Projects Fund (CPF) has been developed to bring community-led place-making and place-improving projects to life at a scale to make a truly significant difference to communities. It will fundamentally support the aims of the Community Vision for 2030, in which Surrey is a place in which communities feel supported and people can support each other, where people feel able to contribute to their community and no-one is left behind.
2. It is being launched in recognition that the Community Vision cannot be delivered by SCC and our partners alone – it is vital that communities feel empowered to help shape their local area. The partnership commitment of the Community Vision sets out that the Council will seek to involve residents in the design of solutions, and actively encourage people and organisations to participate in community activity. The CPF will play a critical 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.
3. On **21 July 2020** Cabinet approved the development of the Fund, along with a proposed process and governance for the management of the Fund and agreed for a piece of community co-design to be carried out to test key aspects of the CPF prior to the formal launch of the Fund. This reflects a genuine desire by Cabinet Members to ensure that the Fund is accessible and relevant as possible to those communities it is meant to serve.

### Community co-design

4. The aim of the co-design was to work with Surrey residents and community groups to identify any potential barriers to submitting applications, so these could be removed, and to ensure the fund is a success so that communities' benefit.
5. The co-design work took the form of five one-and-a-half hour workshops delivered through Zoom and facilitated by a research company, Stripe Partners. The workshops were attended by a mixture of residents and representatives from voluntary community and faith sector (VCFS) groups, with 5 to 6 attendees in each group. The workshops took participants through the process, step by step, to understand any potential barriers and/or support that residents and communities might need to engage effectively with the Fund.
6. In addition to those that took part in the workshops, approximately 100 further residents and VCFS group members that put themselves forward to take part in the co-design were invited to share their views on the process and criteria through the Common Place engagement tool, which has been developed as a key interface for communities in engaging with the Fund.
7. Overall, the co-design showed that the idea and opportunity of capital funding was well received among the sample of participants. They agreed that the application process was logical, easy to navigate and straightforward, and that the support opportunities that were proposed at each stage were appreciated. Participants offered some additional suggestions to help with the success of the fund, including a smooth community/SCC partnership process and suggestions as to the role that VCFS organisations could play in support of residents and communities developing

ideas. Key themes and findings from the workshops and feedback gathered through Common Place are summarised below.

## Key findings

- **Positive feedback on the opportunity of the Fund:** Participant reactions to the fund were positive, and £100m of capital funding was welcomed, with most able to identify capital needs in their areas. The overall application process and criteria was seen to be clear and easy to understand and compared favourably with other funding applications with which participants had experience.
  - **There is a real need for support to residents and communities in developing ideas at the scale of the Fund:** For residents without the experience of putting funding applications and projects together, support of local members, SCC officers or VCFS infrastructure organisations at some stages would help groups to be successful in making bids to the Fund. It was also felt that the development, and then delivery of projects may sometimes require a degree of revenue funding, either for the development of the project or for the organisation running the project.
  - **Clear communications supporting residents to understand the process but also generate ideas will be key:** The scale of the funding, whilst exciting, is genuinely different to what communities will be used to bidding for. As such, targeted communications highlighting potential ideas and case studies will help inspire and encourage potential applicants to 'think big'.
  - **The role of Common Place in the process was recognised, but also the role of a number of other channels in engaging with residents to get them to engage in the Fund in the first place:** The proposed Common Place web platform will be a helpful tool to show project ideas, level of community backing and help with information sharing before the expression of interest stage and as a rolling participation tool – although it was suggested that a whole variety of channels should be used in communicating the funding opportunity with residents from the outset to encourage as many as possible to engage with the Fund. For some groups within certain protected characteristics, there may need to be some support around accessibility so that the digital platform doesn't become a barrier to those applying.
  - **Communications will be key in highlighting the genuine opportunity for residents to access funding to make a difference:** There was a concern raised by some participants about being in competition with others when bidding for the Fund and where ideas may be similar. Once again, communications will be key to ensuring that residents and communities understand the scale of the funding on offer to allay any concerns that people may have around competition and that they could 'miss out'.
8. A summary of how it is proposed that the Fund be developed further to address the above points is set out below. The resulting proposed process and criteria is set out at **Annex 1** to this report.

## Ensuring the community can access the Fund and successfully deliver projects

9. There was recognition from Cabinet in July that communities in Surrey would welcome the opportunities presented by the CPF, but that some residents may feel they do not have the experience to manage all aspects of delivering a project. It was set out at that stage that a level of officer resource would be set up to support residents and groups in delivering projects through the Fund.

10. Whilst this officer resource is critical, particularly once projects have been developed to a point of submitting a full application to the Fund the feedback from the co-design process has made clear that there is a need for support for communities in the early development of ideas. Here, it is recommended that **the role of the local member** is vital.
11. It is recognised that local members have a depth of knowledge as to the needs of their residents and are in a unique position with which to champion ideas to resolve them. They also have an ability to connect residents within their communities in a way that will help them to better develop ideas. As such, the role of the local member has been strengthened and highlighted in the updated process. There is an intention to brief all county councillors in the run up to the launch of the Fund to enable them to play a fuller part in this process.
12. In addition, it is proposed that several different types of support be developed to further support communities in the development of ideas for the Fund, these include:
- Outreach Sessions online and in localities to provide residents and groups with the chance to discuss ideas or receive answers to queries
  - Networking Opportunities, helping residents and groups to link with previous successful applicants and projects, in order to generate and share ideas, expertise or offers of help and support.
  - Upskilling and partnering when things are beyond a group's skill set, through access to training, resource materials and advice on aspects crucial to the success of a project such as project management or financial controls.
13. Finally, in respect of the points made about revenue funding, there is a provision in the Fund's development as set out to Cabinet in July for a degree of revenue funding that would be available to support the development and delivery of some projects. It was previously estimated that development funding of up to 10% of the value of the fund will be needed to support development of shortlisted projects and as set out in July, this funding will be managed in line with the 2021/22 budget process and medium-term financial strategy. This will be kept under review to ensure that the feasibility budget remains sufficient to meet the delivery of the wider capital programme.
14. Further, as part of the offer of support, officers in the CPF Team will aim to signpost applicants to other funds where appropriate in order to provide additional funding to support their bids or in cases where bidders are unsuccessful.

### **Communications and engagement**

15. As highlighted in the feedback from the co-design, communications and engagement are a key part of the CPF. They will be crucial to stimulating ideas from the community, getting resident feedback on proposed projects and highlighting the projects delivered through the Fund.
16. The feedback from the co-design suggests that Common Place will have an important role to play in the delivery of the Fund, but that it needs to be considered as one of several channels through which the Council communicates with communities about the Fund from the outset. It was felt that it can be a key communications and inspiration tool to help people 'think big', join up people with others near them and help people to explore what's possible.

17. Building on the co-design process, the communications plan for the Fund will seek to raise awareness of the CPF and what it is for, including getting people to think imaginatively and ambitiously about what could be done. Communications will encourage residents to engage with the Fund and give opinion on suggested projects while also updating residents and stakeholders on the ongoing work of the CPF and publicising successful projects.
18. A mix of communications channels will be used including, but not limited to, digital engagement, social media, outdoor advertising, local engagement events, local press outlets and web pages. Direct engagement with voluntary, community and faith sector groups will also be crucial in stimulating ideas and ensuring the application and delivery process is effective.
19. Elected members will also be expected to take have a critical role in highlighting the Fund to residents and community groups within the areas they represent, guiding people through the process and passing on feedback to the CPF team.
20. Information and details of the Fund will be published on dedicated CPF webpages, and available offline through a variety of communication and engagement measures, including those outlined in paragraph 18. Plain English will be used throughout to ensure the fund is accessible as possible.
21. Project ideas will be publicised, both online and offline locally using targeted communications to specific geographies and demographics where relevant. Residents will be encouraged to offer their views on proposals that have been submitted.
22. There will be ongoing communication and engagement throughout the delivery and completion of successful projects, making clear the partnership role in delivery alongside the local community.
23. Finally, in respect of the Common Place platform, the feedback from the co-design would suggest that it has a key role to play in the development and submission of ideas, and sharing those ideas with others in communities to build support; that it could be positioned as a form of crowd-sourced “ideas hopper” - providing resident ideas on what is needed and what is widespread across the county.
24. In line with this, it is proposed that through Common Place, applicants will be able to demonstrate that others in their community support a project idea. It is proposed that the criteria of having wider community backing becomes a pass/fail assessment at the review of ideas stage, as set out in more detail in Annex 2, to emphasise the importance of projects that benefit the wider community.
25. Steps will be taken to ensure that where people may need support with accessing online materials there will be the opportunity for them to receive support in community spaces such as libraries to help them on-board and know what they need to do. Local members and VCFS groups will also be able to support people with discussing their ideas and setting out how they can access the Fund.

### **Next steps**

26. It is proposed that with the above changes and revisions to the Fund, the Fund is launched in October 2020 alongside a communications campaign to develop interest and awareness. The Common Place platform will be built and ready for launch in mid – November 2020 to begin exploration of project ideas with communities.

27. In order to proceed with this launch, the process for recruiting CPF team as set out and agreed by Cabinet at its July meeting will be progressed.

#### **CONSULTATION:**

28. A member session was held in February 2020 to introduce the principles behind the establishment of the CPF. The session collected views from Members on the best ways to advertise the Fund to residents so that everyone is aware of the opportunity, how can we support/encourage greater engagement and to begin to think about the type of projects that could be supported.
29. A Member Task Group made up of members of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee was established in March 2020 to advise the officer steering group on the process and criteria for the Fund, as well as the administration and governance.
30. Meetings of the Task Group took place on 21 May, 10 June, 24 June and 29 June with their feedback informing the Cabinet report in July.
31. A piece of community co-design work was undertaken in August 2020, through five one-and-a-half hour workshops delivered through Zoom and facilitated by a research company, Stripe Partners. The workshops were attended by a mixture of residents and representatives from VCFS groups, with 5 to 6 attendees in each group.
32. In addition to those that took part in the workshops, approximately 100 further residents and VCFS group members that put themselves forward to take part in the co-design were invited to share their views on the process and criteria online.
33. Findings from the co-design have been summarised in this report.

#### **FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

34. The £100m of capital funding allocated to the Community Projects Fund is within the agreed budget for the capital programme.
35. Cabinet agreed in July to allocate £300k of revenue funding in 2020/21 (funded from the Corporate Feasibility budget) to establish the core CPF team to manage the delivery of the fund. The ongoing cost will be built into the budget process for 2021/22 and the medium term and kept under review.

#### **SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY**

36. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook is uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which are not fully funded in the current year. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected from next year onward, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.



37. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports that the proposed revenue costs for establishing the Community Projects Fund team for 2020/21 will be met from the existing feasibility fund. The ongoing costs will be factored into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER**

38. The Council has extensive powers to provide assistance to support community projects including through its power of general competence which it can use to benefit its area and residents, support delivering greater value for money and innovation further to the Localism Act 2011.

#### **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

39. The Fund is designed to provide investment in schemes that encourage community participation, reduce isolation, and develop the potential for social wellbeing and economic prosperity. As such it is anticipated that it will have a positive impact on a number of those who may rely on or gain support from within the local community and those within protected characteristics that maybe more likely to experience social and economic exclusion.

40. In the report to Cabinet in July, it was highlighted that there could be potential barriers to accessing the Fund for some within the protected characteristics in terms of the use of the online platform and support that may be required in developing projects to enable their delivery. Some of these points were also raised through the co-design work.

41. Details for how these potential impacts will be addressed is set out in the Equalities Impact Assessment attached at **Annex 2**.

42. Once the Fund is launched, at the end of each funding round, monitoring will take place to understand if there are any equalities and accessibility issues that need to be addressed.

43. Any formal applications to the Fund will be expected to have carried out a form of an Equality Impact Assessment for their project proposal, which will be reviewed as part of the scoring process.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

44. As part of the criteria for assessing bids, any formal applications to the Fund will have to set out how the environmental impact of the project been considered and show that it will encourage sustainable practices and activity. Projects will be required to set out that they have considered the environmental implications of being delivered, in terms of the processes, materials and long-term impact.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

45. The proposed timeline for the launch of the Community Projects Fund is as follows:

- Recruitment of team to support the CPF to take place in September 2020
- Fund launched in October 2020 to develop awareness and interest
- Build digital engagement platform ready for launch in mid – November to begin exploration of project ideas with communities

- First bidding round anticipated for Spring 2021
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**Consulted:**

- Community co-design with residents and VCFS representatives
- CVS'
- Member Task Group
- Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee
- Council officers

**Annexes:**

Annex 1 – CPF process and criteria

Annex 2 - Equalities Impact Assessment

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