

Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee



Report of The Community Projects Fund Task Group

Tuesday 21 July 2020

Purpose of report:

To provide an overview of the work and recommendations of the task & finish group which reviewed proposals to set up the Community Projects Fund during June 2020.

Introduction:

1. The Community Projects Fund is a five year £100m capital fund announced by the council in its 2020/21 budget. The Community Projects Fund aims to bring community-led place-making or place-improving projects to life at a scale to make a significant impact and deliver a real legacy in communities. The Fund is also an important tool that will contribute to the recovery phase following the Covid-19 outbreak, helping to support the rebuilding of local communities and groups that have been affected.
2. The Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee convened a cross-party task & finish group in March 2020 to oversee the development of the Community Project Fund.
3. The Members of the Task Group were:
 - John O'Reilly (Chair)
 - Chris Botten
 - Jonathan Essex
 - Saj Hussain
 - Angela Goodwin
 - Ken Gulati
 - Andy Macleod
 - Fiona White
 - Keith Witham

Task Group Methodology:

4. The task group was aiming to answer the following questions:
 - i. How can we tailor our criteria to make sure that the process for applying to the fund is streamline, simple and accessible to as many residents as possible?

- ii. How can we ensure that our criteria provide us with the highest quality applications and delivery excellent community improvements?”
 - iii. What should be the appropriate and accountable governance of the Fund
5. The Task Group aimed to steer the working group and the Cabinet generating a clear ‘Guide to the Community Project Fund’ which outlines the criteria for individuals, groups and strategic bodies to put forward bids into the fund.
 6. The Task Group met four times to review and comment on proposal papers prepared by officers. Over the course of its meetings the CPF proposal was refined such that the Task Group can fully endorse the Cabinet report recommendations presented in this agenda.

Acknowledgments

7. The Task Group thanks those who contributed invaluable evidence to its review, informing the conclusions and six recommendations regarding the design and implementation of the Community Projects Fund:
 - Mark Nuti, Deputy Cabinet Member
 - Katie Stewart, Executive Director – Environment, Transport & Infrastructure
 - Jane Last, Head of Community Partnerships & Engagement
 - James Painter, Partnerships Manager
 - Matthew Snelling, Strategic Lead - Policy & Strategy
8. Any errors, factual inaccuracies or inconsistencies contained within the report are the responsibility of the Task Group alone and not of those who contributed their knowledge, insight and experiences to the formation of this Report.

<h3>Key Areas of Focus:</h3>

9. Over the course of four meetings the group met with the Executive Director – ETI and colleagues to put forward ideas and offer challenge on proposals. At these four meetings the following key areas were debated:
10. **Governance and criteria** – the task group was clear that governance must be proportionate to ensure a streamlined process. The group advised officers that the level of governance should diminish in relation to the size of the bid. The group was supportive of proposed Fund Panel but raised questions about how the public process would work, and sought clarity required on how it will operate. The Members endorsed the criteria but recommended that a scale of **environmental sustainability** should be added reinforcing the council’s commitment to tackling climate change (this has since been added to the Fund’s criteria).
11. The key **principles** behind the fund – the Task Group thought the Fund should consider fairness, flexibility and transparency as its guiding principles.
12. The importance of **Member and community involvement** in the operation of the Fund. Members know their communities and would be able provide oversight of and intelligence on bids. It was agreed that for a streamlined process to be implemented Members should only become involved in the latter stages of any decision-making

process. Community buy-in was considered an obvious prerequisite of any successful fund and that work should be undertaken to scope how communities can be involved in the decision making process too.

13. **Communications** – messages need to be clear and visible to ensure that the Fund is used and accessed by as many Surrey residents as possible. Guidance should be written that includes case studies and checklists to aid people drafting bids for projects.
14. **Financial sustainability** – this was discussed in the context of due diligence of organisations applying for capital but also a measure of success for the Fund itself. It was considered important that organisation were able to deliver on their bids.
15. Council **resources** will be required to set up and run the Fund. Is there the right capacity available at the council to do so at present? Members considered the idea of a third party administering smaller bids considering this to be an option as long the public saw no difference in process.
16. **Statutory duties** – the Task Group agreed that the fund should not be used for the delivery of statutory council functions but accepted there will be overlap in the purpose of projects and that the Fund might have complementary outcomes to the statutory work carried out by the council.

Conclusions:

17. The Task Group agreed that the foundation of the Fund should be the Council's Vision 2030 and supported the aims of the Fund as outlined in the Cabinet report. Key principles for a successful fund in the Task Group's assessment were: fairness, flexibility and transparency.
18. Members acknowledged that the Fund is capital based but saw a case for making revenue support available or, at least, signposting bidders to other sources of funding to maximise the value and sustainability of projects for Surrey communities.
19. The Task Group agreed that there must be public visibility of significant funding awards by the CPF Panel and attendant scrutiny arrangements must be put in place to review the performance and impact of the CPF annually.

Recommendations:

The Task Group recommends:

- a) That the Fund includes scalable governance measures that reflect the scope of the bids made to the Fund;
- b) That the funding thresholds and timing of funding rounds can flex to approve suitable projects that may fall slightly outside the proposed rules;
- c) From the beginning of the Fund, the council actively engage with residents and communities to offer support and feedback to those interested in accessing the fund

to ensure that less experienced members of the community are able to access the Fund in the same way as more developed community or charitable organisations;

- d) The council's communication plan must include widespread publicity and that bespoke branding be developed to promote the Fund;
- e) That an annual review mechanism is developed to allow for public scrutiny of the activity, delivery and performance of the fund, for example via an annual report that is scrutinised by the Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee at a future meeting

Next steps:

The Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee to schedule scrutiny of the implementation of the Fund within the first year of operation.

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Sources/background papers:

Minutes of the Community Projects Fund Task Group, June 2020
Community Project Fund Cabinet Report, July 2020