

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 26 JANUARY 2021****REPORT OF: MR MARK NUTI, DEPUTY CABINET MEMBER TO THE LEADER****LEAD OFFICER: KATIE STEWART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE****SUBJECT: YOUR FUND SURREY UPDATE****ORGANISATION STRATEGY
PRIORITY
AREA: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

On 21 July 2020, Cabinet approved the development of Your Fund Surrey (at that point known as the Community Projects Fund) – 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. On 29 September, Cabinet agreed to the launch of the Fund in November 2020 and the Your Fund Surrey Commonplace site for residents and groups to begin to generate ideas, and garner community backing and support. This report provides an update on key progress since the launch and outlines the planned next steps to enable the first funding window to open in spring 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Note the key progress since the launch of the Fund in November 2020;
2. Agree to the recommendation that a VCFS representative from Surrey Community Foundation sit on the network of experts that assess and score bids;
3. Note the establishment of the YFS Advisory Panel;
4. Agree the suggested timescales for the next steps for the Fund and the opening of the first funding window.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Your Fund Surrey (YFS) continues to represent 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. 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.

YFS is a key part of the Council's wider Empowering Communities programme of work that is seeking to stimulate local engagement and involvement. By providing the financial backing for community-led projects, the Fund will help to ensure the benefits of the funding match local need and builds local resilience and sustainability by helping people help themselves.

This report highlights the innovative ways in which communities have been involved and engaged in the development of the Fund and the significant interest so far from groups in wanting to use YFS to design and deliver projects that will benefit the areas in which they live.

The recommendations set out the continued work and planned next steps to ensure the Fund is accessible to all and can start to support successful projects once the funding window opens in spring 2021. As set out in the proposed timescales, this timeline is subject to review and monitoring of the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

DETAILS:

Background

1. Your Fund Surrey (YFS) 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. 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. YFS 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, previously known at that stage as the Community Projects Fund, and now titled as Your Fund Surrey, 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 Fund prior to its formal launch. This reflects the continued desire by Cabinet Members to ensure that the Fund is accessible and relevant as possible to those communities it is meant to serve.
4. On **29 September** Cabinet noted the findings from the community co-design carried out in August 2020 and the resulting changes and updates made to the process of delivering and managing the Fund. Following the report, Cabinet agreed to the launch of the Fund in November 2020.

Empowering Communities

5. Approved by Council in December 2020, the Council's refreshed Organisation Strategy reflects the changes in context and environment in which the organisation is operating and focusses on a smaller set of priority objectives than previously has been the case. The priority objectives in the Strategy are based on extensive research and engagement that took place over the summer of 2020. This provided a robust evidence base from which to work from in order to understand the impact of

Covid-19, what residents see as the challenges and opportunities, and how the future priorities for the Council align with this.

6. The engagement that took place highlighted the importance that residents feel in terms of being connected to their local community, emphasised by those that have had to isolate and shield themselves. The findings also highlighted the importance people place in their support networks, including family, friends and neighbours, in addition to services they have received during the crisis from both the public sector and VCFS. It is this emerging community spirit that we are looking to build on through our priority to reinvigorate our relationship with residents, and empowering communities to tackle local issues and support one another.
7. The Council recently launched the 'Make It Happen' communication campaign which demonstrates our commitment to empowering residents and local communities. Residents and community groups will be engaged and galvanised to get involved with a series of projects that demonstrate our focus on this way of working alongside residents.
8. YFS is a key part of the wider Empowering Communities programme with the ethos that communities themselves are the leads in identifying, developing, delivering and assuming overall responsibility for a project. There has always been the recognition that there may be some residents that feel they do not have the experience to manage all aspects of delivering a project, and this is where the YFS Team and other officers as required will help to provide guidance throughout the process. However, rather than taking on the role of delivering an idea that is proposed, SCC will help to facilitate projects by providing support in a number of other ways:
 - Outreach Sessions online and in localities to provide residents and groups with the chance to discuss ideas or receive answers to queries (see para 13 on Q&A sessions)
 - 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.
9. As set out in the report to Cabinet in September, it is recognised that local members will have a key role to play in helping groups develop their ideas; they 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. An all member briefing for county councillors was held on 23 October to enable them to play a fuller part in this process. Members will continue to be supported as to the role they can play in the process.

Progress since November Launch

10. The Your Fund Surrey Commonplace site went live on the 16th November - <https://yourfundsurreymap.commonplace.is/>. This new digital platform is the key element in a range of innovative and interactive communication methods that have been developed, through which communities and residents can positively engage with the fund. This is to support the goal for YFS to connect more widely than previous community funding schemes have been able to.

11. Commonplace is an easy to use platform for residents and groups to develop and generate ideas for projects, as well as a space that provides an opportunity for applicants to gain community support. The site is open all the time, with users encouraged to share their posted ideas on social media channels to continue to garner backing and support more widely.
12. As at the first week of January 2021, there had been 32,455 visits to the Commonplace site. 2,674 people have subscribed to project news while 1,898 have subscribed to the site newsletter. As at 4 January 2021 447 project ideas have been submitted via Commonplace, with 10,585 positive 'likes' being received for these projects.
13. Since the launch in November the council has hosted 14 online Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions. The sessions have been well attended (attended by 117 people to date) and generated positive feedback. The Q&A sessions will continue to run in 2021 and be further developed to include themed sessions with subject experts. Several groups have chosen to interact with YFS through both Q&A sessions and the Commonplace site itself. To support enquiries a dedicated e-mail inbox yourfund@surreycc.gov.uk has been established
14. Alongside this regular YFS updates will continue to be published via the Commonplace news stream including updated Frequently Asked Questions and specific guidance documentation to aid applicants.

Establishment of YFS Team and Network of Experts

15. Following agreement from Cabinet on the establishment of a YFS Team to manage the delivery of the Fund once it was launched, a YFS Programme Manager was appointed and started in post in December 2020. In addition, two YFS Project Advisors are in the process of being appointed; one beginning in post in January and the other shortly after.
16. Once the funding window opens applications to the Fund will be assessed and scored against the funding criteria. Co-ordinated by the YFS Team, the scoring will involve officers from across the different functions of the council depending on the nature of the project. These officers will form part of a network of experts.
17. It is recommended that alongside SCC officers, a representative from Surrey Community Foundation (SCF) be part of the network of experts. The co-design carried out with residents and community groups in August 2020 highlighted the value that participants felt established VCFS organisations will be able to have in providing support and guidance to those putting bids to the Fund together. The SCF representative will be able to bring local intelligence and offer valuable insight to the assessment and scoring of bids given the role they play in supporting the VCFS in the county.

Governance

18. A YFS Advisory Panel has been established to support the effective administration and grant making processes for the Fund and started to meet on a monthly basis.
19. The YFS Advisory Panel is composed of a cross-party group of County Councillors under the Chairmanship of the Deputy Cabinet Member to the Leader and will operate in an advisory capacity with the direct support and advice of key officers under the oversight of an Executive Director within the County Council.

Representatives of the VCFS, businesses or other organisations may also be invited to attend the Panel in an advisory capacity under the discretion of the Chairman.

20. The primary role of the YFS Advisory Panel will be to review shortlisted applications (following the assessment and scoring of bids by the network of experts as set out in paras 16 – 17) and make recommendations on the projects to be funded to the appropriate decision maker. The YFS Advisory Panel will also maintain an oversight over the implementation and administration of the capital fund, ensuring that key outcomes and milestones are met.
21. All financial decisions relating to the Fund will be taken within the County Councils established Financial Approval framework.

Communications

22. Your Fund Surrey was publicly launched on 16 November 2020. The initial launch consisted of:
 - widespread organic social media promotion
 - a series of case study videos
 - press release and local media interviews
 - Surrey County Council homepage advertising and staff intranet.
 - Surrey Matters newsletter
 - member and partner engagement toolkit including posters, postcards and briefings
 - local newspaper and magazine advertising

It is estimated that this launch reached over 300,000 residents of Surrey. As the launch occurred during a national COVID lockdown, traditional outdoor advertising was held back until 2021.

23. During the first quarter of 2021, we will move into the second phase of communications. This will use insight into both the people and communities already engaged and the project ideas put forward to further tailor our communications. This will enable us to identify any areas that are currently underrepresented in terms of community projects proposed, geographical areas, and represented groups, and also identify ideas that do not meet current criteria so that we can support residents and groups by giving them further direction as required.
24. Proactive communications through Surrey County Council channels will be restricted from 22 March after the beginning of the Pre-Election Reporting Period (PERP) if council elections will be taking place.
25. Based on the types of projects that have so far been posted onto the Commonplace site and questions that have been received, a series of supplementary guidance documents are being produced for specific topic areas. to provide more detail on funding related themes for the aid of potential applicants. Guidance documents will be made publicly available prior to the fund opening to applications.

National Lottery Community Fund

26. We have begun the process of creating a strategic relationship with the National Lottery Community Fund to be able to direct applicants to their development grant to support projects to get up and running before applying to YFS and supplement the capital funding allocated by YFS. This is part of an exciting new relationship with the

Lottery aimed at bringing more funding into Surrey and steps we are taking more widely to bring funders together in Surrey to identify opportunities for collaboration and maximise the impact of available funding.

Next steps

27. The aim is to open the first stage of the application process – the ‘ideas submission’ stage – in early March 2021, however this is subject to review based on the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The timing of the next stage of the application process where detailed submissions for projects that have been deemed to be viable can be received will be confirmed as part of the launch of the first stage. If the timescales of any stages are impacted, it is important to note that the fund application is a rolling process, enabling applications to be submitted at any point during the five years of the Fund without finite deadlines that must be met.
28. The impact of Covid-19 means there is still uncertainty relating to the planned local elections in May 2021. The timelines related to the Fund will take the decision that is made into account and will be flexible around the need to respect the activity that can and cannot take place during the Pre-Election Reporting Period.

CONSULTATION:

29. 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.
30. 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.
31. Post the co-design work looking at the application process with residents and representatives from community groups, a collaborative piece of evaluation work on the proposed application form was undertaken. A group of approximately 15 officers took part in a part series of workshops to ensure we have sought views from experts across all parts of the council, including legal, audit and procurement.
32. Alongside these the draft application forms were posted on the Commonplace site to help us understand whether the language used was accessible and where and how we may need to provide support. This engagement with public respondents has enabled us to test the application forms with those interested in putting in bids to the Fund as well as add details that were previously missing.
33. The questions raised through the Q&A sessions and through the Commonplace site are also being used to continue to develop the Fund and ensure that it remains dynamic and flexible in the way it is delivered.

FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

34. The £100m of capital funding allocated to the Your Fund Surrey is within the Capital Programme; held in Pipeline pending approval of individual projects.
35. Cabinet agreed in July to allocate £300k of revenue funding in 2020/21 (funded from the Corporate Feasibility budget) to establish the core team to manage the delivery of

the fund. The ongoing costs of running YFS have been built into the budget process for 2021/22 and the medium term and will be kept under review.

36. In addition, there is a provision in the Fund's development for a degree of revenue funding that would be available to support the development and delivery of some projects. Provision for this is set out in the Corporate Feasibility budget for 2021/22. This will be kept under review to ensure that sufficient feasibility funding is available to support the delivery of the wider Capital Programme.

SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY

37. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. 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 in the medium term, 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.
38. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports the need for YFS applications to demonstrate a robust and sustainable approach to financial management alongside clear delivery of benefits to the community. Capital and revenue costs have been factored into 2021/22 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER

39. 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

40. 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.
41. In the two reports to Cabinet in July and September 2020, 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.
42. Details for how these potential impacts will be addressed is set out in the Equalities Impact Assessment attached at **Annex 1**.
43. 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.

44. Any formal applications to the Fund will be expected to have completed an equality monitoring checklist to understand if there are any potential impacts that may need to be mitigated or maximised. Where this is the case, members of the YFS will help support applicants to complete out a proportionate Equality Impact Assessment for their project proposal, which will be reviewed as part of the scoring process.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

45. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Environmental sustainability	No significant implications arising from this report / Set out below
Public Health	No significant implications arising from this report

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

46. 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:

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

- Stage 1 of the process - 'ideas submission' to be opened in early March 2021, subject to review based on the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
- Stage 2 of the process – 'submission of formal bids for assessment' to be confirmed as part of the launch of the first stage

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Consulted:

Community co-design with residents and VCFS representatives
CVS'
Q&A sessions with residents and community groups
Council officers

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Equalities Impact Assessment
