

TUESDAY 8 MARCH 2022



## YOUR FUND SURREY – UPDATE

### Purpose of report:

This report presents an update on Your Fund Surrey and is presented for scrutiny.

### INTRODUCTION

1. Your Fund Surrey (YFS) is the County Council's flagship fund, focused on bringing community led and initiated projects to life which benefit the wider community and leave a lasting legacy. £100 million of funding is available over a five-year period to support capital, one-off costs, for projects that have the support of the local community and fit with the aims of Surrey's Community Vision 2030.
2. The fund opened for online applications on 1 March 2021. Just over one year into a five-year scheme, it has already prompted 1,278 ideas which have been placed onto the interactive Your Fund Surrey map, with those ideas being further discussed and developed.
3. A total of 222 applications have been submitted and there are currently 152 live applications with funding awarded to four projects so far totalling £632,863 (**Annex 5**). Each application is subject to a rigorous assessment process by officers, to ensure any proposed project meets the aims and published criteria of the fund.
4. From the early stages of establishing the fund, YFS has and continues to develop iteratively with input from a wide range of stakeholders and experts and use of co-design workshops. This has incorporated significant and wide-ranging political input including a cross-party task and finish group convened by the Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee (CEHSC) which reported to Cabinet in March 2021, and the use of Member seminars.
5. YFS has been designed with a focus on, "*fairness, flexibility and transparency*."<sup>1</sup>. The key principles of the fund are set out below:
  - Focus on community-led and initiated projects
  - An easy-to-use application process designed with resident input
  - Open, transparent, and supportive approach
  - Ensuring wide access to the fund so all communities in Surrey can benefit
  - No direct competition between applicants, who are encouraged to share ideas and/or expertise

<sup>1</sup> Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee Member Task Group, 2020

- Low barriers to entry with a proportionate investment in time from residents or groups depending on how far they progress in the process
  - Learning points from successful and unsuccessful projects will be taken to inform the development and evolution of the fund over time.
6. This report sets out details on the development and delivery of YFS in the preceding twelve months for the consideration of CEHSC.

<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>
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7. YFS has seen an incredible public response across the County to date. Currently, there are nearly 1,400 ideas pinned and over 150,000 people have visited the Commonplace ideas map. Importantly, more than 13,500 people have subscribed to the YFS newsletter updates.
8. The YFS team provide a single point of contact and support for applicants throughout the application process. The YFS team draw on the resources of and facilitate the input of officers from across the Council more widely as required.
9. YFS officers have teamed up with local voluntary infrastructure organisations to present the fund at events with charitable and community groups. Weekly group and 100 question and answer (Q&A) sessions have also been organised to provide direct support to current and potential applicants.
10. It is recognised that residents and community groups who may have limited experience of applying for grants and funding would value support in the development of ideas. Members have a key role to play during this stage.

**Local Members**

11. The Council and Members were encouraged at the inception of the fund to actively engage with residents and communities to offer support and provide feedback to those interested in accessing the fund. The involvement of Members is a key principle of the fund. Member seminars have been organised stressing the importance of their participation, with further seminars planned for Spring 2022.
12. Members are fulfilling a critical role in supporting the development and promotion of ideas in their communities contributing to the delivery of successful projects (see **Annex 3** – YFS January update). They have a depth of knowledge as to the needs of their residents and are in a unique position to champion ideas. They also have an ability to connect residents within their communities and identify opportunities for collaboration.
13. Officers have been proactive in keeping all Members informed on the progress of the fund including using infographics to show the number of submissions received and to share success stories via the Members Portal and via the Top Lines Brief Newsletter. A report is published on the Member Portal each month to show the progress of applications. The application process has seven Member touchpoints, and the views of local Members are sought on any application taken for decision.

## Communications and Marketing

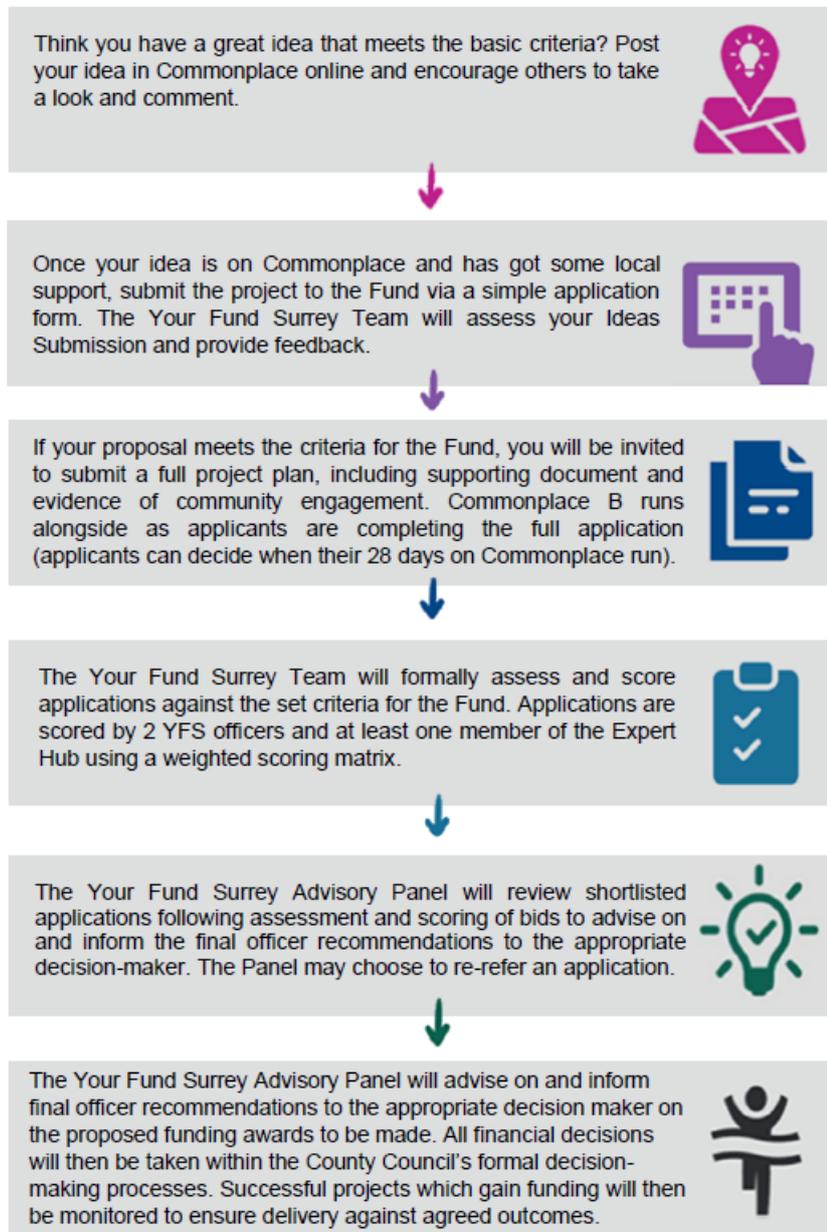
14. Think Big is the marketing campaign used to promote Your Fund Surrey. The campaign uses a combination of offline and online media. This includes advertising in community magazines, local press, posters to community buildings such as town halls, leisure centres and libraries. Postcards were produced for Members to distribute in their communities. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and NextDoor have all been used at regular intervals with updates on the fund provided to community projects. Geo-targeted posts were used to promote the Have Your Say project proposals to the relevant geographical areas. The Fund is also promoted on the Make It Happen website. Campaign assets have been shared with external stakeholders across the county.
15. Press releases on projects which have been awarded funding through Surrey News has been shared more widely with BBC Surrey radio interviews, a mention in the House of Commons and local press features. The Fund has also been featured in the Surrey Matters podcast and sent to 175,000 residents via the Surrey Matters newsletter and featured in the No One Left Behind video.
16. As part of the future marketing of the fund, a leaflet is currently in production for use at Community Events via the Community Engagement Team and a new promotional video is being produced.

## FUND OPERATION

### Assessment Process

17. The application and assessment process for YFS was co-designed with resident and community input, to ensure that the fund is both easy to use and widely accessible, so that all communities in Surrey can benefit. An open, transparent, and supportive approach underpins the process with clear guidance available for applicants at all stages.
18. A comprehensive [governance](#) document for the operation of the fund has been published online setting out the application, review processes and assessment. Following feedback at the co-design stage, a single application process and set of guidance was developed for the fund to add clarity and reduce confusion for residents. The application process consists of 6 stages (**Diagram 1**). A summary of the application stages is attached in **Annex 2**.
19. As of the end of January 2022, 182 project ideas have been taken through to stage two, and 36 have progressed through the entire process - with funding awarded to four projects so far (**Annex 5**). To note, 15 of the 72 unsuccessful applications were withdrawn by the applicant (a further nine were duplicate applications in system).
20. As the YFS process has become more established, the team has introduced targets for responding to applicants. A two-week idea submission response target is now in place for all new applications. A target has been initiated of three months for full applications from submission to the decision-making stage. Though it is recognised that all applications to the fund are unique, and the process and time scales will vary based on the requirements of each project.

21. Applicants are encouraged to seek the support and encouragement of the local County Councillor/s at an early stage when putting a potential project together.



**Diagram 1: Application stages**

22. YFS is open to all to log an idea, but to apply for funding they must be a registered group. This includes voluntary or community organisations, registered charities, a constituted group or club, a community interest company (CIC), social enterprise and parish or town councils (for any non-statutory related activity).
23. All applications to YFS are subject to an extensive assessment process including a rigorous two step application process involving assessment and scoring by YFS Officers. This includes input from the Expert Hub, a group of specialist Officers providing insight for the eligibility of funding. Each application at the submission stage is assessed and scored independently by three Officers whose scores are then moderated. Officers consider each project against the aims and published criteria of the fund to determine whether it is eligible for funding. Environmental impact is one of the key criteria for the fund and from the outset applicants are

encouraged to consider environmental and sustainable practice and components as part of any build or project.

24. A scoring matrix outlining the funds five scoring criteria are set out in **Annex 4**. Officers use the scoring matrix to score each project objectively and consistently. This method of scoring ensures robustness and a clear audit trail to the decision-making process. This also ensures that if any funding decisions are challenged or Freedom of Information requests are submitted, there is clear evidence behind how a decision has been reached.

### **Financial Assessment**

25. YFS applications undergo a high degree of financial testing. The project costs submitted in support of individual applications are assessed against independently sourced quotations which are scrutinised by officers within the Finance team in relation to any monies which may be allocated to a project. The YFS team has a dedicated finance officer with specific expertise on which they can call.
26. Projects must pass a series of rigorous financial tests to be considered for approval. The financial assessment considers:
  - a) The health of the organisation or group (accounts and bank statements)
  - b) The health of the proposed project (cash flow, balance sheet)
  - c) Where relevant, a commercial assessment is undertaken
27. Control measures are in place so that if any matters are flagged as part of this process, they can be referred by the team to the Principal Auditor in Internal Audit and Counter Fraud as is deemed appropriate. There are also regular weekly review sessions held internally at which team members are encouraged to flag any issues or concerns for wider consideration.
28. As Surrey County Council (SCC) only provide capital funding (and the fund is designed to empower communities without ongoing reliance on the council), any running costs will need to be covered by income streams.
29. A commercial finance assessment is conducted for projects which are contingent on the successful delivery of a commercial model. It is noted and accepted that approving bids that are dependent on a commercial model for their long-term viability carries inherent risk. Assessments are undertaken to ensure consideration has been given to these risks and additional information is requested where it is felt necessary (see paras 47-49).

### **Expert Hub**

30. The primary role of the YFS Expert hub is to review applications and to provide insight for the eligibility of funding, which assists the YFS team in conducting rigorous assessment against the fund requirements and scoring criteria.
31. Officers who form the Expert Hub have been identified from within SCC, borough and district councils, and the voluntary sector to provide specialist insight for the eligibility of funding. Individuals are identified to provide expert input either in relation to their organisation, directorate, or subject field / discipline.

32. Members of the Expert Hub are informed of projects relevant to their specialist or geographical area to provide insight. These officers help to identify sticking points and may propose solutions for projects. The Expert Hub can provide a fresh perspective on projects received, bolstering the standing YFS team.

### **Advisory Panel**

33. The cross-party Member Advisory Panel was established to assist the formal decision-making processes which sit outside its remit. The role of the Panel is to review shortlisted applications following assessment and scoring of bids by Officers. The panel advises and helps to inform the final Officer recommendations to the appropriate decision-maker on the proposed funding awards to be made. The Advisory Panel may suggest additional conditions for funding. The Panel has not been established to scrutinise the overall management and administration of YFS, the responsibility of which sits with CEHSC.

### **Decision Making**

34. All financial decisions relating to the fund will be taken by the appropriate decision maker as set out in the July 2020 Cabinet Report, within the Council's established Financial Approval framework.
35. To ensure that final decision-making is as streamlined and proportionate to the amount being sought as possible, Cabinet approved authority for final decisions on funding awards in three bands, with the intention that the named decision maker will make such decisions taking into full consideration the YFS Advisory Panel's key discussion points. The delegation amounts are as follows:
- Projects up to £100,000 – delegated to the Executive Director with direct responsibility for the delivery of Your Fund Surrey
  - Projects between £100,000 and £500,000 – delegated to the appropriate Cabinet Member as determined by the Leader
  - Projects over £500,000 – decision taken by Cabinet

### **Funding Agreement**

36. A specific Funding Agreement is developed for each project prior to the release of any funds to applicants. The Funding Agreement incorporates performance measures to ensure funding is used as intended, as well as outlining any support or additional conditions specific to the project agreed as part of the funding award. A draft agreement outlining any specific conditions that must be met by the applicant are shared prior to final agreement. Projects are closely monitored to ensure the additional conditions agreed in the Funding Agreement are met.
37. All Funding Agreements are based on a draft Funding Agreement for the fund prepared by qualified Officers in legal services in consultation with the YFS team.
38. A project specific payment schedule is completed as part of the funding agreement, retaining the right to determine the best method of payment to the Recipient under this agreement. The payment schedule is drawn up to reduce the exposure to risk on the part of SCC, but also recognising the specific requirements of individual applications. This could either be in a one-off lump sum payment or phased payment of the Funding conditional on the achievement of key milestones. A schedule detailing such key milestones and the expected

outcomes as submitted in the application is included in the Funding Agreement.

39. Applicants are required to submit an evaluation plan detailing how the progress, success and impact of the project will be monitored. This evaluation plan forms part of the funding agreement. This information is compiled and forms part of the overall monitoring of the fund.

<b>MONITORING AND DEVELOPMENT</b>
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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 for the benefit of all Surrey residents. As such, the allocation of funding is not predetermined by geography or proportioned by area.
41. Access to the fund is proactively monitored via Commonplace and insights are drawn into both the people and communities already engaged, and the project ideas put forward to further tailor communications.
42. This monitoring is enabling the YFS team to identify any areas or groups that are currently underrepresented in terms of the quantity of community projects proposed. It is also possible to identify ideas that do not meet criteria and the typical reasons for this so that we can provide support to residents and groups by giving them further direction as required.
43. The YFS Team has developed a dashboard to help identify areas where take up has been low. This includes a map of YFS applications overlaid on Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA), so Councillors and Officers can target interventions as appropriate to ensure that no one is left behind, in line with Council policy. Information gained via the dashboard is helping inform proactive work within communities by the Your Fund Surrey Team. As Covid-19 restrictions reduce, more targeted promotion work can take place within localities.

**Process Review**

44. The application process and the experience of applicants is constantly being monitored to identify areas for improvement. As a result, multiple changes have been made to the process. In addition, a process review was undertaken pre-Christmas 2021 to review existing processes and implement changes necessary to improve the funds operation.
45. The table below presents some of the areas identified and measures implemented:

Issue identified	Action taken
<b>Responding to applicants</b>	<p>A two-week idea submission response target is now in place for all new applications. Two additional officers were brought in to provide additional capacity.</p> <p>A target has been initiated of three months for full applications from submission to the decision-making stage.</p>

<b>Accessibility for applicants</b>	<p>A full application checklist is provided to approved Idea Submission applicants to help them compile all the information required for Full Submission.</p> <p>The FAQs page is being reordered and updated with additional questions.</p> <p>A plan is being developed to streamline the application process into one online location, whilst ensuring SCC has suitable control and access to the site.</p>
<b>Demonstrating community support for proposals</b>	<p>Applicants are being advised to demonstrate a variety of community engagement methods beyond just Commonplace when progressing to full application.</p>
<b>Tracking ongoing applications and managing workload</b>	<p>A full application tracker has been introduced to monitor the progress of projects, enabling a clear view of the projects in the pipeline, and those leading to decision and funding.</p> <p>An annual YFS Key Date schedule has been created to manage capacity and work priorities.</p>
<b>Communicating with and to different groups across the County</b>	<p>User analytics have been run on SCC YFS webpages, identifying the volume and patterns of traffic, navigation to and from the site, and areas most viewed. The same review has been requested for the YFS Commonplace sites.</p> <p>Geographic Information System (GIS) data is being employed to use targeted communications focused on engaging with harder to reach groups and communities.</p>

46. The administration, accessibility, and operation of the fund is constantly adapting to best serve residents and applicants, and to improve the efficiency with which applications are dealt.

<b>RISK</b>
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47. All applications for funding are taken through the due diligence and agreed governance process. Applicants are required to provide an overview of risks against the project. The long-term sustainability of projects applying for funding from YFS is a key factor in assessing their eligibility. YFS Officers scrutinise and challenge the assessment of risks and mitigation strategies presented by applicants to determine whether there are adequate control measures in place.
48. When pro-actively managing risks associated with the fund an important consideration for Officers is that YFS forms a key part of the Council's Empowering Communities priority, focused on supporting communities through meaningful and lasting investment. Therefore, the success of Your Fund Surrey will set against establishing a different relationship with communities, empowering them to be more self-reliant. In forging that relationship, the success of individual projects will vary within the benefits delivered by the programme as a whole.

49. The Council has been undertaking a range of work around the approach to risk management across the organisation. Upcoming work will start to explore risk appetite and approach in the organisation. Officers have proposed that YFS is specifically thought through and tested as part of this approach.

## **EQUALITIES**

50. YFS is designed to provide investment in schemes that encourage community participation, reduce isolation, and develop the potential for social wellbeing and economic prosperity. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been produced for the fund and this was circulated as an Annex to the YFS Cabinet Report 26 January 2021.
51. Applicants are required to complete a needs assessment as part of their application to ensure their project is open and accessible for all. Successful applicants are also subject to regular monitoring to understand if there are any equalities and accessibility issues that need to be addressed.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

52. The report to CEHSC has sought to set out specific detail concerning the policy, approach, and administration of YFS. The iterative design of the scheme is central to the approach of the fund. As part of this approach, the application process and the experience of applicants is constantly being monitored to identify areas for improvement.
53. The report has outlined a number of areas of improvement, including those taken forward as part of a detailed process review which commenced one year after the launch of the fund. The CEHSC, when considering its recommendations, are invited to consider and identify areas of further enhancement in connection to the continued operation of the fund, toward ensuring that the fund can deliver against its stated aims for the benefit of Surrey residents.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To consider the report and provide any recommendations that would support the fund to deliver against its stated aims for the benefit of Surrey residents
2. To provide guidance in the accessing and signposting of information to Members on the fund.
3. Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee to receive a further update on YFS in late 2022.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Officers in conjunction with Cabinet Member to consider recommendations arising from the Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee meeting on 8 March 2022.

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Implement improvements outlined in the Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee recommendations to the fund as part of the iterative process design.

Further Q&A sessions to be organised with Members regarding the fund.

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### **Sources/background papers**

Your Fund Surrey Criteria

Your Fund Surrey Governance Document

Your Fund Surrey Process Review

Your Fund Surrey Delegated Officer Decision Report

Your Fund Surrey Cabinet Report Normandy Café and Shop – CF104

Annex 1 – Useful Links

Annex 2 – Summary of Application Stages

Annex 3 – January 2022 Your Fund Surrey Report

Annex 4 – Scoring Matrix

Annex 5 – Your Fund Surrey Decision Tracker