

North Mid Sussex County Local Committee

25 June 2019

Allocation of the Community Initiative Fund

Report by Director of Law and Assurance

Summary

In response to comments and feedback from Members, partners, and the public, the Cabinet Member for Safer Stronger Communities has to agreed a mechanism for smaller grants to be made by CLCs as part of the Community Initiative Fund (CIF). This would be for smaller-scale projects seeking funding of no more than £750 for total costs of their project.

An organisation seeking funding for £750 or less are able to apply direct for a grant as an alternative to using the crowdfunding platform. This would be aimed at smaller groups with low project costs.

West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context

CIF grant funding makes a significant contribution to the aims of the Council in unlocking the power of communities by supporting them with contributions to projects in their local area that support the aims of the West Sussex Plan.

This new approach will improve the support for small projects not suitable for the crowdfunding approach but whose aims match the aspirations of the West Sussex Plan.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact as this decision does not change the CIF grant fund size.

Recommendations

The County Local Committee is asked to note:

- 1) changes to the operation and processes for the allocation of Community Initiative Fund money to both a crowdfunding model and a smaller 'micro fund' as outlined in the report, in line with the Decision Made by the Cabinet Member for Stronger, Safer Communities; and
- 2) that the change takes effect from June 2019

1. Proposal

Background and Context

- 1.1 A decision was taken in April 2018 (Ref SSC11 17-18) that all grants funds available to County Council Members to allocate would be pooled into the Community Initiative Fund. In order to be eligible for funding, the applicant would need to submit their proposal through the West Sussex Crowd, a crowd funding platform that sought to encourage funds from other sources, including businesses and the voluntary sector.
- 1.2 A year after the implementation of a crowdfunding platform has allowed for a greater understanding of the benefits and limitations of using such a system. To date the West Sussex Crowd has managed to attract additional funding of over £470,000 from over 2000 backers donating to projects and seeing 77 successfully funded projects.
- 1.3 During the application process project managers are asked to provide details of their organisation including information regarding charitable status, financial position and organisational structure etc. This information is then verified by a third party to ensure legitimacy and transparency.
- 1.4 Feedback received from partners, members of the public and project managers has suggested that this process, for projects asking for smaller amounts of money may be counter-productive and less cost effective.
- 1.5 A proposal has therefore been put forward for small scale applications to apply directly to the County Council for funding, without using a crowdfunding platform.
- 1.6 The introduction of a 'micro fund' would effectively seek to reintroduce the previously established Small Grants Fund, which was administered by the County Council Communities Team. This fund was set at £80,000 per year and the average application was between £500 and £800. The proposed limits to be applied to CIF are in-line with this previous arrangement.

2. Proposal Details

- 2.1 It is proposed to change the arrangements for the allocation of CIF so that projects which have a total cost of £750 or less will only need to complete a short, paper-based application form. Paper based application forms will be considered in the same way as those submitted through the West Sussex Crowd at CLC meetings.
- 2.2 Projects with a total project cost of more than £750 will need to complete their application through the West Sussex Crowd in the normal way.
- 2.3 Each County Local Committee allocating their funds will be able to initially allocate up to 30% of their total annual CIF budget to projects applying through the paper-based application. Should any CLC wish to increase the proportion of available CIF for small grants they should only do so after, the exhaustion of the 30% initial allocation and after consideration of a report setting out the amounts generated by crowdfund driven grants in the

previous period and an evaluation of the comparative benefits of small grants for their area by reference to the West Sussex Plan criteria.

- 2.4 CIF reports submitted to each CLC will feature a running total of how much has been spent on projects submitted through the West Sussex Crowd and also those that have been submitted for projects under £750.
- 2.5 It is proposed that Members continue to play a key role in the following ways by:
 - Setting the principles and objectives that will help determine how funds are allocated
 - Agreeing funding pledges to be made to projects in their CLC areas
 - Exploring and understanding the needs and community expectations in their areas
 - Championing, encouraging and supporting local groups to develop ideas to meet local needs and use the platform to raise funds
 - Monitoring the use of public funds and the effectiveness of the collaborative approach
- 2.6 Allocating 30% of the CIF fund to the micro fund reflects the previous small grants total (£84,000) and having a maximum funding limit of £750 also reflects the average of applications under the former small grants fund.

Factors taken into account

3. Consultation

- 3.1 Officers met Voluntary Sector Organisations in April 2019 to receive feedback on the crowdfunding model. Feedback received from these sessions supported the implementation of a 'micro fund' and responses were universally positive.
- 3.2 All members received a communication from the Cabinet Members for Safer Stronger Communities on 15 April 2019 regarding the proposed changes. Feedback and comments on the proposal were encouraged.
- 3.3 Formal consultation on the proposed change will be incorporated in the scheduled CLC review to be undertaken by the Governance Committee to commence in May 2019.

4. Financial (Revenue and Capital) and Resource Implications

Revenue consequences of proposal

- 4.1 There are no revenue considerations to consider as this decision is not changing the CIF grant fund size.

Resource Implications

- 4.2 Officer time will be required to assess each application and determine whether it is appropriate to be considered at CLC meetings. This will be monitored regularly to ensure the process is neither overly consuming or counterproductive.
- 4.3 The County Council seeks to maintain the crowdfunding model alongside a paper-based system, as the use of a crowdfunding approach brings, on average, 3.5 times leverage on grants. This provides the prospect of the County Council being able to facilitate an arrangement which will help a greater number of community groups to benefit to a greater extent than is currently achievable. This will assist all Members in contributing to the core ambitions of the Council's West Sussex Plan and the targets which the Council has approved for those ambitions.

5. Risk Assessment Implications and Mitigations

- 5.1 The County Council anticipated that the numbers of groups using the new platform would be lower in the first year of the change than expected for the previously established system. Efforts were made to promote and encourage awareness and take up and members will be invited to take part in such promotion.
- 5.2 The proposed change seeks to mitigate the lower level of applications submitted through the crowdfunding platform by allowing project manager seeking smaller funds a more streamlined application process.
- 5.3 The County Council will continue to deploy support for communities from front line Communities Directorate staff to help community groups to understand and engage with the model.
- 5.4 When the initial decision to utilise a crowdfunding model was taken, research from [West Sussex Life](#) suggested that 88% of adults have used the internet in the last 6 months.

6. Other Options Considered

- 6.1 To continue only using the crowdfunding model for all applications for CIF. This would not address the concerns expressed on behalf of community groups applying for low level funding.
- 6.2 Further amendments to processes could be made in an attempt to streamline approaches and minimise confusion and duplication. However, at a time of diminishing resources, this would not address the issues driving the proposals.
- 6.3 Grant funding could cease altogether, but this would diminish support to local groups at a time when the Council is committed to unlocking the power of communities.

7. Equality and Human Rights Assessment

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act, the Council has a 'public sector equality duty'. It must have and show how it has given due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The need for an Equality Impact Report has been assessed. Whilst CIF may be used to benefit people with protected characteristics, it is a universal grant that any group can apply for and is used to support a range of community-based projects and initiatives.
- 7.2 Allowing smaller groups with less capacity to apply using a paper-based application will help to be more inclusive of all community groups and project managers, particularly those who aren't as IT literate or have significant time restraints.
- 7.3 There are no known Human Rights implications associated with these recommendations

8. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment

- 8.1 Grant funding helps voluntary and community groups to contribute to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their communities.

9 Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment

- 9.1 There are no Crime and Disorder Act implications associated with these recommendations although the Council's duties in relation to crime reduction and prevention and the community safety partnership work may well inform individual funding decisions and the principles members choose to adopt.

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Background Papers: [Decision made by the Cabinet Member for Stronger Safer Communities, Ref No: SSC01 19/20](#)