



SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23RD JUNE 2021

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FUND

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE
SERVICES**



1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present a proposed approach to the delivery of the council's newly instigated Community Empowerment Fund (CEF).
- 1.2. To seek comment and endorsement of the proposed funding criteria and grant management arrangements for the Community Empowerment Fund from Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee prior to it being considered by Cabinet.
- 1.3 To seek views on appropriate support required to enable elected members to effectively champion the Community Empowerment Fund across their communities.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The *Team Caerphilly – Better Together* transformation strategy endorsed by Cabinet in June 2019, highlights the importance of effective community engagement and the subsequently endorsed *Consultation and Engagement Framework 2020-2025* commits to promoting and supporting the principles of community empowerment and building resilient communities.
- 2.2 The council is focussed on further strengthening the relationships between it and its communities – residents, businesses, voluntary and community groups. Caerphilly county borough benefits from a vibrant and engaged voluntary and community sector, which offers significant opportunity to maximise community participation.
- 2.3. In the council's recent far-reaching resident survey 'The Caerphilly Conversation', 78% of respondents to that survey felt it was a positive suggestion to make a community budget available to residents, to enable them to do more things for themselves in future. 89% of respondents also agreed that offering incentives to communities would likely encourage them to take greater pride in their area.
- 2.4. In the council's budget setting for 2021/22, members approved a £328,000 annual funding allocation for a 'Community Empowerment Fund' to support community-led

initiatives that complement and support those provided through public services.

- 2.5. This report sets out the proposed approach to the delivery of the newly instigated Community Empowerment Fund, with the draft application form and guidance for the fund and draft community engagement guidance for ward members attached at appendix one and appendix two respectively.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee endorse the proposed approach to the delivery of the Community Empowerment Fund, and comment on and endorse the funding criteria and grant management arrangements for the fund, prior to it being considered by Cabinet.
- 3.2 That the Committee offer their views on appropriate support required to enable elected members to effectively champion the Community Empowerment Fund across their communities.
- 3.3 That the Committee support a review of the Community Empowerment Fund after 12 months in order to review take up of the fund to date and to identify and mitigate against any emerging barriers to the scheme.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To ensure the council has a Community Empowerment Fund with robust funding criteria and grant management arrangements, in order to enable communities to bid for funding to develop and deliver projects aimed at meeting local need.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The *Team Caerphilly – Better Together* transformation strategy endorsed by Cabinet in June 2019, highlights the importance of effective community engagement and the subsequently endorsed *Consultation and Engagement Framework 2020-2025* commits to promoting and supporting the principles of community empowerment and building resilient communities.
- 5.2 Community groups are increasingly playing a strong role in planning and delivering services that meet local needs, complementing those provided by public services. This community provision has a particular strength in developing innovative and flexible activities that are valued by local people and helps to build a real sense of community pride and cohesion.
- 5.3 The council is focussed on further strengthening the relationships between it and its communities – residents, businesses, voluntary and community groups. Caerphilly county borough benefits from a vibrant and engaged voluntary and community sector, which offers significant opportunity to maximise community participation.
- 5.4 In the council's recent far-reaching resident survey '*The Caerphilly Conversation*', 78% of respondents to that survey felt it was a positive suggestion to make a community budget available to residents, to enable them to do more things for themselves in future. 89% of respondents also agreed that offering incentives to communities would likely encourage them to take greater pride in their area.

5.5 In the council's budget setting for 2021/22, members approved a £328,000 annual funding allocation for a 'Community Empowerment Fund' to support community-led initiatives that complement and support those provided through public services. This allocation amounts to £4,490 per elected member per year.

5.6 The Community Empowerment Fund will enable communities to bid for funding in order to develop and deliver community-led initiatives that complement and support those provided through public services. Projects will aim to support communities to:

- Build community capacity
- Better understand and identify their local aspirations and priorities
- Make good use of existing assets, with the projects having the support of local communities
- Increase active inclusion and develop opportunities for enhanced engagement with groups that are more vulnerable and harder to reach
- Develop local assets, services and projects that respond to the needs of the people in their local communities
- Develop projects that are capable of becoming sustainable community projects
- Complement existing services in an area by providing additional activities

5.7 Grant management

Applications must be made by a non-profit organisation based within Caerphilly county borough. All organisations must have their own bank account in the name of the organisation.

For non-constituted community groups that have an interest in bidding into the fund, support in advance of submitting the application can be sought from the council's Caerphilly Cares team, to enable them to become a constituted community organisation.

In calculating allocations the £328,000 has been divided by 73 (the number of elected representatives within Caerphilly county borough), meaning an allocation of £4,490 per ward councillor. In wards where there are more than one ward councillor, the allocation is multiplied according to the number of ward councillors. For example, Penyrheol ward has four elected representatives, therefore the Penyrheol ward would benefit from an allocation of £17,960 (£4,490 x 4).

It should be noted that the Community Empowerment Fund allocation of £328,000 for Caerphilly county borough during 2021/22 is allocated to wards, and not directly to local ward councillors.

The maximum allocation available to an organisation/community group is £4,490 (in a single member ward). Approved projects in a single member ward where the total cost is less than £4,490, can be awarded a grant of up to 100% of the project costs (depending on the number of applications received in a particular application round).

Larger projects in a single member ward costing over £4,490 can receive a grant of up to the maximum amount (depending on the number of applications received in a particular application round), with the expectation that the remainder of the funding is sourced by the organisation/community group from other sources, or their own funding.

For multi member wards the ward councillors can choose to 'pool' their allocation to fund larger projects, up to the maximum amount that the ward members have agreed to pool (i.e. up to £8,980 in a 2 member ward, up to £13,470 in a 3 member ward). Ward members are not required to pool their allocation if they do not wish to.

Organisations/community groups may be offered less than the maximum amount if there are multiple applications from organisations or groups in individual wards in a single application round.

It is suggested that all applications are for a minimum of £1,000, which can be made up of a number of different items. No group/organisation can apply for a grant in consecutive financial years.

50% of the grant amount will be paid when the grant is approved. The remaining 50% will be released on receipt of the necessary financial records to show that the grant released on project approval has been spent in accordance with the original application form submitted. Invoices/receipts and bank statements will be required as evidence.

The Policy and Partnerships Team have considerable experience of managing and administering community grants, using the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Panel as a post-allocation reporting mechanism after officer delegated decisions against the agreed criteria. It is proposed that while elected members will act as 'sponsors' for bids, the management, administration and ultimate grant allocation of the Community Empowerment Fund will follow this established mechanism, with funding allocated via officer delegated decisions and information reports to Cabinet every six months.

Full details of eligibility and grant criteria to apply to the Community Empowerment Fund is included at Appendix One.

5.8 Application criteria

The council's recent resident survey '*The Caerphilly Conversation*' sought views on what the Community Empowerment Fund could be spent on, with seven priority areas emerging from the feedback, therefore forming the basis for the application criteria for projects:

- Environmental projects, including awareness of biodiversity and increasing community activity
- Projects that support greater community cohesion
- Projects that aim to tackle isolation and loneliness across the community
- Digital inclusion projects
- Projects to encourage greater physical and mental wellbeing
- Activities for young people/educational activities (non-statutory)
- Initiatives that promote and encourage community safety
- Supporting community groups to establish

Funding would be utilised to support communities to become more sustainable and resilient, which also supports the principles of the council's newly established *Caerphilly Cares* model for service delivery and the council's Place Shaping and Wellbeing Framework.

Applicant organisations will be required to evidence the need for their project or activity

and the lasting benefits it will provide for the local community. Full application criteria for the grant can be found at Appendix One.

5.9 The role of elected members

As highlighted at section 5.5 of this report, the £328,000 annual allocation to the Community Empowerment Fund amounts to the equivalent of £4,490 per elected ward councillor per year. In wards where there is more than one elected ward councillor, communities can choose to combine their funding allocation, to enable larger scale projects to be undertaken.

Local ward councillors have a key 'sponsor' role in the roll out of the fund and in the subsequent development of community projects.

Bids for funding from the Community Empowerment Fund must have support in writing from their local elected ward councillor prior to submission, and members must consider any potential conflicts of interest before 'sponsoring' any application.

Councillors will also be encouraged to consider:

- Carrying out community engagement activity to raise awareness of the fund across their ward area
- Discuss priorities within their local area with their constituents and seek agreement and support for these priority areas in supporting groups to bid to the Community Empowerment Fund
- Work alongside other ward councillors and local organisations where possible on joint projects, where co-funding becomes the enabler for delivery
- If projects require resources, or ongoing commitment e.g. maintenance from a council service areas, agreement must be received in writing from the relevant service area(s) before the project is approved.

Supplementary community engagement guidance for local ward councillors in relation to the Community Empowerment Fund can be found at Appendix Two.

In addition, virtual training opportunities for elected members will be available over the summer in areas of public engagement including community involvement, coproduction and participatory budgeting, which will help inform conversations with community members in prioritising ward-level projects.

5.10 **Conclusion**

Community groups are increasingly playing a strong role in planning and delivering services that meet local needs, complementing those provided by public services. This community provision has a particular strength in developing innovative and flexible activities that are valued by local people and help to build a real sense of community pride and cohesion.

Feedback from residents through the '*Caerphilly Conversation*' resident survey has been instrumental in shaping the remit of the Community Empowerment Fund, enabling communities to feel empowered in the design of local services and the things that affect them.

It is considered that the implementation of the Community Empowerment Fund supports the principles of community empowerment, as outlined in the council's *Consultation and Engagement Framework 2020-2025*.

The Community Empowerment Fund will be reviewed after 12 months in order to review take up of the fund to date and to identify and mitigate against any emerging barriers to the scheme.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 This report has been written with the assumption that ongoing annual funding will be available to support the Community Empowerment Fund.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 A full Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed and submitted alongside the development of this report.
- 7.2 The premise of the Community Empowerment Fund is to engage with and empower residents to do more for themselves in future. Feedback from 'The Caerphilly Conversation' resident survey has been instrumental in the development of this fund; with 78% of respondents indicating they felt it is a positive idea to make a community budget available to residents. Feedback on how the funding should be spend has also been key in developing the criteria for submitting a bid.
- 7.3 As already highlighted, projects would aim to support communities to:
- Build community capacity
 - Better understand and identify their local aspirations and priorities
 - Make good use of existing assets, with the projects having the support of local communities
 - Increase active inclusion and develop opportunities for enhanced engagement for groups that are more vulnerable and harder to reach
 - Develop local assets, services and projects that respond to the needs of the people in their local communities
 - Develop projects that are capable of becoming sustainable community projects
 - Complement existing services in an area by providing additional activity

A link to the full Integrated Impact Assessment can be found at:
https://caerphilly.gov.uk/CaerphillyDocs/IIA/IIA_CommunityEmpowermentFund_June2021

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 As per section 6.1, this report was written with the assumption that ongoing annual funding will be available to support the Community Empowerment Fund from 2022/23 onwards.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The council's Policy and Partnerships Team have considerable experience of running and administering community grant initiatives. While capacity to manage the Community Empowerment Fund bids would be a relevant consideration particularly given the two-tiered approach to funding allocation (50% on approval, 50% on completion), it is thought that implementing a minimum £1,000 amount on applications to the fund would be appropriate for administering the fund within current resources.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 This report has been sent to the consultees listed below and comments received are reflected in this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Equality Act 2010 and Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. One of the specific duties covers matters of engagement.

Author: Hayley Lancaster, Senior Communications Officer
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Consultees: Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive
Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director Environment and Economy
Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Services and Housing
Cllr Philippa Marsden, Leader of the Council
Cllr Eluned Stenner, Cabinet Member Customer, Performance & Property
Cllr James Pritchard, Chair Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Gez Kirby, Vice Chair Police and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Colin Mann, Leader Plaid Cymru Group
Cllr Kevin Etheridge, Leader Independent Group
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Stephen Harris, Head of Corporate Finance / Section 151 Officer
Kathryn Peters, Corporate Policy Manager
Tina McMahon, Caerphilly Cares Manager
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer – Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation

Background papers:

Caerphilly County Borough Council Consultation and Engagement Framework 2020-2025 - [15694ConsultationandEngagementFramework.pdf \(caerphilly.gov.uk\)](#)

Findings from 'The Caerphilly Conversation' resident survey 2020/21 - [Caerphilly - Join the Caerphilly Conversation](#)

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Draft Application Criteria – Community Empowerment Fund
- Appendix 2 Draft Engagement Guidance for Members – Community Empowerment Fund
- Appendix 3 Draft Application Form – Community Empowerment Fund