



VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE DIGITAL MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Ms M. Jones (Parent Network) - Chair
Councillor Mrs E. M. Aldworth – Vice-Chair

Councillors:

A. Collis, S. Cook, K. Etheridge, J.E. Fussell, R.W. Gough, L. G. Whittle

Voluntary Sector Representatives and Compact Partners: R. Evans (Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly Care & Repair Cymru), S. Tiley, A. Palmer and G. Jones (GAVO), K. Jenkins (Groundwork Wales), L. Jones (Menter Iaith Sir Caerffili), R. Evans (Oakdale Community Centre), J. Pritchard (The Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed), D. Llewellyn (Aneurin Bevan University Health Board)

Together with:

P. Cooke (Senior Policy Officer), P. Massey (Policy Officer), S. Foley (Policy Officer), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer), M. Harris (Committee Services Support Officer)

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed and would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View.](#)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, Ms J. Gale, D. Harse, A. Higgs, Mrs T. Parry, Mrs D. Price, E. Stenner and W. Williams, together with Pobl Housing, H. Llewellyn (Town and Community Councils Representative), Gwent Police, and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 17TH JUNE 2021

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2021 be approved as a correct record and a show of hands up (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee held on 17th June 2021 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

4. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FUND - VERBAL UPDATE

Vicki Doyle (Policy Officer) delivered a presentation to the Committee, which gave a detailed overview of the Community Empowerment Fund (CRF), the criteria for the fund and funding process, the role of Elected Members in engaging with their communities regarding the Fund, and the support available to secure this funding.

The Committee were advised of feedback from the 'The Caerphilly Conversation' survey, with the majority of respondents agreeing the need for a community budget to enable communities to do more for themselves and encourage communities to take greater pride in their area. The Fund has a £328,000 annual funding allocation to support community-led initiatives that complement those provided through public services. The funding total has been divided by 73 (the number of elected members), meaning an allocation which is equivalent to £4,490 per councillor per year, which can be pooled in multi-Member wards.

The Fund aims to support communities to build capacity and better understand local priorities, make good use of existing assets, with projects having the support of local communities, increase participation among harder to reach individuals, and develop sustainable community projects. During her presentation, Mrs Doyle outlined the types of projects that can be funded and also detailed the project costs that cannot be funded by the CRF. It was noted that projects must be managed by a non-profit organisation based within Caerphilly county borough and organisations must also have a bank account in its own name.

The closing date for the first round of applications for this year's funding is 31st October 2021 and subsequent rounds will depend on the funding remaining in the relevant ward pot. Applicants will be informed of the outcome around 6-8 weeks later, depending on the number of applications. The maximum funding that can be applied for by any community group is £4,490. Groups may be offered less than the maximum amount if there are multiple applications in the same ward in a single funding round, and applications must be for a minimum amount of £1,000.

In terms of funding payment and timescales, 50% is released on approval, and the remaining 50% is released on receipt of necessary financial records to show how the amount released on project approval has been spent. All expenditure will need to be evidenced, and the Council could potentially seek to reclaim funding where evidence is not provided. All approved projects must also be completed within 18 months of approval.

Mrs Doyle outlined the significant role of Elected Members in the successful delivery of the fund, including sponsoring applications from community groups/organisations and engaging with communities and prioritising projects as required, based on identified need. It was emphasised that only those funding bids with support from Elected Members will be taken forward.

The Committee were also advised of the support that is available to the Voluntary Sector through the Caerphilly Cares service. Members were asked to note that all applications and queries in relation to Community Empowerment Funding should be directed to a centralised

email mailbox (cef@caerphilly.gov.uk), and they were encouraged to publicise this to interested parties as the main contact for the CEF. The Committee were advised that non-constituted community groups wishing to access the Community Empowerment Fund should contact the Caerphilly Cares team or the GAVO Community Development team for advice and assistance if they wish to become a constituted group. It was noted that Mrs Doyle would arrange to circulate the presentation with these contact details to the Committee following the meeting.

Following the presentation, the Committee discussed the Community Empowerment Fund in detail. One Councillor representative highlighted difficulties faced by community groups in his ward as they have no facilities to meet locally and so are having to meet outside of the ward which results in lower attendance. The Councillor also felt that the 31st October deadline was too short notice for the representatives from the 9-10 estates across his ward to arrange to meet to discuss the available funding. He also expressed concern that it is the same groups who are repeatedly receiving the same funding.

Officers explained that 31st October 2021 is the closing date for the first round and that any remaining funding can be accessed in subsequent rounds, which will be in January/February 2022. Officers acknowledged that some groups are having difficulty in meeting and suggested alternative avenues, such as virtual meetings. It was emphasised to Members that if an organisation receives funding in one year, then they will not be able to apply for funding the following year, and any funding received in subsequent years would have to be for different projects. Officers acknowledged the difficulties in setting up new groups during the pandemic but emphasised that the funding for each ward remains accessible, which can be ringfenced and carried over for one year and will then go into a general funding pot for the whole of the county borough. This will ensure that individual wards are not carrying forward large sums of money in subsequent years.

A Voluntary Sector representative asked if they could use such funding to procure security cameras for a project and if they would have to provide estimates, and if so, how many. It was confirmed that such equipment could be purchased through the Community Empowerment Fund if that was the agreement locally. In relation to costs, 2 quotes would need to be obtained if the project cost is under £5000, and 3 quotes if the total project cost is over that amount. The representative highlighted difficulty in securing 3 quotes, and Officers explained that there is a need to evidence good value for money for this funding as it is from the public purse.

A Voluntary Sector representative asked if county-wide organisations are able to submit more than one application for the funding if this is linked to different Councillors and wards. Mrs Doyle confirmed that she would have to discuss this query with her colleagues; however, the CRF is intended for local community groups at a grassroots level and they should be locally-based. Another representative also highlighted the community-led position across its organisation and referred to the support that is lent from their organisation to those smaller groups who may not be constituted or have other basic facilities in place in order to apply for funding (such as a designated bank account). It was suggested that perhaps an existing organisation in that ward could make the application on behalf of the group, but this was something that would have to be firstly discussed with Council colleagues, as the funding would be set up in a slightly different way to other community grants.

A Voluntary Sector representative asked how many CEF applications for this year had been received so far. Mrs Doyle confirmed that none have been received as yet, although forms had been sent out to organisations and also Councillors. The representative also sought clarification on underspends across the Area Forum Budget, small grants scheme and Welsh Church Fund. Mrs Doyle explained that she was unable to comment on the Area Forum Budget as this is administered by a separate Council department. Members were advised that the Welsh Church Fund and Grants to the Voluntary Sector are ongoing live budgets

open for applications. The representative cited underspend figures contained in the most recent report to the Grants to The Voluntary Sector Panel and Mrs Doyle explained that the figures would be accurate as the committee papers are in the public domain but emphasised that these figures would have been at that particular point in time when the Panel met in July and the updated position will be available at the next Panel meeting in November.

In response to a query from a Voluntary Sector representative, Mrs Doyle confirmed that the assessment panel for the CEF would comprise of Council Officers and follow an internal approval process as per other community grants. The representative also sought clarification on the role of Elected Members during the assessment process, and Mrs Doyle explained that if there were a situation where applications exceeded the funding available for that ward, Officers would discuss with the relevant Elected Member to gather their input on the local priorities.

A Voluntary Sector representative referred to the emphasis on the funding being for local grassroots groups and asked if there were avenues for larger organisations to challenge this criteria to avoid exclusion from the funding. Mrs Doyle confirmed that the funding criteria and grant management arrangements for the CEF have been approved by Cabinet, and although there is no opportunity for challenge, Cabinet have supported a review of the CEF scheme after 12 months to identify and mitigate against any emerging barriers to the scheme. It was emphasised that the Council has made the criteria as inclusive as possible so that many organisations can access the scheme and is hoped that smaller groups would look to work with the more established groups in the community in order to access the funding in that way.

Alison Palmer (GAVO) asked where CEF application forms could be obtained from. Mrs Doyle explained that applicants are asked to email the CEF inbox in the first instance so that Offices can ascertain that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria before they spending time completing the application. Mrs Palmer offered for GAVO to assist in distributing the forms and offer advice to applicants and Mrs Doyle confirmed she would be happy for GAVO to have the forms. Discussion took place around other grant schemes that could potentially be applied for alongside the CEF, and Mrs Doyle explained that there would be an expectation for CEF applicants to declare any other funding applied for, to minimise the risk of duplicate funding.

A Councillor representative asked about monitoring of project expenditure and funding clawback. Mrs Doyle provided details of the spend evidence that would be required and the reminders that would be sent out if this proof is not submitted. It was emphasised that the Council will potentially look to reclaim funding if successful applicants are unable to evidence spend, with the conditions of funding clearly set out in the application process.

Mrs Doyle was thanked for her presentation and for responding to queries, and the Committee noted the update in relation to the Community Empowerment Fund.

The Committee were advised that if they had any subsequent questions regarding the CEF, they were welcome to contact Mrs Doyle following the meeting.

5. WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT - WORKSHOP

Paul Cooke (Policy Officer) gave an overview of the Well-being Assessment, which is currently out for consultation and will cover the whole of the Gwent area due to the move from a Caerphilly Public Services Board to a Gwent Public Services Board.

However, there remains a need to understand the issues and priorities for Caerphilly residents, and so a series of consultation events are currently being undertaken across all 5

Wellbeing Plan areas. Mr Cooke emphasised the importance of gathering views and input from the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee as part of this consultation exercise.

Mr Cooke explained that it had therefore been arranged for a special consultation workshop to be held immediately following the formal meeting via the use of breakout rooms, in order to maximise discussion and contributions from participants. Mr Cooke encouraged all meeting participants to attend this workshop in order to gather views and raise Caerphilly issues for the Wellbeing Assessment which can subsequently be fed into the Wellbeing Plan.

The Committee thanked Mr Cooke and noted the update on the Wellbeing Assessment workshop.

6. ITEMS OF INTEREST CONCERNING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FROM COMPACT PARTNERS

It was noted that the representative from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board had been in attendance earlier in the meeting but had left by this point due to technical difficulties.

There were no other Compact Partners in attendance and no updates relating to items of interest were received.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and encouraged all parties to join the Wellbeing Assessment workshop immediately following the main meeting, by way of the separate Teams link provided to them beforehand.

The meeting closed at 11.38 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2021.

CHAIR