



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27TH JUNE 2023

SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT ON THE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FUND

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the operation of the Community Empowerment Fund since it was approved by Cabinet in July 2021.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report will provide a summary of the delivery of the Community Empowerment Fund following Cabinet approval in July 2021. It will detail the total funding allocated by ward in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and outline the minor changes to be made for 2023/24. It will also highlight some of the issues experienced in the delivery of the grant scheme and explain the processes for dealing with end of year underspends.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee scrutinise the contents of the report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 So that the Committee examines the delivery of the Community Empowerment Fund.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 On 21st July 2021, Cabinet considered a report on the establishment of a new Community Empowerment Fund. The report recognised that the Council's 'Team Caerphilly – Better Together' transformation strategy highlights the importance of effective community engagement, and the 'Consultation and Engagement Framework 2020-25' commits to promoting and supporting the principles of community empowerment and building resilient communities. In the Council's 2021 resident survey 'The Caerphilly Conversation', 78% of respondents to the 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 the future. 89% of respondents also agreed that offering incentives to communities would likely encourage them to take greater pride in their area.

- 5.2 In the Council's budget setting process for 2021/22, Members approved a £328,000 funding allocation to establish the Community Empowerment Fund, to support community-led initiatives that complement and support those provided by public services within the county borough. As part of the Cabinet report, it was agreed that the funding be split equally between the 73 Members (at that time) across the county borough, which equated to an amount of £4,490 per Member in the first year of operation. Therefore, wards with more Members would have a higher allocation i.e. a single member ward (e.g. Maesycwmmmer) would have an allocation of £4,490, whereas a multi-Member ward (e.g. Penyrheol) would have an allocation of £17,960 (4 x £4,490).
- 5.3 The grant scheme aims to support communities to:
- Build community capacity
 - Better understand and identify local aspirations and priorities
 - Make good use of existing assets, with projects having the support of local communities
 - Increase active inclusion and develop opportunities for enhanced engagement for groups that are more valuable and harder to reach
 - Develop local assets, services and projects that respond to the needs of people in local communities
 - Develop projects that are capable of becoming sustainable community projects
 - Complement existing services in an area by providing additional activity
- 5.4 Projects must be managed by a non-profit organisation based within the county borough e.g. a voluntary group, community organisation, charity or social enterprise. One of the key differences of this grant scheme to other Council grant schemes operated for the sector is that all projects must be 'sponsored' by one or more Members, and projects are supported from the relevant ward funding pot. Members can also choose to pool their pots to fund larger projects and can also jointly fund projects which cross ward boundaries. Therefore, the grant scheme offers a level of flexibility that is not available from other Council grant schemes. Applicants also have the option of seeking match funding from other sources and their own funds, in order to deliver their chosen projects.
- 5.5 As stated previously, 'The Caerphilly Conversation' residents' survey sought views on what the Community Empowerment Fund could be spent on and eight priority areas emerged, which formed the basis of 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 well-being
 - Activities for young people/educational activities (non-statutory)
 - Initiatives that promote and encourage community safety
 - Supporting community groups to establish
- 5.6 Following Cabinet approval to establish the grant scheme, information was published on the Council website ([Caerphilly - Caerphilly County Borough](#)) to inform potential applicants of the grant scheme criteria and how to make an application. A formal application form must be completed for each project, and applicants must seek the sponsorship of the relevant Member(s) before making an application for funding. The grant scheme was designed to have a number of application rounds per year (depending on the funding available at a ward level), with only two being held in 2021/22 due to the late approval of the grant scheme and the need to finalise the application pack and processes. The first round closed in October 2021.

- 5.7 In order to raised awareness of the fund with Members, Officers have held a series of information/awareness raising sessions for Members (both when the scheme was originally launched and following the Local Government Elections. In addition, Officers have attended community surgeries that Members have held to raise awareness of the fund with potential applicants. A communications pack containing posters and information leaflets has also been produced and there is a dedicated webpage on the Council's website with a wealth of information about the Fund Caerphilly - Caerphilly County Borough.
- 5.8 During 2021/22 a total of thirty-two applications were supported and a total of £98,461.78 funding was allocated. A list of the projects supported is included at Appendix 1. As the total budget for the year was £328,000, this meant that there was an amount remaining of £229,538 at the end of the financial year. In the original Cabinet report it was suggested that any underspends would be ringfenced at a ward level for one year – this meant that those Members and wards that had not fully allocated their funding pot during the year would have the remaining amount added to their new allocation in 2022/23.
- 5.9 As Members will be aware, the Local Government Elections were held in May 2022. This had a direct impact on the Community Empowerment Fund in the following ways:
- There were changes to the ward boundaries due to a Boundary Commission review
 - The number of Members reduced from 73 to 69
 - A number of Members did not stand in the election, so there would undoubtedly be some change in the Members representing each ward
- 5.10 Due to these changes, CMT agreed that rather than ringfencing any underspend to the relevant Members individually, any remaining funding would be pooled at a ward level and an equal amount allocated to each Member within the relevant ward, which would then be added to their new allocation in 2022/23.
- 5.11 In the Council's budget setting process for 2022/23, Members approved a £341,120 funding allocation for the Community Empowerment Fund, which was split equally between each of the 69 Members, resulting in an allocation per Member of £4,940. For those Members with an underspend from 2021/22, the underspend was added to their new allocation for 2022/23 (£4,940) to give their individual funding pot for 2022/23.
- 5.12 Whilst there was a late start to allocations in the 2022/23 financial year due to the Local Government Elections and the other changes detailed in 5.9, four application rounds were undertaken during the year and a total of 81 projects were supported and £414,784 allocated to these projects, including a number of projects across ward boundaries. A full list of approved projects is included at Appendix 2. This means that at the end of 2022/23 there was an underspend of £155,874 (£341,120 plus £229,538 2021/22 underspend, less £414,784 2022/23 allocations).
- 5.13 In the Council's budget setting process for 2023/24, Members approved a £250,000 funding allocation for the Community Empowerment Fund. In addition to this amount there is a small amount of £501.22 which has been carried forward from Member allocations in 2021/22 and 2022/23. This means that the funding pot available per Member for 2023/24 will be £3,630.
- 5.14 With regard to the 2022/23 underspend (£155,874), the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Performance have agreed that this will remain ringfenced to the individual Members that it relates to, so these Members will have additional funding available to them in 2023/24.
- 5.15 The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Performance have also undertaken a review of the grant scheme and have agreed a minor change so that from 2023/24, all community groups will be able to bid to the Community Empowerment Fund in consecutive years, but

only for a maximum of three years. However, each application should relate to a new project, as groups should not become reliant on the grant funding.

5.16 Conclusion

This report summarises the delivery of the Community Empowerment Fund since its inception in 2021/22 and details the minor changes that will be put in place from the 2023/23 financial year.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions applicable to this report. The carry forward amount for 2022/23 detailed in the report has been approved, as has the new budget for 2023/24.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An IIA was completed for the Community Empowerment Fund as part of the budget setting process for 2023/24 and a copy of this is available on this link [Community Empowerment Fund IIA](#). The IIA relates to the budget setting process for 2023/2024. Following consultation responses the budget was reduced rather than removed.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 As the carry over of £155,874 from 2022/23 has been agreed and the budget for 2023/24 (£250,000) has been approved, there are no other financial implications.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The views of consultees have been incorporated into the report as appropriate.

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.

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Background Papers:

Cabinet report – 21st July 2021

Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 21st July, 2021, 10.30 am (group.local)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Summary of CEF grants awarded in 2021/22

Appendix 2 Summary of CEF grants awarded in 2022/23