

To: Communities and Housing Board

On: 17 January 2023

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Community Empowerment Fund

1. **Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Communities and Housing Board for the award of grants from the Community Empowerment Fund.

1.2 The key objective of the fund is to support community organisations to acquire and develop community assets. The fund aims to support and develop community organisations, with a specific focus on assisting those organisations that wish to acquire and develop community assets.

1.3 No new applications were received through this round and one application previously deferred was considered, as detailed within Section 4 and Appendix 1.

2. **Recommendations**

2.1 It is recommended that the board approves the recommendations as detailed in Section 4 and Appendix 1, to award:

- £10,000 to Western Desert Recce Group to undertake an Architectural Feasibility Report and VAT Consultancy Report to inform the development of their Community Asset Transfer request for the Whitehaugh Barracks site in Paisley.
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3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 2 March 2018, Council agreed to commit £1.5million (£0.5million in revenue and £1million in capital) to establish a Community Empowerment Fund that will be used to support community asset transfers, by providing up-front investment in the condition of assets prior to transfer. It should be noted that the £1.5million represents a one-off investment fund.
- 3.2 On 20th June 2018, Leadership Board agreed the key objectives and criteria of the fund, and agreed that applications to the Community Empowerment Fund be submitted to Communities and Housing Board for final approval.
- 3.3 The key objectives of the fund are to support and develop community organisations with a specific focus on assisting those organisations that wish to acquire and develop community assets in three ways:
- **Project:** Support the development of the Business Plan for an asset
 - **Organisation:** Develop the organisational capacity to manage and develop an asset
 - **Property:** Upfront investment in assets prior to or after transfer
- 3.4 The fund is comprised of £0.5million in revenue funding and £1million in capital funding. As such, it is anticipated that revenue funding will support applications to develop the project or organisation, and the capital funding will be used to support property costs.
- 3.5 It will be important applicants to the fund are able to demonstrate the following:
- Able to demonstrate positive impact for local communities
 - The community are involved in the design and delivery of the project
 - Good working relationships and partnership with others
 - The project is financially sustainable
 - Strategic fit with the fund objectives and criteria
 - Value for money and leverage of additional funding and/or resources

3.6 The award of funding from the Community Empowerment Fund does not commit the Council to a particular outcome as part of the Asset Transfer process, which will be subject to a separate decision-making process through relevant governance arrangements.

4. **Summary of applications**

4.1 One application previously deferred was considered. The total value of requested grants through this round is £10,000.

4.2 A cross-service panel of officers has been established to review and assess the applications against the agreed objectives and criteria outlined at Section 3.2 and 3.3 of this report.

4.3 The officer recommendation is:

- To approve the application submitted by Western Desert Recce Group to undertake and Architectural Feasibility Report and a VAT Consultancy Report which will inform the development of their Community Asset Transfer request for the Whitehaugh Barracks site in Paisley.

4.4 A summary of the applications can be found at Appendix 1.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - Council approved the allocation of £1.5million to establish the Community Empowerment Fund in March 2018.

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – Not applicable

3. **Community/Council Planning** –

The Renfrewshire Community Plan 2017-2027 states “There are new opportunities for communities to use, manage or take ownership of public sector assets and also to participate in the planning and delivery of services through the Community Empowerment Act. Over the last few years, there are over a dozen examples of community groups that have taken over public sector buildings or land in Renfrewshire, and more community groups are now thinking about assets and participation requests. As a partnership, we are committed to supporting this wherever we can.”

The Renfrewshire Council Plan also has a number of relevant priorities as part of the 'Building strong, safe and resilient communities' outcome. These include:

- Strengthening existing community networks and empowering local people to become more involved in their area and the services delivered there.
- Working with communities to support the regeneration of some of our most disadvantaged areas.
- Ensuring all towns and villages in Renfrewshire are better connected and able to participate in social, cultural or economic activities across the Renfrewshire area.

4. **Legal-** The establishment of this fund supports the delivery of a number of the Council's obligations as part of the Community Empowerment Act 2015.
5. **Property/Assets** - The development of this fund will support Asset Transfer, and support the Council to meet its obligations as part of the Community Empowerment Act.
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - It is anticipated that the fund will have a positive impact on equality and human rights, and applications for the fund will be assessed to ensure they take relevant equalities implications into account.
8. **Health & Safety** – None
9. **Procurement** – None
10. **Risk** – None
11. **Privacy Impact** – None
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – None

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Organisation	Amount Requested	Purpose	Recommendation	Additional Info and/or Areas of Concern
Western Desert Recce Group	£10,000	<p>The purpose of this project is to undertake an Architectural Feasibility Report and a VAT Consultancy Report which will inform the development of our Community Asset Transfer request for the Whitehaugh Barracks, Whitehaugh Avenue, Paisley.</p> <p>The Architectural Feasibility Report will identify the necessary capital works required to renovate/refurbish the Category C listed Barracks as well as provide a breakdown of likely project costs. VAT Consultancy will review planned income and activities and provide VAT options for the project moving forward.</p> <p>A robust project budget will be required as part of any Community Asset Transfer application for the Whitehaugh Barracks site to evidence project viability and sustainability, and also to support future applications to other funding sources for grant support for the project.</p> <p>Funding has already been secured from the Architectural Heritage Fund to fund half of this stage of this project, and the group have engaged with relevant Council departments and key external partners in the development of their plans.</p>	£10,000	The Panel felt that funding would allow the group to develop the detailed costings required to support the Community Asset Transfer application.

