
To: Leadership Board

On: 4 December 2019

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Community Empowerment Fund - guidance

1. Summary

- 1.1 On 2 March 2018, Council agreed to commit £1.5m of funding to establish a fund to be used to support community organisations to realise ambitions in relation to community asset transfer.
- 1.2 Subsequently on 20 June 2018, the Leadership Board approved the funding guidance required in order to launch the new Community Empowerment Fund. It was also agreed that a cross service officer group would be established to consider all applications, and to make recommendations the Communities, Housing and Planning Board in relation to funding decisions.
- 1.3 The fund has been very successful with 17 awards to date, and £256k of funding distributed in total.
- 1.4 A pipeline of applications has been supported and developed since the initiation of the fund by the Partnerships and Inequalities team within the Chief Executive's Service.
- 1.5 During the first year of the fund's establishment, feedback has been received from a range of stakeholders on its operation, including those applicants who have been successful or unsuccessful in attracting funding. The funding guidance approved in June 2018 has now been

reviewed and is presented as Appendix 1 for approval. The updated guidance provides greater clarity on the application process and criteria, for example, where funding requests exceed limits set for applications.

- 1.6 A key element of feedback has been the need for the Fund to operate with some degree of flexibility, given the significant range of projects and initiatives which community organisations are seeking support to develop. The guidance has been updated to include specific criteria to allow applications to be considered from community organisations to develop their ideas for community ownership of an asset, where the asset is not in the Council's ownership, or is not related to Community Asset Transfer as defined by the Community Empowerment Act 2015.
- 1.7 At the Communities, Housing and Planning Board on 29 October 2019, applications from Paisley 2021 Community Trust and Active Communities were approved in principle subject to the approval of the revised guidance by the Leadership Board on 4 December 2019.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- Approve the revised guidance for the Community Empowerment Fund; and
 - Note the decision of the Communities, Housing and Planning Board to approve awards in principle to both Active Communities and Paisley 2021 Community Trust, pending the approval of revised guidance at Leadership Board.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 2 March 2018, Council agreed to commit £1.5million (£0.5mil in revenue and £1mil 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.

- 3.2 The fund was intended to develop and strengthen the Council's response to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, with a specific focus on the community asset transfer process.
- 3.3 On 20 June 2018, Leadership Board approved the key objectives of the new Community Empowerment Fund, alongside fund guidance and criteria. 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 Applicants to the fund are required to evidence:
- 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.
- 3.5 An award of funding from the Community Empowerment Fund does not commit the Council to a particular outcome as part of the Asset Transfer process. It also does not commit the Council to funding further stages of the project as it develops, which will continue to be subject to a separate decision making process through relevant governance arrangements.
- 3.6 Following submission of the application form, officers work with the applicant to develop a more detailed understanding of the project and organisation and to inform the assessment of the application. Recommendations are then developed, with the final decision on the awarding of grants made by the Communities, Housing and Planning Board.
- 3.7 The fund has been very successful with 17 awards to date, and £256k of funding distributed in total. The majority of funding applications have been applications for revenue funding to support the development of the project or organisation, and most commonly, feasibility studies on specific properties and development of elements of the business case. It was anticipated that in the early stages of the fund there would be

more applications to develop project ideas, and as these projects develop, the nature of applications to the fund will develop as well.

4. Review of fund guidance

4.1 During the first year of the fund's establishment, feedback has been received from a range of stakeholders on its operation, including those applicants who have been successful or unsuccessful in attracting funding. The funding guidance approved in June 2018 has now been reviewed and is presented as Appendix 1 for approval.

4.2 Specifically the revised guidance:

- Provides greater clarity on the application process, covering issues such as the conditions where multiple applications to the fund will be considered.
- Has greater emphasis on the importance of engaging with Council officers early and prior to the submission of an application, and further detail on the timescales for board approval.
- Makes reference to the cross-service officer panel which considers applications and develops the recommendations for Board approval.
- Makes reference to the requirement to share any commissioned reports with the Council, and potentially other community organisations where this is appropriate.
- Provides further definition of the 'exceptional circumstances' which would allow applications to be considered beyond the agreed limits for awards.
- Explicit reference to applications relating to projects to develop non-Council assets, and assets not in public ownership.

4.3 A key element of feedback has been the need for the Fund to operate with some degree of flexibility, given the significant range of projects and initiatives which community organisations are seeking support to develop. The guidance has been updated to include specific criteria to allow applications to be considered from community organisations to develop their ideas for community ownership of an asset, where the asset is not in the Council's or public ownership. This would allow applications for project development or organisational costs to be considered only.

4.4 At the Communities, Housing and Planning Board on 29 October 2019, applications from Paisley 2021 Community Trust and Active

Communities were approved in principle subject to the approval of the revised guidance by the Leadership Board on 4 December 2019.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The introduction of the Community Empowerment Fund has also provided greater insight into the experience of community organisations involved in the Community Asset Transfer process, and in particular, the actions the Council can take to support organisations undertaking this process. This will continue to be an area of focus for relevant services.

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** – none.
3. **Community Planning** – Strategic Partnership Agreements with community organisations support a drive to redefine the Council's relationships with community groups and organisations, in order to achieve shared outcomes and objectives.
4. **Legal** - none.
5. **Property/Assets** – none.
6. **Information Technology** – none.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** – none.
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – none.

- 9. **Procurement** – none.
- 10. **Risk** - none.
- 11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
- 12. **COSLA** - none.
- 13 **Climate Risk** - none

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Renfrewshire Council Community Empowerment Fund

Guidance

The Council is committed to building strong, safe and resilient communities and recognises that one of Renfrewshire's greatest assets is its thriving network of local community groups and organisations.

Community groups are increasingly playing a strong role across Scotland 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.

There is also increasing interest among community groups in becoming owners or custodians of publicly owned buildings and land through options such as community asset transfer. This is helping to ensure that we get as much productive use as possible from the assets in our communities, harnessing the ideas and capabilities of local people.

Renfrewshire Council is committed to promoting and supporting the principles of community empowerment and encouraging interest in community asset ownership and principally, community asset transfer. The Council has committed £1.5 million to establish a Community Empowerment Fund to support community groups to develop their ideas. The total funding is split £0.5 million revenue funding and £1 million capital funding.

Through the Community Empowerment Fund we particularly seek project ideas that:

- Make good use of assets and have the support of local communities.
- Are capable of being viable and sustainable community enterprises.
- Complement existing services in an area by providing additional activity.
- Fit with the aims of the Our Renfrewshire Community Plan and Renfrewshire Council Plan.

What is the purpose of the fund?

The purpose of the fund is to support community organisations to acquire and develop community assets. The fund will be able 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

The fund is designed to support the development of community organisations and build their capacity to undertake potential asset transfers. As such, it is not required that a group has already acquired an asset to apply for the Community Empowerment Fund, so groups are welcome to apply for the fund before or during the asset transfer process.

What is Community Asset Transfer?

Asset transfer is a process to allow a community organisation to take over publicly-owned land or buildings, in a way that recognises the public benefits that the community use will bring. That may be a discounted price, a grant or other support, or simply the agreement to transfer something the public authority did not plan to sell. If the land is put up for sale or lease and a community body offers the best (or the only) bid, that is just a commercial transaction.

An **asset** is something that has value to someone. In relation to "asset transfer" under the Community Empowerment Act it means land and any buildings or other structures on the land, like bridges, walls or piers. It does not include vehicles or equipment.

More information on asset transfer, including guidance for community bodies, can be found on the Scottish Government website [here](#).

While the primary purpose of the fund is to support the asset transfer of Council assets, there may be circumstances where applications will be considered for project relating to non-Council assets. This will be considered where organisations can demonstrate that an asset will be brought into community ownership, and demonstrate clear benefits for the wider community. Applications for projects seeking to acquire assets for community ownership, but not using the Community Asset Transfer process, will be considered, but this can only be for project development related costs, and applications which include a contribution to the cost of acquiring the property cannot be considered.

Who can apply?

Any constituted voluntary or community organisation can apply.

It should be noted that organisations must be 'Community Transfer Bodies' to be eligible for Community Asset Transfer. While this is not a requirement for applications to this fund, organisations should be aware of and working towards this status.

When can I apply?

The fund launched in 1st July 2018 and is now open to applications. Early engagement with the Council is always advised before submitting an application, and may help with understanding the Fund's guidance, process and timescales.

Applications will be approved by Renfrewshire Council's Communities, Housing and Planning Board. Submission of an application prior to a specific meeting of the board does not guarantee the application will be considered at the next Board.

How much can I apply for?

Grants will be considered in two categories:

- Funding applications to **develop the project or organisation**, up to a value of £10,000
- Funding applications for costs related to **property**, up to a value of £50,000

In exceptional circumstances, grants exceeding these values may be considered. This might include, but is not limited to:

- The project represents a significant capital project with a robust business case
- The organisation has been successful in leveraging in external funding to Renfrewshire
- The organisation can demonstrate extensive community engagement in support of its project, including strong relationships and partnerships in the area.
- The organisation is recognised as a key strategic partner for Renfrewshire Council, and for example, has a formal Strategic Partnership Agreement in place

Organisations can submit more than one application to the fund, where there is demonstrable progress in the development of the project since the last application. For example, an application for funding to complete a feasibility study at the early stages of a project may be followed by an application for capital costs later in the asset transfer process. Each individual application will be considered on its own merit.

What we are looking for

Projects should promote or improve economic development, regeneration, public health, social wellbeing, environmental wellbeing or reduce socio-economic inequalities in line with both the Council Plan and Community Plan priorities.

It will be important that applicants to the fund will be able to demonstrate the following:

Able to demonstrate positive impact for local communities

- You have identified the community need for your project, as well as clearly showing the changes your project will bring.
- You can clearly explain the impact your project will have for the community, and how you will know whether you have achieved change.

The community are involved in the design and delivery of the project

- You can evidence how the community are involved in the development of your idea, and supportive of your plans.
- Your plans show the community will continue to have a voice in the delivery and oversight of your project.

- You are able to demonstrate a clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, making sure that different types of people are supported and empowered to engage with your project.

Good working relationships and partnership with others

- You can demonstrate that you are able to develop and sustain good working relationships with others.
- You have a clear commitment to partnership working.

The project is viable and sustainable

- You are able to demonstrate how your project can be financially sustainable.
- Your organisation has the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver the project, or has a plan for engaging people who do
- Your organisation should have suitable governance arrangements in place for the scale of the project, and should have clear succession plans in place for the recruitment of Board members or trustees

Strategic fit with the fund objectives and criteria

- You understand how your project fits with the strategic priorities of Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership.
- Your project is complementary to existing facilities and provisions in the local area.

Value for money and leverage of additional funding and/or resources

- You are able to demonstrate value for money
- You are able to identify and secure other funding sources to support the development of your project, including the leverage of additional funding into Renfrewshire.

The information required on these issues should always be proportionate and appropriate to the scale and type of project involved. Following the submission of the application, further information may be requested in order to support the application.

If an application is successful in gaining funding for studies or reports relating to the project, organisations will be required to share these reports with the Council, and in circumstances where an Community Asset Transfer is not yet complete, the Council may request that information is shared with other community organisations where relevant.

How are the decisions made?

Applications to the Community Empowerment Fund are made on Renfrewshire Council's standard Application Form for Voluntary and Community Organisations.

Following submission of the application form, officers will work with the applicant to develop a more detailed understanding of the project and organisation and to inform the assessment of the application.

Recommendations will then be developed by a panel of Council officers from across a range of Council services, with the final decision on the awarding of grants made by Communities, Housing and Planning Board.

Applicants should note that a successful funding application to the Community Empowerment Fund to support development of a project idea is not an indication of the outcome of a subsequent asset transfer request. Each asset transfer request will be considered on its own merits.

Applications for the funding will be considered throughout the year, with approvals made by elected members on the Council's Communities, Housing and Planning Board. Deadlines for the submission of applications are available on the website, but it should be noted that submission of an application by the deadline does not guarantee that a decision will be made at the next available Board.

Please note that information is provided to the Communities, Housing and Planning Board on all applications, whether they are recommended for approval or not.

Grant conditions

All grants will be subject to Renfrewshire Council's standard Grant Conditions.

- £1,000 to less than £10,000: All grant payments will be authorised by the Council subject to satisfactory compliance procedures outlined in the Grant Conditions and subject to scrutiny of any grants claims and receipts/invoices by the Council. Once agreed all grant payments will normally be made in one or two instalments at the Council's discretion.
- £10,000 or more: All grant payments will be authorised by the Council subject to satisfactory compliance with the bookkeeping and accounts procedures outlined in the Grant Conditions and subject to scrutiny of any grants claims and receipts/invoices by the Council. Once agreed, a schedule of grant payment will be agreed and may be paid in advance at the Council's discretion.

Please note: Grants are made payable to applicant organisations or individuals detailed in the main application form. Grants awards are not transferrable to other organisations or entities.

Attachments to your application

Organisations and Groups should provide supporting evidence as follows:

- Bank Statement less than three months old.
- Copy of your most recent Annual Accounts or Income and Expenditure Statement. These should be less than 15 months old, dated and signed as approved. (you may provide a link to OSCR/Companies House submitted file)
- New organisations should submit estimates of income and expenditure for the first 12 months
- A signed, dated copy of the organisation's Constitution or Memorandum and Articles of Association. (you may provide a link to OSCR/Companies House submitted file)

- Any other relevant reports or information to support your application such as supporting evidence (including media coverage, press cuttings, images, past publicity materials, reviews and letters of support) (PDF's preferred)

What other support is available?

Advice and support for applicants will be available from Renfrewshire Council Chief Executive's Service, who can also signpost to specialist advice as required on different aspects of community asset transfer and development of community organisations.

Early discussions regarding development of projects is strongly advised.

Who do I need to contact?

Telephone: 0141 618 7408

Enquiries email: communityplanning@renfrewshire.gov.uk

Completed applications should be emailed to: rcgrantapplications@renfrewshire.gov.uk

By Post: Grant Applications, Community Empowerment Fund, Renfrewshire Council, Cotton Street, Paisley PA1 1JD

Useful links

Community asset transfer strategy and guidance

<http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/article/6265/Our-Renfrewshire-community-plan-2017---2027>

Our Renfrewshire Community Plan

<http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/article/6265/Our-Renfrewshire-community-plan-2017---2027>

Renfrewshire Council Plan

<http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/ourplan>