
To: Communities, Housing and Planning Board

On: 26th October 2021

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Community Empowerment Fund

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Communities, Housing and Planning Board for the award of grants in the sixteenth round of the Community Empowerment Fund. The key objective of the fund is to support community organisations to acquire and develop community assets.
- 1.2 One new application was received through this round and two deferred applications were also considered in this round by the officer Grant Approval Panel.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the board:
- Approves the recommendations as detailed in Section 4 and Appendix 1 to award £50,000 to Thorn Athletic Community Trust to upgrade facilities at the McMaster Sports Centre in Johnstone.

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 to 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, Housing and Planning 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. The total value of awards from the Community Empowerment Fund to date is £538,835.
- 3.5 It is important that 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 new application was received by the deadline date set for applications and two applications have been previously deferred. The total value of requested grants through the sixteenth round is £200,000.
- 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 an award of £50,000 to Thorn Athletic Community Trust to upgrade facilities at the McMaster Sports Centre in Johnstone. The Panel felt that the funding would allow Thorn Athletic Community Trust to progress their long-term aspirations by pursuing Community Asset Transfer, and the recommendation is based on the wider community benefits the group seeks to deliver.
- 4.4 A summary of the application 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

(a) Background Paper 1 – None

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Appendix 1: Community Empowerment Fund – Round Sixteen – Recommendations for award

Applicant	Project description	Requested	Recommendation	Reason	Geographical Area
Thorn Athletic Community Trust	<p>The group are interested in pursuing a CAT for the former McMaster Sports Centre in Johnstone. They currently have a lease until 2052 for the facility. The facility consists of an indoor sports hall and toilets/changing facilities and a community sports pitch. The group have successfully operated the facility since 2011 to provide a variety of affordable and sustainable sport and recreational activities to the wider community.</p> <p>The group are now looking at development opportunities for the organisation in a post COVID era recognising an emphasis needs to be on outdoor activity due to the limitations of indoor activities and the restraints this poses to the group's revenue.</p> <p>The pitches require upgrading to enable to the group to develop a feasible social enterprise that would involve letting the pitch space to other community organisations.</p>	£50,000	£50,000	<p>The Panel felt that the funding would allow Thorn Athletic Community Trust to progress their long-term aspirations by pursuing Community Asset Transfer, and the recommendation is based on the wider community benefits the group seeks to deliver.</p> <p>This application was deferred by the Grants Approval Panel to allow for further information to be provided. This information has now been provided to the Panel's satisfaction.</p>	Johnstone