

To: Communities, Housing and Planning Board

On: 18th May 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 fourteenth 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 one deferred application was also considered in this round by the officer Grant Approval Panel. The next deadline for applications is 11th July 2021.
- 1.3 Subsequent to the closure of the fourteenth round, an additional funding request to the Community Empowerment Fund of £15,600 was received from Paisley Community Trust, in relation to the Paisley cinema project. Further information in relation to this request is provided in Section 4 for consideration by elected members.
- 1.4 An update on the progress of the Community Empowerment Fund is also detailed at section 5 of the report, along with case studies from previous Community Empowerment Fund awards.
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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 Friends of Howwood Park in relation to the development of a pavilion for community purposes;
- Considers the request from Paisley Community Trust for additional funding of £15,600 to be awarded from the Community Empowerment Fund to support the organisation to meet the requirements of an application for external funding; and;
- Agree that any additional funding awarded to Paisley Community Trust, is subject to conditions set out in section 4.7 of this report.

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 the 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.

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 within this round, and one application was previously deferred. The total value of requested grants through the fourteenth round is £150,000.

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 a partial award of £50,000 for Friends of Howwood Park for the refurbishment of the pavilion located in Howwood Park.
- To defer the application from Thorn Athletics Club to seek further information and clarification on this application.

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

4.5 In addition, a recent request has been received from Paisley Community Trust (PCT) for the board to consider an award of £15,600 to support plans to bring cinema to Paisley High Street. Members of the Board will be aware that two separate funding applications to the Community Empowerment Fund by PCT have been approved by the Communities, Housing and Planning Board. Specifically, awards of

£10,000 (August 2018) and £6,760 (October 2019), were approved to support a feasibility study and resulting business plan in relation to the cinema project.

- 4.6 In early May 2021, PCT requested additional funding to support the organisation to meet the requirements of an external funding application which is time limited in nature. Due to the deadline associated with this capital funding stream, an application to the Community Empowerment Fund within the fourteenth round was not possible, and an application to the next round would be beyond the application deadline.
- 4.7 Members of the board are asked to consider the funding request from Paisley Community Trust for an additional award of £15,600 from the Community Empowerment Fund. Should this be approved it is recommended that the following conditions are applied to the award:
- i) PCT will retrospectively submit all application and grant documentation required through the Community Empowerment Fund process; and
 - ii) The award of £15,600 funding is granted to support the submission of the external funding application being progressed by Paisley Community Trust only, and is therefore subject to that application proceeding.
- 4.8 Applications for revenue funding from the Community Empowerment Fund are accepted up to a level of £10,000, with applications for funding above this value permitted under the fund guidance within exceptional circumstances, including to support projects which have the potential to lever in significant levels of external funding to Renfrewshire.

5. Community Empowerment Fund Progress

- 5.1 The Community Empowerment Fund was launched in 2018, and since then it has supported 21 groups to explore and progress Community Asset Transfers with total funding of £473,235 awarded. £145,185 of revenue funding has been awarded, and £328,050 of capital funding.
- 5.2 Officers have been undertaking a review of the Community Empowerment Fund, to identify learning and explore ways to improve the operation of the fund and support the aspirations of local groups.
- 5.3 Community Asset Transfers are, by their nature, a long-term commitment for any organisation and as such the nature of projects

involved asset transfer are often developed and delivered over a number of years between their inception and finalisation.

5.4 As such, officers have been in touch with all recipients of Community Empowerment Funding since the beginning of the fund to get a current view of the development of their projects, and the impact of the funding they received.

5.5 A summary of some of the key points raised are below:

- There is a positive reception of the fund amongst recipients, with many groups saying their project would not have happened without the funding
- For a number of projects, the Community Empowerment Fund award had enabled them to lever in external funding to their project and to Renfrewshire
- Some projects have also received an initial revenue award from the fund (for feasibility work or business case development), and then had follow up capital awards as the project has progressed
- In some cases, the scope of the projects have changed as they have developed, or the funding has demonstrated that particular premises aren't viable and avoided groups taking on significant liabilities

5.6 Three case studies demonstrating different awards from the Community Empowerment Fund are provided below.

Case Study 1: Active Communities, Community Health Hub at Johnstone Police Station

- Active Communities received a £10,000 award from the Community Empowerment Fund in 2018 to allow them to undertake business planning around establishing a community health hub in the former Johnstone Police Station. In late 2019, Active Communities received a £100,000 award of capital funding for the Police Station for the fit out of the premises. Active Communities have now secured the full funding package required for this project from a range of external funders and are currently on track to complete the facility later in 2021. There is now a Strategic Partnership Agreement in place with Active Communities which outlines how the two organisations will work together moving forward to support the community.
- “The Community Empowerment Fund was our first successful funding bid and saw our dream become a reality.”

Case Study 2: Friends of Howwood Park, Howwood Park Pavilion

- Friends of Howwood Park received a £10,000 award from the Community Empowerment Fund to explore the feasibility of a Community Asset Transfer of the pavilion within the park, which is currently derelict. The group had their Community Asset Transfer agreed earlier in 2020, and have applied for further capital funding from the Community Empowerment Fund, as well as other external funders.
- “The impact this funding has made has been huge. If this funding had not been available, we would not have taken this project forward.”

Case Study 3: Spateston Tenants and Residents Association

- Spateston Tenants and Residents Association received a £9,650 award for a business plan and community consultation. Initially, the group were interested in the Spateston Nursery building, but the feasibility work enabled the group to realise that this was not a viable option. The group are now continuing their business planning, and are progressing their interest in an alternative piece of land.
- “Without this funding we would have foolishly taken on what appeared to be an asset to the community and ended up going out of business within the same year. The asset was in reality a massive liability to us and our community. The remedial work, not work we wanted to do, was forecast to cost over £480,000.”

5.7 In addition to making improvements to the Community Empowerment Fund processes, the learning from organisations has been a valuable insight into local groups’ experiences of Community Asset Transfer which will inform ongoing work under the Developing Communities workstream of Right for Renfrewshire. This will incorporate the experience of groups throughout the entire Community Asset Transfer journey from the initial idea phase, through to the ongoing management of a Community Asset. Consideration will also be given to how the Community Empowerment Fund can best support groups to achieve their ambitions around Community Asset Transfer moving forward.

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

List of Background Papers

- (a) Background Paper 1 – None

Author: Annabelle Armstrong-Walter, Strategic Partnerships and Inequalities Manager, 0141 618 5968