

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

29 JUNE 2018

REPORT OF THE SECTION 151 OFFICER

COMMUNITY ACTION FUND 2017-18 UPDATE

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update in respect of the use of the Community Action Fund (CAF) approved by Cabinet on 05 September 2017.

2. Connection to corporate improvement objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:

- Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
- Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
- Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

3.1 The 2017-2021 Medium Term Financial Strategy which was approved by Council on 1st March 2017 included a new budget of £285,000 for the creation of a Community Action Fund. The broad aims of the fund were to create opportunities for localised intervention by members within their own ward to the benefit of the community. It was hoped to broaden the impact which council funding can have on individual communities and provide a funding source which Elected Members can individually use to directly benefit their local ward.

3.2 The Community Action Fund scheme was designed with the aim of minimising administrative costs and placing responsibility for the eligibility of payments with individual Elected Members. Further assurance would then be provided through public accountability which included the reporting of payments on the Council's website and to the Audit Committee. The Council's internal audit function would undertake periodic sample based compliance testing to provide additional assurance.

- 3.3 Elected Members have significant discretion over how the money has been used with the overarching caveat that expenditure must be lawful and it must not contravene council policy. Similarly, funding should not be awarded to profit making organisations or for political purposes. It should not be used for expenditure that is recurring and would necessitate future funds.
- 3.4 Elected Members are required to attend mandatory training before they are able to submit applications for payment to ensure that the scheme operated smoothly, that administration costs and enquiries were kept to a minimum, and Members were able to comply with the conditions of the scheme and self regulate.
- 3.5 It was anticipated that some members would wish to use their allocation to fund works or services which the council would itself carry out, additional to existing provision. In such cases, members were encouraged to discuss proposals at an early stage with officers in order to consider whether these were able to be accommodated. It was recognised that it may not be possible to practically or economically accommodate all requests and therefore Elected Members were notified that the relevant Corporate Director retained the right to refuse such work.
- 3.6 On 5 September 2018 Cabinet approved the implementation of the Community Action Fund scheme as outlined in **Appendix 1**.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 Following approval of the Community Action Fund proposals by Cabinet, two training sessions were arranged in October 2017 with an additional two sessions being subsequently provided to ensure that all Elected Members attended the necessary training before being able to submit a funding request.
- 4.2 It was agreed that from 16 October 2017 funding requests could be submitted and that due to the delay in the implementation of the scheme, the funding allocated for the Community Action Fund would be rolled over into the subsequent financial year. Funding requests received after 19 October 2018 would not be considered and any unspent funding would be return to the corporate reserve.
- 4.3 Between 16 Oct 2017 and 21 June 2018 a total of £77,198.96 (28.59%) of the available £270,000 was provided from the Community Action Fund budget to fund 27 projects across the County Borough. Some Elected Members worked together to collectively fund 5 projects which provided a shared benefit to their wards.
- 4.4 Almost half of the Elected Members who submitted funding applications provided funding to more than one project.

No of Projects	No of Councillors
1	14
2	8
3	4
4	1

- 4.5 Although the minimum level for funding requests was established at £500, Elected

Members used their allocation to fund projects of different amounts:

Expenditure in £	No of Councillors
Up to 1000	8
1001 – 2000	5
2001 – 3000	6
3001 – 4000	2
4001 – 5000	10

4.6 Elected Members used their funding for a variety of projects including:

- funding of school equipment,
- activities for young people i.e. scooter clubs,
- purchase of equipment for schools/community groups,
- environmental improvements and memorial garden,
- refurbishment work and
- safer routes to school

A full list of projects, Elected Members, wards and values is shown at **Appendix 2**. It is proposed that this Appendix will provide the data that will be included on the Community Action Fund webpage.

4.7 It should be noted that by 04 June 2018 a total of 27 (50%) Elected Members have not used any of their allocated funding.

4.8 From the initial allocation of administrative support funding only £123 has currently been used for Welsh translations for the Community Action Fund Web page on the BCBC website. The anticipated initial surge of applications has not materialised and therefore no additional administrative staff have been needed to deal with the existing workload. However, significant officer time has been incurred particularly by the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer in respect of determining and advising on the appropriate use of the scheme and clarification of the financial and governance arrangements of grant applications and payment requests. This position will be kept under review in the next few months.

4.9 Feedback from Officers

4.9.1 The administration team used the checklist contained within the Payment Request form to ensure that each application met the criteria for payment. Difficulties were experienced with:

- incomplete forms or forms which lacked sufficient detail,
- clarification of declarations of interest,
- additional confirmation of how funding would be used,
- bank statements not being included with the submission,
- 3 quotes not being provided when the request for funding was over £1000; and additional advice required from S151 and the Monitoring Officer amongst others to progress a funding request.

4.10. Feedback from Elected Members

4.10.1 Ten Elected Members responded to the initial query regarding their experience of the scheme and any outcomes that have been achieved as a result of the funding being provided.

4.10.2 The following positive outcomes from the scheme were identified by Elected Members:

- a) After spending £1,000 of his Community Action Fund on a traffic survey for safe routes to school the Welsh Government agreed to provide £450,000 of funding for the safe routes to Newton Primary School.
- b) After using their entire Community Action Fund to one very rather large refurbishment project which will ensure that community resources will continue to be accessed by all in much more comfortable surroundings and which will be accessible to all.
- c) One Elected Member identified the benefits that can be achieved when organisations work together with their councillor to support their local communities.
- d) It has brought Elected members closer to community groups and delivered projects which without the funding would not be delivered.
- e) “The major part of my fund has supported a new kitchen at our local community centre, which serves my ward and neighbouring ones. This centre was set up by local volunteers in the 1950s, and has been self funding ever since, making none of the demands on council resources that other community centres make - thus preceding our Community Asset Transfer (CAT). policy by about 60 years. Their old kitchen was condemned, on grounds of both health and building regulations, and this could have threatened the viability of the whole centre. It was very fortunate that the CAF was available for this purpose”.
- f) “I believe that the C.A.F. has empowered ward councillors, and enabled them to work together across ward boundaries, and indeed across political party lines. I have been pleased to support projects jointly with other Councillors”.
- g) “I had positive reaction from all three of people who approached me. I awarded the money to organisations in my ward to provide for arts/cultural purposes, wellbeing for young disabled adults and wellbeing for over 55s. The latter was a collaboration between different ward councillors in different political parties which worked well”.
- h) “I have found the scheme successful for a number of community organisations in my community who have benefited from the fund and it has made a big difference for them with the financial assistance provided. I initially was sceptical but I believe the scheme and the fund has merits that outweigh the scepticism”.

4.10.3 The following concerns regarding the scheme were identified by Elected Members:

- a) "the process especially submission of the digital forms is not straight forward and I know has put a number of councillors off progressing matters. I think completion/submission of forms could be simplified".
- b) "The uses for the funding needs further consideration. In my ward there is little demand for club/group support but more the need for grass cutting/pot hole filling, buses, which falls outside the remit of the scheme".
- c) "I have found the experience of applying for the funding good once you understand the process, it is advisable to check the guidelines before submitting the application and checking that all the documents are enclosed".
- d) "I believe that some councillors have found the process very hard in as much as the work that it has created. I also believe that officers have found the work that it has created overwhelming".
- e) "I have to admit I haven't been able to 'spend' my allocation as I'm dealing with BCBC & everything takes an absolute age. In fact I'm concerned now that if things don't happen soon that the money will be lost".
- f) "I don't feel it was well advertised by the local authority or that it allowed the freedom to be as effective as some members hoped".
- g) "I feel that in times of increasing strain felt from Welsh Government funding settlements to local authorities, that this money could have been better used strategically as part of a larger budget".
- h) "From my perspective, it has been difficult to get voluntary organisations and town/community councils in my patch to apply for the fund. Time is going on and I am yet to receive a single application. It may be better if the fund is to continue for individual borough councillors to work with officers to take forward a project(s) of their choice in consultation with members of the public. I fear that much of the money will go unspent and return to central coffers so perhaps the design of the fund will have to be tweaked if it is to be a success in the future".

4.11 It is proposed that a full review of the Community Action fund be undertaken following the end of the current phase of funding with the intention of considering whether the scheme:

- created opportunities for localised intervention by Elected Members which would benefit their communities,
- broaden the impact which council funding can have on individual communities,

- minimised the administrative support needed for the effective operation of the scheme,
- provided effective use of the Council's resources.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no effect on the policy framework and procedures rules

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with 5 ways of working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The following is a summary to show how the 5 ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been used to formulate the recommendations within this report:

- Long-term - The intention of the Community Action Fund is to provide financial support for the implementation of projects which are forward looking. The provision of one off expenditure is expected to deliver a clear and demonstrable benefit to the local community within the Councillor's electoral ward.
- Prevention - The scheme is intended to provide low levels of funding for projects which meet the specific needs of the communities within the Elected Members ward. The reduction in the administrative burden of the scheme is intended to ensure that costs are minimised and to provide the funding quickly and effectively to where it is needed the most.
- Integration - The effective use of the Community Action Fund supports all of the wellbeing objectives.
- Collaboration - Following the roll out of the Scheme the Head of Democratic Services requested the views of all Elected Members regarding the process and outcomes of the Scheme for inclusion in this report. Officers were also consulted to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the administrative processes of the scheme.
- Involvement - All Elected Members have undertaken the training in the use of the scheme and are able to engage with representatives of their community to identify suitable projects which may benefit from the available funding to provide long term benefits.

8. Financial implications

8.1 An initial budget allocation was made for the Community Action Fund from the 2017-18 Revenue Budget. Due to its delayed implementation the funding is being held as a reserve until 19 October 2018. Any unallocated funding on that date will be returned to the Corporate Reserve.

8.2 A further allocation for the Community Action Fund has been provided for in the 2018-19 Revenue budget. However, this funding will not be made available until a full review of the process has been undertaken and effectiveness of the scheme has been evaluated.

9. Recommendation

9.1 The Audit Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of the report;
- b) Note the publication of the Community Action Fund information as shown in **Appendix 2**;
- c) Note that a full review of the Community Action Fund will be undertaken following the end of the current phase of funding as stated in paragraph 4.11 above.

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Background documents: None