

Recommendations of the Grant Working Party: 24 June 2020 - Overview of Community Chest 2020/2021 and proposed changes to the 2021/2022 scheme; and Locality Budgets 2019/2020

Report No:	CAB/WS/20/044	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	21 July 2020
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Decisions Plan: The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendations: It is recommended that due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Community Chest: 2020/2021

- 1. In these exceptional circumstances, the £3,500 allocation of Community Chest funding in 2020/2021 to Our Special Friends now be used to pay core costs for one year only, as detailed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of Report No: CAB/WS/20/044;**
- 2. the following nine organisations that received Community Chest funding in 2020/2021, be given an extension to fulfil the outcomes and outputs of their projects which were committed to as part of the award for 2020/21, as set out in paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8:**
 - a. Bury Drop in**
 - b. Haverhill Community Trust**
 - c. The Befriending Scheme**
 - d. Second Chances Support Group**
 - e. Suffolk Mind**
 - f. Bury Theatre**
 - g. Turner Hall**
 - h. Newmarket Day Centre**
 - i. The Erskine Centre**
- 3. The ways in which some organisations have adapted their approach in response to COVID-19 in order to continue to offer a service be noted, as set out in section 4 of Report No: CAB/WS/20/044.**

Community Chest: 2021/2022

- 4. The amended timeframe for applicants and decision-making process, as set out in paragraph 5.2 of Report No: CAB/WS/20/044, be noted to allow applications to be submitted by a deadline of 30 October instead of the usual 30 September; and**
- 5. the proposed revised guidance for applicants to Community Chest in 2021/2022, as contained in Appendix A to Report No: CAB/WS/20/000, be approved for the reasons set out in paragraph 5.3.**



Councillor Locality Budget Scheme: 2020/2021

- 6. In these exceptional circumstances, the Council's Councillor Locality Budget Guidance be amended to enable projects awarded funding in 2019/20 and the early part of 2020/2021 to be completed beyond the current deadline, which currently required funding to be spent within a 12-month period, as detailed in paragraph 6.1 of Report No: CAB/WS/20/044.**



1. Background / Context

- 1.1 Community Chest funding supports many voluntary and community organisations each year. These organisations make a contribution towards improving the quality of life for our residents in West Suffolk. All funded activities help deliver the Families and Communities approach.
- 1.2 In January 2020, Cabinet agreed with the recommendations of the Grant Working Party and financially supported 22 organisations for 2020/2021. Money was paid to the recipients in April 2020. This included second-year agreements paid to nine organisations to the value of £109,177 and the 17 allocations made for 2020/2021, totalling £357,540. Overall Community Chest commitments valued at £466,717 were awarded by Cabinet for this financial year. The Working Party was reminded of the specific grants that had been awarded for 2020/2021, which was contained in Appendix 2 of its report.
- 1.3 Each July the Council launches Community Chest funding applications for consideration. Applications close in September each year and are considered by Grant Working Party and Cabinet before being awarded for the following financial year. It is therefore important that, in light of COVID-19, we review the process for this year and ask Cabinet to make any necessary changes so that organisations have the capacity to apply for funding whilst managing the crisis situation.
- 1.4 The Families and Communities team has considered the current situation based on the outcomes of the Community Action Suffolk survey of Voluntary and Community Sector Groups as well as direct contact with those organisations who were awarded funding this financial year.

2. Impact of COVID-19

- 2.1 The current climate for our voluntary and community sector is challenging. As such, every single organisation we work with has had the opportunity and will continue to have the opportunity to work with us and the Suffolk Collaborative, so we can best support them through this difficult time.
- 2.2 Following the release of the Community Action Suffolk COVID-19 Impact Survey ([Appendix 1](#)), clear headline data emerged regarding the critical nature of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) sector across Suffolk. The report recognises that many organisations are having to make some difficult decisions about the services they offer and how they can continue to operate in the future. The headline data is as follows:
 - 35% do not have a reserve policy
 - 30% if not supported are unlikely to survive beyond six months
 - 73% do not have a Business Resilience or Continuity Plan
 - Most are challenged by IT and technology
 - 75% need just under £5,000 income per month to survive
 - 34% plan to access grants/schemes available
 - Support being requested around employment rights during Covid.
 - Support with cashflows identified as a theme
 - 45% of respondents wanted help with volunteer recruitment.

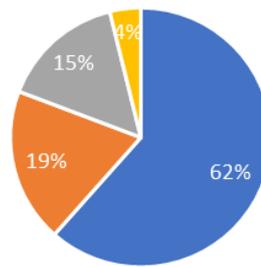
- 2.3 Note: The Community Action Suffolk COVID-19 Impact Survey conducted between 31 March 2020 and 5 April 2020 and had 176 responses, of which West Suffolk made up 32% of the returns. West Suffolk Council is an active member of the Suffolk Funders' Network and is working very closely with partners to coordinate the funding approach to best support our VCSE sector. Suffolk Funders Network have offered the following to the VCSE: funding surgeries; webinar sessions through pro-help professional business services; online VCSE resources guides; and comprehensive list COVID-19 emergency funds. They have also been involved in the COVID-19 Impact Survey for data collection. The network has positive representation from Suffolk Community Foundation, Community Action Suffolk, The Local Enterprise Partnership, The National Lottery Suffolk County Council External Funding Team, Suffolk County Council and the districts and boroughs.
- 2.4 At the start of this crisis the Families and Communities team proactively made contact with all of our Community Chest funded organisations, along with other organisations which support our communities. We have provided them with support, guidance and signposted to additional funding resources where needed. In addition, we have linked them into the wider work we have been undertaking around new volunteering opportunities, safeguarding and working differently. We have maintained regular contact and will continue to do so through frequent calls to touch base as the situation is ever changing.

3. Outcomes from our engagement

- 3.1 Every organisation we have funded with Community Chest this year has received a reassuring call where their current situation has been discussed.
- 3.2 When calling each organisation, we wanted to establish the following:
- How the organisation has adapted to the COVID-19 situation
 - What impact COVID-19 will have on the delivery of the Community Chest funded project and other projects that support our residents.
 - Any organisational concerns as a result of COVID-19, for example, job retention scheme/furlough, Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) business loan etc.
 - If any additional funding support is required
- 3.3 Below is a graph which shows the current status for the Community Chest funded organisations. 81% of organisations are confident in being able to deliver the original outcomes and outputs which were agreed as part of the Community Chest funding, but through different means.



Community Chest Projects - current status



- Continuing and have adapted processes to meet outcomes and outputs
- Working on adaptations, but will need a small extension on reporting outcomes and outputs
- Pausing the project and will restart when restrictions are reviewed
- Cannot continue with project and would like to use funds for something else

- 3.4 It was clear from many of the conversations had, that organisations needed to think creatively in order to support residents and fulfil their project brief.
- 3.5 Only 15% of organisations have paused their projects but have every intention of working with us to find a practical and safe way to deliver their projects, once further clarity is provided by Government on the next phase. This leaves one organisation feeling unable to fulfil the project to which they originally committed, this being Our Special Friends (OSF) which was awarded £3,500 for an Animal Companionship Practitioner. They have requested the Community Chest funding be used to pay core costs, so they can survive this challenging time and continue with the support they currently offer. The Grant Working Party considered this change of use of funding and has made a recommendation to Cabinet, as set out above.
- 3.6 The Working Party considered it appropriate to recommend that the funding be allocated towards funding OSF's core costs for one year only as it recognised these were exceptional circumstances. Emphasis was placed on not setting a precedent for funding core costs and whilst the scheme was flexible, the principal purpose of Community Chest was to provide funding towards specific projects.
- 3.7 From the initial discussions it is clear that the following nine organisations are going to require a moderate extension of time to achieve the outcomes and outputs to which they originally agreed.
- Bury Drop In
 - Haverhill Community Trust
 - The Befriending Scheme
 - Second Chances Support Group
 - Suffolk Mind
 - Bury Theatre
 - Turner Hall
 - Newmarket Day Centre
 - The Erskine Centre
- 3.8 Given the current circumstance the Working Party considered it was reasonable to honour this. The Council would still expect quarterly

performance returns and would continue to have open dialogue to offer support. Members also considered that an interim update on progress of the above organisations' projects should be presented to the Working Party in January 2021; however, it was acknowledged that some projects may take more than a year to complete given the difficulties and challenges currently faced.

- 3.9 All organisations have been supported by the Families and Communities Team. Detailed conversations regarding additional funding support has been had with all. Along with the offer of one to one funding surgeries. All organisations have been linked in with the funding support package that is being offered through Community Action Suffolk.

4. Examples of changed working practices

- 4.1 It is encouraging to see how many organisations have adapted their work practices to continue delivering their services. Many of these changes will ensure that they will be able to support residents, even if social distancing measures need to remain for many months to come.
- 4.2 Examples of changes include IT solutions for 1:1 counselling; introduction of protective screens and Public Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff and volunteers; and introduction of digital platforms to engage with residents. Some organisations are already thinking about the wider impact across communities and what recovery could look like. Below are some positive examples of changes made by some of the organisations we are supporting:
- 4.2.1 **Steel Bones** are now providing online support through email, social media, zoom and telephone support. They would normally carry out home visits but due to social distancing and shielding measures they have invested in a different way to engage with their service users. All events they have put on hold until September, but service users can access their Fitness Club online.
- 4.2.2 **Gatehouse** have a multi-purpose hub providing support to many aspects of our communities across West Suffolk. Funding was provided to support different classes and support for their service-users living with dementia. They have developed online mindfulness classes for dementia services users, carers and family members. This has been received well by their service users. Additionally, they have been providing telephone support, food parcels and coordinating hot food delivery for those who need it. They have received funding through Suffolk Community Foundation to enable to food element of this project.
- 4.2.3 **Citizens Advice West Suffolk** have purchased Web Ex IT to enable a continuous service for residents in need across west Suffolk. They have been able to continue providing information, advice and guidance across the area.
- 4.2.4 **Newmarket Day Centre** is currently closed due to the social distancing restrictions. However, the centre continues to offer a hot food for service users and has increased its provision, using the Community Chest funding. They have been working in partnership with others in the town to meet the demand, due to the lockdown. They have had additional support through the



locality budget and Newmarket Town Council. They were originally supporting a cohort of 16 service users receiving weekly hot meals, they are now supporting 102 people weekly.

5. Considerations for the next round of Community Chest (2021/2022)

- 5.1 In light of the challenges posed by COVID-19 we need to consider whether this remains to be the best process for our voluntary and community sector and the Council when launching Community Chest for 2021/2022.
- 5.2 The biggest challenge for potential applicants is the changing landscape due to COVID-19, resulting in many unknowns for the future. One way we could help would be to change the application submission time, hopefully allowing time for further clarity and stability around recovery. Giving the voluntary and community sector the opportunity to establish their priorities and next steps for the following financial year, officers suggested to the Working Party that the closing date is moved from 30 September 2020 to 30 October 2020. This would of course mean the usual decision making process would need to be delayed slightly with final Cabinet approval being sought in February 2021 rather than January. The Working Party considered the two timelines for decision making, which were presented within their Appendix 3 and agreed that a slight delay to the application submission time was prudent in the current circumstances. The effect on the decision-making process for the Community Chest applications for 2021/2022 to be considered would therefore be:

Grant Working Party Meeting (non-public) 1: 16 December 2020

Grant Working Party Meeting (non-public) 2: 5 January 2021

Grant Working Party Meeting 3 (if required) (non-public): 13 January 2021

Recommendations of the Working Party to Cabinet (public): 9 February 2021

Decisions take effect following expiry of call-in period: 19 February 2021

- 5.3 The guidance has been reviewed in light of COVID-19 and the Working Party considered it sensible to remove section 3.3, point 19 of the existing guidance, which states core funding is not usually supported through Community Chest. As outlined above, some organisations are struggling financially during this period, so it would be beneficial for many to broaden the core funding element for the 2021/2022 financial year only. Many of our voluntary and community sector are the backbone to preventative support for our residents, so the Working Party considered it prudent to support these organisations through this challenging climate. The proposed revised version of the guidance is attached to this report as Appendix A.
- 5.4 The Cabinet has already committed £10,000 to Reach and £5,000 to Relate for the next financial year. This leaves £307,500 remaining to be allocated in the Community Chest 2021/2022 round.

6. Locality Budgets 2019/2020

- 6.1 169 projects have been supported by locality budget funding within West Suffolk in 2019/2020; however, 72 of these have been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. The Council's current Councillor Locality Budget



Guidance states that the funding needs to be spent within a 12-month period; however, it is clear that the 72 projects that have been delayed will potentially require additional time to complete. The Working Party considered that in these exceptional circumstances, it was prudent to extend the current deadline for those already funded beyond the 12-month period. Project organisers would be given the option to return the funds if they feel unable to spend it as intended, which would result in this funding being allocated back into the Council's central grant budget.

- 6.2 The Working Party has therefore made a recommendation to Cabinet to address the matter detailed above, which is set out on page 2 of this report.

7. Alternative options

- 7.1 The Council could choose not to provide any grant funding; however, it is recognised that some support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) is required. The Community Chest also enables the Council to commission services to support the delivery of its priorities. By making these slight adjustments, the Council can continue to provide additional support in these exceptional circumstances where COVID-19 has had an impact on those organisations within the Sector.

8. Consultation and engagement

- 8.1 See section 3 above. The Grant Working Party considered the engagement that had proactively been taken by the Families and Communities Team, which assisted in the making of their recommendations.

9. Risks

- 9.1 Organisations are not aware of our approach to grants and the proposed changes to the scheme in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to support those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which equates to a medium risk. Control – to implement a wide-ranging communication plan.
- 9.2 Some organisations may end up in financial crisis due revenue streams being affected as a result of COVID-19. This could result in future challenges around staffing, delivery and in some cases even survival. Naturally this could mean that projects we have funded could cease. This is a medium risk. Control – Families and Communities Team to continue working closely with our VCSE organisations, linking them into support within the Suffolk system.
- 9.3 Due to control measures in place to control COVID-19 organisations have needed to think creatively about how they continue with their service. In some cases this has been possible, whereas others need further relaxation of the control measures to enable them to fulfil their intended outcomes and outputs. This is a medium risk. Control – regular monitoring by the Families and Communities Team. In addition, all grant agreements require quarterly reporting, so progress can be tracked. Any concerns and or changes can be raised for the Grant Working Party's consideration.



- 9.4 By adapting Community Chest 2021/2022 to allow applicants to apply for funding to meet core costs, we could see an increase in applications. This option would be for one year only and Grant Working Party would consider all applications based on our criteria. This is a low risk. Control – Families and Communities would work with our VCSE to provide support and guidance on additional funding. We are part of the Suffolk Funders Network and have had success in the past sourcing additional or alternative funding for organisations.

10. Implications arising from the proposal

10.1 Financial

Funding for grants are contained within existing budgets. The proposed changes would not adversely impact on these budgets. Engagement with organisations from the Families and Communities Team during the pandemic has been borne from existing resources.

10.2 Equalities

The Council's approach to grants has previously been subject of an Equality Impact Assessment and no negative consequences have been identified.

11. Appendices

- 11.1 **Appendix A:** proposed revised Community Chest Guidance for Applicants 2021/2022

12. Background documents

- 12.1 Cabinet Report on 26 November 2019: Recommendations of the Grants to External Organisations Review Group
Report No: [CAB/WS/19/042](#)

Cabinet Report on 14 January 2020: Recommendations of the Grant Working Party: November 2019 - Community Chest 2020/21
Report No: [CAB/WS/20/007](#)

