



West  
Northamptonshire  
Council

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

12 OCTOBER 2021

**COUNCILLOR RESPONSIBLE FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY & ENGAGEMENT,  
AND REGULATORY SERVICES: COUNCILLOR DAVID SMITH**

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**Report Title**                      **Approach to Community Funding for 2021/22 and 2022/23**

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## Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

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## List of Appendices

- Appendix 1: Community Funding Grant policy
- Appendix 2: Community Funding Application Form
- Appendix 3: Covid Support Fund application and Terms & Conditions
- Appendix 4: Funding for Community & Voluntary Sector Organisations

## **1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1 The report sets out the proposed approach to community funding for 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- 1.2 The report sets out the proposed new policy and the Council's intention to combine resources and provide one community funding scheme for West Northants.
- 1.3 The report intends to gain the support and approval of Cabinet members for the proposed Community Funding Grant Policy.
- 1.4 The report intends to gain the support and approval of Cabinet members for the proposed Councillor Covid Support Fund.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 The report outlines the reasons for writing an interim Community Funding Grant Policy for West Northants Council 2021 to end of March 2023.
- 2.2 The report sets out the Community Funding Grant Policy principles.
- 2.3 The report informs Cabinet of the delegated authority for awarding community funding.
- 2.4 The report introduces the Councillor Covid Support Fund and sets out how this fund will be implemented.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - a) Approve the proposed interim Community Funding Grant Policy for West Northants Council 2021 to end of March 2023.
  - b) Approve delegated authority to Director for Adults, Communities and Wellbeing (DASS) for awarding community funding as set out in the new policy. Where appropriate to adjust the policy in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.
  - c) Approve the Councillor Covid Support Fund of £232,500 for 2021/22 to aid Covid recovery of our local communities, note the use of Covid Recovery Fund to finance this scheme in 2021/22 and agree that officers complete a review of the scheme and its funding source prior to 2022/23.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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### **Community Funding Grant Policy:**

- WNC acknowledges there has been a six-month gap (since Vesting Day) in the council awarding small grants to our local community and voluntary organisations (CVS). This

presents a risk to the continuation of essential local support and services. Therefore, Cabinet approval is sought to enable WNC to launch the interim Community Funding Grant Policy.

- The recommendation to produce one interim policy with one community funding scheme for West Northants provides a consistent approach to community funding grant awards across West Northants.
- The policy enables the council to take a more strategic approach to investment into CVS organisations, aligned to meet identified needs and the councils adopted corporate priorities.
- Approval of the policy enables the application and award for grants process, in turn benefiting our local communities through funding that helps sustain and invent new activity to address the local needs.
- WNC has an increased Scheme of Delegation limits for officers, and with grant awards capped at maximum £15,000 no grant award will be classified as a Key Decision of the Council. The Cabinet will set the strategic direction of community funding through its decision to approve the proposed community grant funding policy and the policies alignment to the council's corporate priorities. However, there will be cross-party oversight of the implementation of the Community Funding Grant Policy to ensure adherence to the new policy, that grant awards are allocated to meet identified local needs, and that community funding is distributed in a fair and equitable manner.
- The recommendation for delegated authority to officers will ensure applicants receive funding awards in the most expedient timescale.

#### **Councillor Covid Support Fund 2021-22:**

- To support our local communities to recover from the impact of Covid during the remainder of the 2021-22 financial year.
- To provide WNC Councillors with a consistent and expedient mechanism for making local grant awards to community and voluntary groups.
- To draw upon the local knowledge of Councillors best placed to identify local groups, organisations and/or communities at most risk due to Covid impact and in most need for grant awards.

## **5. Report Background**

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### **Community Funding Grant Policy:**

- 5.1 Community funding is a mechanism for the council to support local community and voluntary groups with grant awards that enable them to continue delivering important services and activities to our communities. The community funding grant policy and application process are aligned to the council's corporate priorities and through awarding community funding grants the council benefits by means of adding additional resources (through local partner organisations) and the ability to reach those most in need.

- 5.2 Historically, all sovereign councils have provided:
- larger grant awards to or commissioned voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver key services for local residents e.g. debt and money advice, community transport.
  - Community funding grants to not-for-profit organisations that are located within their district or directly associated with their district.
- 5.3 Each sovereign council delivered their Community Funding Grants through a funding policy and set of principles. These were found to be very similar when compared with each other as part of the process to draft the new policy for West Northants.
- 5.4 Grants awarded by the sovereign councils covered similar themes relating to needs of their local communities. Some of the organisations awarded historical grants received funding from more than one sovereign council due to being an organisation that delivers a remit across the west geographical area. The new policy being proposed will help reduce risk of duplicating funding and provide applying organisations with a consistent and co-ordinated funding process.
- 5.5 Prior to the formation of West Northants Council, the sovereign district and borough councils made provisions to continue funding key services provided by community and voluntary sector organisations in 2021/22 by making larger grant awards under their previous community funding policies or directly commissioning services from providers to ensure continuity for the first year of the new unitary council. Alongside this as part of the Future Northants workstream it was identified that a new approach for other community funding grants (usually smaller awards) would be required post Vesting Day. Since becoming the new West Northants Council these community funding grant awards have been placed on hold during a period of policy reviews and the drafting of the new Community Funding Grants policy for West Northants.
- 5.6 The decision to recommend one new community funding grant policy for West Northants Council will provide better consistency of decision making for grant awards compared to running for example three locality-based community funding schemes. Running three locality-based schemes presents a potential risk to the council of challenge from unsuccessful applicants.
- 5.7 One policy approach will provide an improved service to grant receiving bodies by: reducing duplication of funding; consistency of funding principles and decision making.
- 5.8 The interim Community Funding Grant Policy proposes for 2021/22 and 2022/23 grants will be capped at £15,000 and £5,000. The initial funding round, within each financial year, will be open to all applicants seeking a Community Funding Grant up to and including £15,000 to determine the highest value projects the Council can fund for a financial year. All subsequent funding rounds, within the financial year, will be capped to projects where the total value of the Community Funding Grant award is up to and including £5,000.
- 5.9 All Community Funding Grant applications will be triaged by an assigned Community Funding Officer on any grant enquiry made by phone or on completion of an expression of interest form. If the proposal aligns with the new Community Funding Grants Policy, the applicant will be issued with a web-based Community Funding grant application link to complete their application online. (N.B. a paper copy of the application form can be provided in exceptional circumstances).

- 5.10 The triage process allows the Community Funding Officer and Sector Specialists to work with potential applicants to develop their Community Funding Grant proposal, establish need, and also add value and address other needs in the project outcomes. It also provides an indication of future projects and the demands on the budget.
- 5.11 The new policy sets out the funding principles, which include an assessment for:
- need;
  - reach;
  - outcome;
  - sustainability;
  - value for money;
  - other sources of funding / match funding; and
  - levels of monitoring and evaluation required to demonstrate the grant has been spent in the right way, value for money has been achieved, and the required results have been delivered.
- 5.12 Historically sovereign councils ran a mixed approach to decision making and membership of decision-making panels.
- 5.13 The proposed community funding grant policy sets out membership of a panel consisting of WNC officers (including the Community Funding Officer and Sector Specialists) and cross-party elected member representatives. The role of sector specialists is to support or discount approval to fund an application based on knowledge of their respective areas. For example, a decision will take into account the identified service need and alternative options for funding (internal council funding and/or external funding).
- 5.14 The Community Funding Officer will present recommendations to award grant funding to the panel chair. The decision to agree recommendations to award grant funding is made by the panel chair Assistant Director Housing & Communities, or equivalent senior officer, or delegated to a Head of Service with responsibility for Communities. The panel chair will present the approval decisions to Executive Director of Finance (Chief Finance Officer) for final sign off of grant funding awards.
- 5.15 WNC has a Scheme of Delegation limit for officers, and with grant awards capped at maximum £15,000 no grant award will be classified as a Key Decision of the Council. The Cabinet sets the strategic direction of community funding through its decision to approve the proposed community funding grant policy
- 5.16 The interim Community Funding Grant Policy, application form and guidance notes will be reviewed at least once a year to ensure it remains fit for purpose. It can be reviewed more frequently, if necessary, for example, to ensure that the Council's, strategic aims, objectives and priorities are appropriately reflected in the Community Funding Grants assessment criteria.
- 5.17 The regular review of the community funding grant policy also allows for the inclusion of relevant newly adopted strategies for West Northants Council for example Sport & Leisure, Communities and Housing Services.

5.18 The budget for the Community Funding Grant Policy for 2021/22 is £433,401 (see Appendix 4 for a summary of the Housing and Communities Directorate grant funding provision to the local community and voluntary sector).

**Councillor Covid Support Fund 2021-22:**

5.19 The Covid pandemic has had a huge impact on local community and voluntary organisations who rely on small grant awards to remain sustainable. These groups often require funding at short notice as they react to the local needs in their communities. The Community Funding Grant Policy provides an opportunity to access funding grants however some of the smaller groups face barriers to accessing this due to the structured process or the formatted timetable for awarding grants on a quarterly basis.

5.20 The community funding review noted that a mechanism for awarding smaller local funding grants to community and voluntary organisations outside of a formatted timetable would be beneficial.

5.21 This report requests Cabinet to approve the Councillor Covid Support Fund for 2021/22. This fund ensures essential grant aid can continue to reach those groups embedded in our local communities.

5.22 The Councillor Covid Support Fund would allocate up to £2,500 per WNC Councillor to enable Councillors to efficiently and effectively allocate money within their ward to make a positive impact on the areas they represent and to empower local residents to be active in their communities' recovery from Covid impact.

5.23 The proposal is that Councillors cannot access the Fund directly. All payments will be made by officers and are subject to the usual internal controls on expenditure.

5.24 The application form and terms and conditions are included at Appendix 3.

5.25 Councillor Covid Support Fund will operate a total funding budget of £232,500 for 2021/22. This works out as £2,500 per 93 Councillors.

**Direct Grants (for information and context):**

5.26 Part of the work carried out by sovereign councils ahead of vesting day was to allocate funding for the delivery of key services for local residents delivered by the local voluntary and community sector. This work was overseen and authorised by the Future Northants Project Boards and followed the community funding policies and/or procurement processes of the sovereign councils.

5.27 These key services include voluntary sector infrastructure support, money and debt advice and community transport. These services are funded either via larger grant awards or commissioned services.

5.28 The funding for these services is allocated for 2021/22 in all localities and 2022/23 for the Daventry locality (these are commissioned services under a 2-year agreement).

5.29 An extension of direct grants awarded in Northampton and South Northants localities will be considered for 2022/23 to see if it is possible to bring them in line with funded services in Daventry locality.

5.30 For 2021/22 the total funding for these services is £798,600.

#### **Overall Position and Longer Term Approach for funding the Community/Voluntary Sector**

5.31 The total funding budgets for grants to the local community and voluntary sector from the council's Housing & Communities Team is summarised at Appendix 4. This shows that the total funding provision for community grants from the Housing & Communities Team for local community and voluntary sector organisations for 2021/22 is £1,634,701.

5.32 It should be noted that there will be other significant investment in the local voluntary and community sector from other parts of the council and other public sector partners. Mapping funding of the local voluntary and community sector across the public sector 'system' is a project for inclusion in the council's transformation programme to inform a holistic and strategic approach to commissioning in the future.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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6.1 **Continuing the model of sovereign council community funding.** This model would see decision making and awarding of community funding implemented on a locality basis (Northampton; Daventry; South Northants). This option is not recommended for reasons including: requirement for three different funding policies and principles; the risk of challenge due to inconsistencies of decision making; risk of duplicating funding to organisations and/or projects; inconsistency of having three different thresholds for min/max grant awards.

6.2 **The decision to have a Councillor Covid Support Fund for the remainder of 2021-22.** To further enhance and expediate the recovery of local community and voluntary groups in West Northants the recommendation is for WNC to have a Councillor Covid Support Fund. This fund enables Councillors to make local decisions on grant funding awards for the benefit of the communities they represent.

6.3 **Assign an allocation (£232,500) of the councils Covid Recovery budget to the Councillor Covid Support Fund.** This option protects the current Community Funding Grants budget of £433,401 helping to stretch community funding grant awards further.

6.4 **Not to approve the proposed community funding approach as interim to cover 2021/22 and 2022/23.** This would lead to the council having no mechanism to deliver community funding grant awards therefore having a detrimental effect on community and voluntary organisations and residents of West Northants.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. Funding of successful Community Funding Grants will be subject to the approval process set out in this Community Funding Grant Policy. As set out in Appendix 4 the total funding provision for community grants from the Housing & Communities Team for local community and voluntary sector organisations for 2021/22 is £1,634,701. This is made up of: Community Funding Grant Policy budget of £433,401; £798,600 direct grants/commissioned services; £170,200 one off funding allocated for the delivery of key services by voluntary/community sector organisations; and £232,500 Councillor Covid Support Fund. The budget resource of £433,401 exists within base budgets for the new Community Funding Grants Policy for 2021/22.

7.1.2 It is proposed to fund the Councillor Covid Support Fund proposal of £232,500 from the WNC Covid Recovery fund.

### **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the responsible officer to ensure the proper administration of the local authority's funds. Controls and processes which establish how funds can be spent, financial limits applicable, and by designated decision makers, is best practice are essential to discharge that statutory responsibility.

7.2.2 The grants are subject to terms and conditions. There will be no material grants awarded under the new Community Funding Grants scheme, as the maximum award will be up to and including £15,000. Officers can approve Community Funding Grants under the delegation limits within the Constitution.

7.2.3 Covid Support Fund grants follow the same underlying controls and process as the Community Funding Grants, save the maximum grant award, per Councillor's nomination, is up to and including £2,500.

### **7.3 Risk**

7.3.1 Should the proposed Community Funding Policy not be approved by Cabinet there will remain no mechanism to deliver community funding grant awards to the community and voluntary organisations in West Northants.

7.3.2 Reputational risk for West Northants Council in being seen as not sufficiently supporting the work of community and voluntary sector by not providing financial support through grant awards.

7.3.3 Reputational risk for West Northants Council as it will be seen as having removed a service (community funding grants) that previous sovereign councils provided to community and voluntary organisations.

7.3.4 Long term sustainability of local community and voluntary groups and their ability to remain operational. The 'closure' of community and voluntary groups would impact on the council and been seen through increased demand on essential health and wellbeing services.

#### 7.4 **Consultation**

7.4.1 There is no requirement to carry out statutory consultation for the proposed approach to community funding.

7.4.2 The proposals are to provide the council with an interim policy and funding approach up to end of March 2023.

7.4.3 The Community Funding Policy and funding approach has been discussed with Members at Executive Programme Board (EPB), with Senior Officers at Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) - Adults, Communities and Wellbeing, and with Portfolio Holder for Community Safety & Engagement, and Regulatory Services.

#### 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None

#### 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 Climate impact dependant on the organisations and projects awarded grant funding. Considerations to include:

- Choice of travel to and from activity and events.
- Use of materials, design and build, contractors and processes.
- Sustainability of resources and environmental impact of capital projects.

7.6.2 Linking grant applications to support the Council Priorities for Green and Clean Environment & Wellbeing:

- Carbon neutral by 2030
- Climate summit in first few months
- Increased wildlife species & more trees
- Increased electric charging & energy efficiency
- Vibrant towns & villages
- High quality parks
- Accessible green space for all

#### 7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 Dependant on grant awards made but all will have a link to the council priorities and have a strong focus/impact on building community resilience.

7.7.2 Criteria used to assess applications will consider the contribution towards WNC priorities:

- Green and Clean

- Improved Life Chances
- Connected Communities
- Thriving Towns and Villages
- Economic Development

7.7.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment screening form has been completed to assess the impact of the community funding approach.

## **8. Background Papers**

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- 8.1 Appendix 1: Community Funding Grant Policy
- 8.2 Appendix 2: Community Funding Application Form
- 8.3 Appendix 3: Covid Support Fund application and Terms & Conditions
- 8.4 Appendix 4: Funding for Community & Voluntary Sector Organisations