

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee: Minutes

Date: Thursday 11th November 2021

Time: 2:00pm – 3:00pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury

Present: Councillors Tom Sanderson (Chair), Hilary Cox Condron (Vice-Chair), Henry Batchelor, Adela Costello, Steve Criswell, Jan French, Ian Gardener, Bryony Goodliffe, Ros Hathorn, Lucy Nethsingha, Keith Prentice, Philippa Slatter and Firouz Thompson

24. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Billington (Councillor Gardener substituted), Councillor Dew and Councillor D Schumann.

Councillor Costello declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 6 (Innovate and Cultivate Fund – Endorsement of Recommendations), as the local member for Ramsey and Bury.

Councillor French declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 6 (Innovate and Cultivate Fund – Endorsement of Recommendations), as the local member for March North and Waldersey.

Councillor Goodliffe declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 6 (Innovate and Cultivate Fund – Endorsement of Recommendations), as her husband was a trustee of the C3 Church.

25. Minutes – 2nd September 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

26. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

27. Cambridgeshire Household Support Fund (Excluding the Direct Voucher Scheme)

The Committee received a report detailing the proposed process for delivering the Household Support Fund, excluding the Direct Voucher Scheme, in line with the conditions set by the Government, which would be providing 100% of the grant. Noting that the grant would remain available until 31st March 2022, the Service Director for Communities and Partnerships drew attention to the framework established by the Government for spending the fund, which was set out in section 1.3 of the report, and which was specifically designed to meet people's emergency support needs. Following the allocation of £1,124,266 to the Direct Voucher by the Children and Young People Committee, a remaining balance of £2,457,158 was left to be allocated.

The proposed scheme had been designed to be as simple as possible for recipients and to maximise the possibility for households to learn about and access rapid support. This would be further enhanced by a straightforward application process that could be approached via multiple routes. The proposed eligibility criteria was set out in section 2.4 of the report, although it was emphasised that discretion would be used to ensure that people in need were not left out. The Council's current trusted partner network that had been developed during the two previous funding schemes would be expanded where possible to widen the opportunities for accessing the fund and in order to decentralise the process. Members were informed that although consideration had been given to outsourcing management of the scheme, it had been decided that it would be appropriate for the Council to undertake the role, on one hand to expedite the process and minimise administration costs, but also to build relationships with people who required support and who were previously unknown to the Council as being in need of support.

Noting that some details of the scheme were still being developed when the report had been written, and due to the fact that the nature and timing of the funding made it impossible to follow the standard procurement route to appoint the bodies to distribute some of the support, two additional recommendations were being made to the Committee. A waiver to the procurement process was requested, while the procurement of services from Family Fund, Charis and AO was proposed. The Service Director confirmed that the Monitoring Officer and Interim Head of Procurement had been consulted on the process and it had been agreed that the risk of challenge with this approach was low and that the greater risk would have been not being able to distribute the funding.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Paid tribute to officers for developing the scheme in such a timely manner.
- Welcomed the emphasis on maintaining relationships that had been developed with local partners throughout the pandemic, and continuing to work in a flexible, responsive and collaborative manner with district and city councils, as well as the voluntary and community sector. Members also welcomed that a workshop on the fund had been set up with partners, as well as the fact that data sharing agreements would be developed.

- Acknowledged the need for discretion in order to accommodate people in urgent need of support, including asylum seekers, homeless people, travellers, refugees and council or social housing tenants.
- Argued that the NHS should be included in the trusted partner network, noting its integrated working relationship with the Council.
- Suggested the development of a promotional poster that could be shared on social media and circulated to maximise uptake of the offer of support.
- Highlighted their role as key contacts with local communities and asked how they could reach out to people they thought might be in need of the support despite being unaware of its availability. The Service Director acknowledged the importance of proactively identifying people that were not currently receiving alternative support that was available from the Council, noting that there were people who were only beginning to face hardship as a result of the end of the Government’s furlough scheme and the removal of the Universal Credit uplift, and that they would be unaccustomed to seeking support and knowing where to look for it. He emphasised the importance of trusted partners and other support organisations in achieving this, and noted that the development of data sharing agreements would further enhance take up.
- Observed that the proposed scheme used the Office of National Statistics’ UK-wide median household income of £29,900 as a baseline, and sought clarification on whether this was reflective of the County’s average household income. The Service Director confirmed that the County’s average was at a similar level, although he acknowledged that it was higher in the Cambridge city area than other parts of the County and expressed concern that there would be households above the eligible level that still required assistance in some areas. Reiterating the proposal for discretion in such cases, he assured Members that applicants who appeared to be ineligible would be contacted and not simply rejected.
- Established that the Council would only receive as much funding as was claimed, with any unallocated resources remaining with the Government.
- Observed that a significant percentage of the families in most need of support had children, and suggested that information on how to access the fund should be provided to schools, given that teachers were in a position to identify those who may appear to be hungry or missing warm clothing.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the principles of the scheme, as outlined in section 2.3 of the report;
- b) Approve the eligibility criteria for the scheme, as outlined in section 2.4 of the report;
- c) Approve the means of accessing support, as outlined in section 2.5 of the report;

- d) Approve the arrangements for providing support, as outlined in section 2.6 of the report;
- e) Approve the delivery arrangements, as outlined in section 2.7 of the report;
- f) Approve a waiver to the procurement process; and
- g) Approve the procurement of services from Family Fund, Charis and AO.

28. Business Planning Update for 2022-27

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the current business and budgetary planning position and estimates for 2022-27, an outline of the principal risks, contingencies and implications facing the Committee and the Council's resources, and the process and next steps for the Council in agreeing a business plan and budget for future years. Attention was drawn to the Business Planning context for the Committee, as detailed in section 4 of the report, which highlighted a proposed additional income target of £200k for the Registration Service and an efficiency savings target of £250k across the service directorate. It was also proposed to remove £120k, over 2023/24 and 2024/25, of the additional resources that had been allocated to the Coroner Service as a permanent virement during the current financial year 2021/22, as the current backlog of cases was expected to be have been resolved by that point.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Expressed concern about not being provided with information on the impacts of the proposed efficiency savings.
- Sought clarification on whether the Coroner Service's backlog of cases was expected to be resolved in the current financial year. The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships informed Members that there was a two-year plan to overcome the backlog and that it was anticipated to have been resolved by the end of the 2022/23 financial year.
- Established that a backlog for the Coroner Service equated to inquests being held more than twelve months after the death, and expressed concern that some communities and cultures would be more affected by such delays. The Service Director clarified that a delay to an inquest did not imply a delay to burial, and informed Members that exceptional arrangements were in place, for example, for the Muslim community, to ensure that burials could take place within twenty-four hours of a death.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the progress made to date and next steps required to develop the 2022-23 to 26-27 Business Plan; and
- b) Endorse the budget and savings proposals that are within the remit of the Committee as part of consideration of the Council's overall Business Plan.

29. Innovate and Cultivate Fund – Endorsement of Recommendations

The Committee received a report detailing nine applications to the Cultivate funding stream, which had been supported by the Recommendation Panel at its meeting on 13th October 2021. It was noted that if the recommended applications were approved, the total amount of funding committed would reach £1,955,517 for 91 projects, which would leave £208,639 to still be allocated. It was therefore proposed that a call for a further round of applications take place, with a deadline of 1st February 2022.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the high number of applications from Fenland, noting that there had previously been fewer applications from that part of the County. It was confirmed that if the recommended bids were approved, the overall distribution around the County would be more equally spread.
- Clarified that a further call for applications for the remaining funds would be required as there were no bids from previous rounds that had not already been considered.
- Sought clarification on how projects and their impact on the Council's services were monitored and evaluated. The Think Communities Manager informed Members that all applications were initially evaluated by service lead and finance officers to ensure they provided a return on investment. Once projects had been awarded funding, all are required to submit monitoring reports and for those paid by instalments, a monitoring report is required before next payment can be made. An annual report was presented to the Committee each year, which included an analysis of the approved projects, their level of success, and their return on investment, with the next such report to be presented at the Committee meeting on 2nd December 2021. Lessons are learned from the monitoring process including where this can benefit other projects, or highlight potential changes to the way in which the Council worked, such as the way in which it commissioned services.
- Suggested waiting until after the review of the Innovate and Cultivate Fund (ICF) had been presented to the Committee at its meeting on 2nd December 2021 before calling for new applications, however it was noted that the remaining funds were part of the current allocation of £2.3m and so could continue for 1 February round of applications. Any subsequent rounds would need to take account of the

member review currently underway and would be subject to additional resources being provided.

- Highlighted the importance of place-based officers for identifying contacts and people who would need help in their community, as well as for spreading good practice between different areas, and sought information on how such officers could be identified. Members were informed that the officers were not always from the Think Communities team and that it depended on who was the most appropriate person for each individual project. While this was sometimes geographically based, on other occasions it was based on their relevant expertise. It was also noted that pre-application advice sessions were held for community projects, which represented an opportunity to provide advice and support without financial assistance.

It was resolved to:

Agree to fund the following nine applications through the Cultivate funding stream:

- i) C3 Church
- ii) Cam Sight
- iii) Haddenham Arts Centre C.I.C.
- iv) Headway Cambridgeshire
- v) Kings Hedges Family Support Project
- vi) Ramsey Neighbourhoods Trust
- vii) St Peter's Church, Yaxley
- viii) The Edmund Trust
- ix) Young People's Counselling Service.

30. Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan

While discussing the Agenda Plan, it was requested that the Committee receive a report clarifying where the Council's responsibility for partnership working lay and how it was monitored. A further report was requested on the Council's ongoing decentralisation programme, with the observation that parish councils were keen to understand how this would affect service delivery areas prior to the Cambridgeshire Local Council Annual Conference on 14th January 2022.

The Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
2nd December 2021