

<b>Committee(s):</b> Community and Health Committee	<b>Date:</b> 14 March 2022
<b>Subject:</b> Proposed changes to Brentwood Community Fund	<b>Wards Affected:</b> All
<b>Report of:</b> Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager (Communities, Leisure and Health)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Author:</b> Lucy Gill, Community, Leisure and Wellbeing Officer Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: lucy.gill@brentwood.gov.uk	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

The Brentwood Community Fund was set up to give Brentwood's communities the opportunity to provide local initiatives to improve the quality of life for local people living in the borough. This report will outline proposed changes to the Community Fund which will create a more efficient and meaningful scheme, both for the Council and recipient

### Recommendation(s)

**Members are asked to:**

**R1. Agree to the proposed changes to the Brentwood Community Fund, outlined in point 6.**

### Main Report

#### **Background**

1. The Brentwood Community Fund has been set up to give the borough's communities the opportunity to promote local initiatives to improve the quality of life of people living in the local area. Last year, the fund had £31,300 allocated for localism projects, which consisted of £16,300 from Brentwood Borough Council and a £15,000 contribution from Axis, the Council's repairs and maintenance contract as part of their Social Value contribution. There was an underspend of £4727.40, which was agreed to be carried forward to 2022/2023.
2. Grants of up to £4,000 were available for not-for-profit organisations and groups. The funding was open to applications from 1 April until 30 September

2021. The recommendations for funding were approved at Community and Health Committee in December 2021.

3. In order to be eligible for a grant, applicants needed to meet criteria that aligned with the Council's corporate priorities for economy, environment and communities. Applicants needed to demonstrate community involvement, including engaging volunteers, contributing match or in kind funding and outlining the sustainability of the project.
4. The total number of applications each year to the Community Fund has varied from 11 – 32, with applicants expectedly reducing over the past two years. This was due to a wealth of funding pots available for community support during the pandemic, and organisations' confidence in their ability to deliver planned projects as far ahead as next year.
5. Last year's application guidance and scoring matrix is included as Appendices A and B to this report.

### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

6. Following a review of discretionary funding programmes, officers recommend the following changes:
  - a. To merge the Mental Health Small Grant Scheme with the Community Fund. This enables a reduction in officer and Council resources. It also avoids duplication of applicants whilst ensuring that health and wellbeing remains a priority within the Community Fund's criteria.
  - b. To seek an additional external partner to contribute to the funding pot, to match Axis' contribution.

Existing budget structure:

<b>Brentwood Community Fund 2021</b>	
Brentwood Borough Council	£16,300.00
Axis (reduced in 2021 to support the Stars of Brentwood Awards)	£15,000.00
<b>Total of grants awarded 2021</b>	<b>£26572.60</b>
Carry forward to 2022	£4727.40

<b>Mental Health Small Grants Scheme 2021</b>	
Brentwood Borough Council	£10,000.00
Health and Wellbeing Board	£5,000.00

COMF (one-off fund to support management and containment of COVID-19)	£10,000.00
Total of grants awarded 2021	£25,000.00

Proposed budget structure:

Brentwood Community Fund 2022		
Contribution	With additional funding partner	Without additional funding partner
Brentwood Borough Council	£0	£5,000.00
Health and Wellbeing Board	£5,000.00	£5,000.00
Axis	£20,000.00	£20,000.00
Carry forward	£4727.40	£4727.40
Additional partner	£20,000.00	£0
<b>Total</b>	<b>£49727.40</b>	<b>£34,727.40</b>
Savings to Brentwood Borough Council	£26,300.00	£21,300.00

- c. To open two rounds of funding to enable swifter access to grants:
  - i. Round 1 – Open 1 April 2022 – 31 July 2022. Decision and allocation by 30 September 2022. For projects with delivery between 1 October 2022 – 30 September 2023.
  - ii. Round 2 – Open 3 October 2022 – 31 January 2023. Decision and allocation by 31 March 2023. For projects with delivery between 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.
- d. To enable flexibility of delivery and to allow for disruptions to plans (I,e COVID-19), projects will be for delivery within 1 year after the funding is awarded, with an option to extend delivery time for another year upon request.
- e. For senior officers in consultation with the Chair of Community and Health Committee to have delegated authority to make funding decisions, based on scores from officer and external partner representatives. This will ensure that money can be distributed quickly without being tied to committee dates. A full annual report on the Community Fund can be brought to Community and Health Committee at year end.

- f. To increase the maximum grant per awardee to £5,000. This will ensure greater impact of funding and more sustainable outcomes.
- g. To award applicants a level of funding based on the requested grant amount, rather than a percentage based on scores. Previously, some applicants have received as little as 55% of their requested funds, meaning they have then needed to find additional funding to make up the shortfall, creating a longer wait for project delivery. The Council may choose to fund certain budget lines if some are not eligible, i.e food and drink.
- h. Considering point 6.g, to raise the scoring threshold for awards from 50% to 60% to ensure that grants are awarded to initiatives that better meet the required criteria.
- i. Projects will still be expected to engage volunteers, demonstrate how the community has been involved in identifying the need for the initiative, and that the applicant has a degree of match funding for the project, either from cash or in kind contributions.
- j. A full example budget template will be provided to assist applicants with completion. Most applicant queries are around budget lines and completion of the template.
- k. The question on sustainability will be expanded to include not only the longevity of the initiative, but how the applicant is taking steps to reduce their carbon footprint in project planning and delivery.
- l. It will now be mandatory for applicants to demonstrate how they have considered safeguarding vulnerable people in project delivery. The Council will expect a policy or statement to be submitted.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

- 7. Each application will continue to be subject to a robust, independent and transparent scoring process to ensure fairness in the allocation of funding. Applications will be scored by a panel of officers and representatives from external funding partners, considering the following key priorities:
  - a) Evidence that the bid meets the criteria, the Council's priorities and expected outcomes;
  - b) Evidence that the community has been involved in the development and implementation of the project;

- c) Evidence that the bid supports the promotion of volunteering and community participation;
  - d) Evidence that the applicant has sought additional external funding or in-kind value (such as the use of volunteers) for the project; and
  - e) Evidence that the project is sustainable once the Council's contribution has ceased.
  - f) Evidence that the applicant has taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint.
  - g) Evidence that the applicant has awareness of safeguarding and reporting procedures.
8. Once the applications are individually scored, they will be ranked by their score. Applications scoring over the 60% threshold will be given priority, receiving funding in rank order until all the funding has been allocated.
9. Successful applicants will still need to agree to any terms stipulated within the conditions of the grant being awarded and complete a monitoring report once their project has completed.
10. Any unsuccessful applicants will continue to be offered the following support: telephone call or online meeting with a member of the Community Services team to review their prospective application; offered a funding training session via Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services which includes tips on submitting a good funding application and access to My Funding Central, an up-to-date database of thousands of funding streams for the sector. Members will also be asked to assist in this process.
11. Officers will review the impact of the above recommended changes annually and will advise Members of any further changes that are required.

## **Consultation**

12. The application process was reviewed following consultation for the recently approved Voluntary, Faith and Community Sector Support Strategy (2021-2026), to ensure that it aligns with the strategy's commitments and with a view to encourage flexibility and widening the breadth of initiatives that the fund can support.
13. Consultation has also been undertaken with previous applicants over a number of years and included as part of the monitoring process. As a result we have revised and simplified the application process, including simplifying the application form and supporting guidance notes. It was recognised that some organisations or individuals may have had difficulty understanding some terminology in respect of completing the funding application. The

requirements for supplementary information and match funding should be proportionate to the amount of money being awarded.

14. The proposed changes have been reviewed by Axis who have confirmed that they align with their priorities for community support.

### **References to Corporate Plan**

15. The Community Fund supports a number of priorities and sub priorities within the Corporate Plan under 'Growing our economy', 'Developing our communities' and 'Protecting our environment.'

### **Implications**

#### **Financial Implications**

**Name & Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources) and S151 Officer**

**Tel & Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

16. The 2021 Community Fund pot consisted of £16,300 from existing budgets and £15,000 contribution from Axis as part of their social value commitment through their housing, repairs and maintenance contract. There is an underspend of £4,727.40 carried forward to 2022/2023.
17. The proposed absorption of the Mental Health Small Grants Scheme into the Community Fund and the onboarding of an additional external funding partner will create savings of £26,300. Should the Council not be successful in bringing on board an external funding partner, savings of £21,300 will be made.

#### **Legal Implications**

**Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer**

**Tel & Email: 01277 312500/amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk**

18. The General Power of Competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a broad power, subject to some limitations to do things an individual may do, provided it is not prohibited by other legislation. This power is wide enough to include the allocation of funding under the Community Fund.
19. Criteria has been formulated against which applications for grant funding will be assessed. This will support decision making on the allocation of funding being made in a fair and transparent way and satisfies the legal process.

20. Any additional legal advice will be provided as necessary during the process.

### **Economic Implications**

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning & Economy)**

**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk**

21. The Community Fund has a positive impact on the local economy when there is an increase in the number of jobs, volunteering roles, skills development opportunities and improvements to facilities.
22. By bringing in an additional funding partner, the Council is maximising its partnerships with local businesses to make effective contributions to the community.

### **Other Implications**

#### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

23. The Community Fund supports voluntary and community organisations that best support residents in the community, regardless of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion and sexual orientation.

#### **Asset Implications**

24. Where relevant, the granting of funding is dependent upon permissions being granted by the owner of the asset.

#### **Background Papers**

None

#### **Appendices**

- Appendix A: Brentwood Community Fund Guidance and Criteria 2021
- Appendix B: Brentwood Community Fund Scoring Matrix 2021
- Appendix C: DRAFT Brentwood Community Fund Guidance and Criteria 2022
- Appendix D: DRAFT Brentwood Community Fund Scoring Matrix 2022