



Subject:	Support to Community Partners 2020 Update
Date:	6 th October 2020
Reporting Officer:	Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Alison Allen, Neighbourhood Services Manager (Community Provision) Stevie Lavery, Neighbourhood Services Manager (West)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
<i>After Committee Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>After Council Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Some time in the future</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Never</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members on the progress of the funding allocated to support community needs over the summer months and to ask Members for consideration as to how that support can be extended to meet ongoing needs up to end March 2021.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to approve the following; <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Note the update on financial investment in communities as part of the summer funding 2020 and the lessons learned- Note the additional external funding secured from DfC, Shared City Partnership and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (in progress) to further support communities- Agree the continuing grant funding approach for financial investment in communities for the remainder of 20/21

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delegate authority to the Director (Operational) City & Neighbourhood Services to make operational decisions relating to the running of the remainder of the 20/21 grant funding approach to include making awards, assessing demand for each strand of the overall fund, allocating additional funding should it become available and temporarily pausing a strand/s should demand exceed available budget - Delegate authority to the Director (Operational) City & Neighbourhood Services to accept new offers of funding in support of communities from external funders e.g. DfC Access to Food and Financial Inclusion Funds with retrospective reporting to Committee - Agree to extend the existing 20/21 Community Capacity and Revenue Buildings Grant Programmes for a further year until end March 2022 with final funding allocations subject to Committee consideration when final budget allocation is known from DfC - To authorise Officers to develop the 21/22 Community Provision Grant Programme as detailed at point 3.21
3.0	Main report
	<p><u>Community Provision Summer Funding Update</u></p> <p>3.1 Members will recall in July 2020 a further financial investment of £636,057 (comprised of funding from BCC, DfC, TEO/SCP and DoJ/NIPB/PCSP's) was agreed to support recovery at a community level, which was in addition to the £939K financial investment in communities as part of the COVID-19 emergency response.</p> <p>3.2 This investment took into account the lessons learned from the COVID-19 emergency response, in particular feedback from community partners and the revised grant process replaced the previous individual grant programmes delivered by the Council.</p> <p>3.3 The new approach was comprised of two strands (detailed below) and an update is provided on the progress to date on each of these elements:</p> <p>3.4 Strand 1 – Strategic Funding of Key Area Based Organisations</p> <p>Proposed Budget: £486,000</p> <p>Of the 9 lead partners across the city for this fund the position is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposals received, due diligence completed and delivery commenced – 6 lead partners - Proposals received, due diligence in progress – 2 lead partners - Proposal not received – 1 lead partner

	<p>The development of proposals and due diligence process has been supported throughout the summer by staff from within our Area Support Teams working closely with lead partners.</p>
3.5	<p>Strand 2 - Micro Grants</p> <p>Initial Budget: £150,000 (but with delegated authority given to Director (Operational) City and Neighbourhood Services to enhance this subject to demand and should further funding become available.</p> <p>Maximum allocation per organisation: £1,000 per organisation</p>
3.6	<p>In August 2020, Committee agreed that given the significant demand, should further funding be received central government, it could be used to support the extension of the Micro Grant programme under the delegated authority of the Director (Operational) City and Neighbourhood Services.</p>
3.7	<p>As indicated at point 3.6 demand for the micro grant has far exceeded expectation and under delegated authority granted to the Director (Operational) City and Neighbourhood Services, further funds had to be added to this grant programme (from additional central government grant funding received, see point 3.12 for further detail).</p>
3.8	<p>For Members information, the average turnaround time for the micro grants programme from receipt of application to payment of funds is 17 days. This is enabled by the commitment of our staff in our Area Support Teams, a streamlined process and reductions in unnecessary bureaucracy (in keeping with the Department of Finance Reducing Bureaucracy for the Voluntary and Community Sector Code of Practice 2015).</p>
3.9	<p>As updated at Committee in August 2020, Council was expecting further financial support from the Department for Communities through the Community Support Programme, although detail on the exact amount at that stage was not known. Confirmation of the exact amount has now been received and DfC are providing an additional £486,000 to support communities through the Community Support Programme up to end March 2021.</p>
3.10	<p>£135,000 of this funding was required to meet the significant demand for micro grants resulting in a total financial investment in communities as detailed below up to end September 2020:</p> <p>Micro Grant applications received, assessed and grant paid to 15/9/20 – 269 Micro Grant financial investment in community to 15/09/20 - £250,079 Micro Grant anticipated total demand up to end September 2020 - £ 285,079 (304 applications)</p>

3.11	<p>This leaves a remaining £351,000 from the additional funding secured from DfC to support further grant funding.</p> <p>Additionally, given the positive feedback about this way of grant funding and the uncertain delivery environment going forward as a result of COVID-19, both the Shared City Partnership and Policing and Community Safety Partnership are in the process of committing more funding to support the wider Council approach. This will add a further £180,000 approximately to compliment the DfC investment up to end March 2021.</p> <p>This gives a total further flexible financial investment available for communities up to end March 2021 of £531,000 at this time.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Additional restricted funds from DfC</u></p> <p>DfC are in the process of making further restricted monies available in the following areas, with DfC setting the terms of reference for each fund as detailed below. Given the time pressures involved, delegated authority is requested for the Director (Operational) City and Neighbourhood Services to progress the delivery of the Access to Food and Financial Inclusion Fund in a co-design manner with the partners detailed below.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Access to Food – £176,365 (up to end March 2021)</u></p> <p>This fund is designed to facilitate strategic consideration of how access to food is addressed in a more strategic and considered manner taking in to account all of the learning from the COVID-19 emergency response, with all relevant community/voluntary and statutory partners involved in the discussion and co-designing the solutions on a council by council basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the economically vulnerable group, is it a poverty issue or food poverty issue? • For the short term, how do we build in more robust assurance mechanisms in terms of impacts of support and who is the most appropriate delivery agent? • What are the characteristics of those seeking help with food (those in receipt of benefits, those in work etc?) • To what extent did the issues precede the emergency; are due to the emergency; or will emerge due to the overall economic impact of the emergency? • How do we move from an emergency response towards a longer term food poverty approach, in the context of the Anti-poverty Strategy?
3.14	<p>Members will also be aware that as Council and community partners transitioned out of the provision of emergency food parcels as part of the DfC scheme, we retained existing contractual capacity with the Red Cross for the following types of community support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of essential supplies including emergency food - Pickup of prescriptions and grocery deliveries

- Emergency financial hardship

3.15 However, demand for access to the Red Cross food parcels is low and there is significant value left should the need arise again for any of these services in the coming months.

3.16 Officers will be engaging with relevant voluntary and community sector partners in the coming weeks for their input to proposals on how the Access to Food funding is used (within the stated objectives from DfC)

3.17 Financial Inclusion - £175,148

The aim of the Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund will be to target those most likely to be adversely impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic, help build financial resilience and improve overall financial wellbeing through access to money management, low cost/affordable credit, promoting savings and linking into holistic debt and income maximisation advice.

It is intended that the Fund will be allocated through Councils to enable 'debt preventative measures' through partnership working by community level organisations, best placed to support individuals as they seek to improve their financial wellbeing and build resilience in the Covid-19 recovery phase.

3.18 Through early targeted support, the Fund aims to:

- Identify those people who would benefit from direct, targeted advice and support;
- Provide access to money management/budgeting advice;
- Ensure early referrals to formal, regulated debt advice services;
- Improve awareness of, and increasing access to, affordable credit from responsible lenders;
- Improve awareness and increase access to income and benefits maximisation;
- Promote a savings culture (for those that can save) to help build resilience to future financial shocks.

Officers will be engaging with the Belfast Advice Group and the participating consortia in the coming weeks for their input to proposals on how this funding is used (within the stated objectives from DfC).

This financial investment at a micro grant level has enabled a significant and extensive programme of activities to take place across the city.

3.19

Examples of programmes/activities for both Strategic Funding and Micro Grants

An extensive programme of activities and service delivery has taken place across the city to include:

- Activity Programmes for young people and youth diversionary/outreach
- Community Arts and video/photography programmes
- Physical activity and community sports programmes
- Literacy/Numeracy workshops and back to school support
- Mental health, wellbeing, mindfulness and resilience programmes
- Capacity Building and Group Support
- Counselling and Talking Therapy
- Environmental Programmes, Community Clean-ups and upcycling from waste
- Digital inclusion programmes
- Family Activities e.g. outdoor cinema
- Good Morning and social contact programmes
- Homeless Outreach
- Men's Sheds
- Silent Discos
- Train the Trainer Health and Well-being
- Volunteer support and development

3.20

Lessons Learned from Summer Community Grant Fund 2020

As has been the case throughout, our approach to supporting communities has been informed by their feedback and the most recent lessons learned about the summer grant fund 2020 are detailed below.

- Communities are trying their best to resume services/activities but the constantly changing operating context makes this very challenging. Having one grant programme with a range of high level outcomes provides a common focus but with sufficient flexibility for unexpected changes.
- Community partners are asking for a more sustained financial investment to take them up to March 2021 to allow them to properly plan and deliver against the needs of their residents.
- Demand has been much higher than expected for the micro grant indicating an appetite for smaller amounts of money and reduced bureaucracy that can be mobilised quickly for one off/short term events/activities.
- However, there remains a gap for a grant of a higher value to allow community partners to deliver larger programmes/activities over a longer period up to March 2021.

- There also remains a gap in providing financial support to community partners for unexpected premises costs (e.g. screens/signage) or for increased consumables due to COVID-19 (e.g. sanitiser, masks, cleaning products).
- Demand for the micro grant with reduced levels of bureaucracy as resulted in a large number of organisations operating at a community level applying for funding but who had no previous relationship with Council. This now provides a strong platform for us to provide further support for them either in their organisational development and/or access to further funding.
- The administration associated with grants needs to be transitioned to the online grants management software to enable easier access for community partners.

3.21

Continuing Grant Funding Approach 20/21

Taking all of the above in to account, the following is recommended as the continuing grant funding approach up to end March 2021 (using the flexible funding from DfC, Shared City Partnership and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships).

The total budget available at present would be £531,000 but with the potential for additional funds in the future. The approach would have three strands:

1. **Micro Grants** - continuation with next tranche opening in November 2020 for delivery up to end March 2021, with increase in maximum award available to groups to £1,500 (Estimated Fund Value – £150,000)
2. **Small Grants** – introduction of new category of grant with larger maximum value of £5,000 (Estimated Fund Value - £250,000)
3. **Strategic Funding of Key Area Based Organisations** – ongoing support for 9 key area based organisations based on their spend to date of existing allocations, anticipated future need up to end March 2021 and with a focus on alignment with Belfast: Our Recovery, identification of area strategic priorities and enabling collaboration and partnership working in support of those priorities. As proposals are developed in each area, they will be brought forward to Committee for consideration (Estimated Fund Value - £131,000)

3.22

The above fund values are estimated as demand is difficult to predict in this uncertain operating environment, however, delegated authority is being requested to the Director (Operational) City & Neighbourhood Services to make operational decisions relating to the running of the remainder of the 20/21 grant funding approach to include making awards, assessing demand for each strand of the overall fund, allocating additional funding should it become available, reallocating unspent funding and temporarily pausing a strand/s should demand exceed available budget, with retrospective reporting to Committee on a regular basis.

3.23

On the basis of the learning to date and the ongoing feedback received from communities it is recommended that the existing priorities for funding remain the same as:

- **Children and Young People:** Summer activities and programmes, negative educational and wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 and digital connectivity
- **Civic Pride:** Communities are rightly proud of the huge volunteering effort and sense of neighbourliness and community spirit and want to develop that
- **Preventing Isolation:** the impact of COVID-19 on those shielding has been significant and a huge community effort is needed to support those individuals, with digital connectivity an element
- **Emotional Wellbeing:** There is widespread concern about then emotional wellbeing concerns of vulnerable individuals, families and communities
- **Anti-Social Behaviour:** Levels of anti-social behaviour, particularly in parks/open spaces has increased due to people not being at school/work and periods of good weather

3.24

With the addition of the following priorities given the importance of supporting community partners to recover their services and facilities for the benefit of their communities in what is a very uncertain operating environment:

- **Unexpected Premises and PPE Costs:** In recovering services and opening premises, community partners will have to make small scale physical changes to their premises and purchase PPE to ensure social distancing. These are unplanned for costs placing an additional financial burden on them. Groups in receipt of an existing revenue buildings grant from Council or other central government funder will not be eligible unless they can provide evidence their existing grants will not cover expected costs up to end March 2021.
- **Connectivity and Inclusion:** Programmes and activities that promote connectivity and inclusion within communities, between communities and between communities and statutory partners as we all navigate the uncertainty of the coming months. This will also support programmes and activities which will enhance and develop grass roots community capacity.

3.25

Thematic Funding

The organisations funded under thematic funding from the initial COVID-19 emergency response as all either continuing with delivery within their allocated budget or in the process of securing additional resources if needed from the Shared City Partnership and/or Policing and Community Safety Partnership/s. No additional requests have been made to Council to date, but Officers continue to work closely with these groups and will connect them with other funders as needed.

3.26

Maximising Participation

As well as promoting the continuing financial investment in communities on Council website and social media to maximise accessibility, Officers will liaise directly with every organisation that had previously made grant applications under the pre-COVID-19 grant processes to update them on what financial support is available for the 20/21 financial year, this will include those organisations who made an application under our small grants programme Tranche 1.

3.27

Capacity and Revenue Buildings Grant 21/22

In March 2020, Council authorised the release of the planned 2020 Capacity and Buildings Revenue grants to applicants. This was a planned grant process and all organisations who made an application, received an award as detailed below:

- **Building Revenue grants - 74 grants totalling £985,405**

These grants are aimed at community development organisations which address the needs of their community by delivering a broad based programme from their building. The building may be used by the local neighbourhood, or the community may be from across the whole city for a thematic/special interest group.

- **Capacity Building Grants - 34 grants totalling £1,021,336**

These grants are aimed at lead community development organisations that advocate the interests of their local groups, area and residents; and support local community groups to ensure good practice in governance, committee procedures, appropriate policies and financial management.

3.28

Many grant recipients continue to be engaged in COVID-19 response and community partners remain under significant pressure. Taking this in to account and the increasing concern about further pressure at a community level as we move forward in to the winter months with additional COVID-19 impacts, it is recommended that the existing Capacity and Buildings Revenue grants are extended for a further year (up to end March 2022) without further open call. Additionally, other staffing resource pressures at present and with more expected in the coming months, the significant workload operating an open call of this size requires 6 months advance notice which is not possible to facilitate at present.

3.29

Members should note that DfC have changed their financial allocation model regionally to the Community Support Fund, but we do not have exact detail on how or if this will affect Belfast. Taking this in to account, further engagement will be needed with Committee on specific financial allocations to the Capacity and Building Revenue Grant Programmes as further detail becomes available.

3.30

Wider Community Provision Grant Approach 21/22

Ongoing engagement with Committee in recent months has demonstrated significant learning from the COVID-19 experience in how we provide financial support to communities in a way that is agile, flexible, accessible and with proportionate levels of bureaucracy. The feedback from community partners is that this approach is working more effectively for them than our previous grant processes to date and they would welcome improvements to our grant programme.

3.31

Taking that in to account, Officers are requesting authority not to revert to the previously delivered grant programmes for 21/22 detailed below and to engage with funders and partnerships to secure participation in reviewing community provision grant programmes as well as the necessary approvals in due course:

- PCSP Small Grants/Policing Committee (DoJ/NIPB/BCC/PCSP)
- Good Relations Grants/Bonfire and Cultural Expression Programme Grants - (TEO/BCC/SCP)
- Community Development Summer Scheme Grants (DfC/BCC)
- Community Development Small Project Grants (DfC/BCC)
- Ur City 2 Grants (Children/Young People in N'hood Renewal Areas) (BCC)
- Parks Events Small Grants (BCC)

The estimated total value of these grants is approximately £900,000.

3.32

Officers are additionally requesting authority to use this opportunity to embed the learning from COVID-19 in to a new approach for 21/22 and beyond. This is a significant piece of work which will require further political and community engagement in the coming months but would be based on the following:

- Improved strategic alignment (including Belfast: Our Recovery) both within Council and with external partners utilising the Community Planning Partnership and associated Boards;
- Focus on outcomes and impact rather than activities and functional areas;
- Encourage co-design and community participation;
- Effective delivery mechanisms to include a streamlined programme, streamlined and consistent processes, innovative community financial investment methods as well as traditional grant funding;
- Reducing bureaucracy and administration to a proportionate level;
- Consideration of citywide as well as area priorities;
- Maximising accessibility and eligibility, particularly for those groups who would have accessed previous schemes.

