

COUNCILLOR LOCAL COMMUNITY FUND

Councillor Richard Cox Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

Date: 14th November 2023

Agenda Item:

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Key Decision? YES

Local Ward All
Members



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of a review of the two year pilot of the Councillor Local Community Grant Fund. The Committee's views and feedback are sought on the impact of the Fund, and the future of the Fund moving forwards.

2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Review and provide views to Cabinet on the impact of the Councillor Local Community Grant Fund.
- 2.2 Provide views to Cabinet on the continuation of the scheme and the proposed improvements outlined in paragraph 4.2.
- 2.3 Provide views to Cabinet on the level of funding available per councillor.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Councillor Local Community Grant Fund was set up in 2021 to enable councillors to award funding to grassroots organisations in their ward. Under the fund each councillor had £300 per annum to award to local projects and activities to make a positive impact in their area. Awards could be made from a minimum of £50 to a maximum of £300 with an option for applications to be made to more than one councillor in a ward or across wards, up to a maximum award of £900.
- 3.2 The Councillor Local Community Fund is one of a number of key funding opportunities available to support our local voluntary and community sector. Complementing the fund is the District Council's three-year VCS Funding Programme and the Community Lottery. The District Council is also a key supporter of We Love Lichfield, which is a local fund that provides small grants across the district.
- 3.3 It was agreed that the Councillor Local Community Fund would be run as a pilot over 2 years, starting in June 2021. To make it as easy as possible for grassroots organisations to apply, an online application form was developed focussing on the purpose of the organisation and what they needed funding for.

- 3.4 The fund was open to any community groups. The funding was aimed at:
- Projects that provide local solutions to local needs
 - One-off events that benefit the local community and support community resilience
 - Current projects/activities that need a small amount of support to continue or grow
 - Capital items (equipment, materials etc.)
 - New projects and activities that need some funding to get going
 - Projects that stimulate new community activity, such as setting up new local community events and clubs
- 3.5 Prior to the launch of the scheme, a training session was offered to all councillors. This set out councillor roles and responsibilities, including issues to consider when awarding funding, transparency, data protection and signposting to other funding options.
- 3.6 The scheme was originally intended to be run by the Council however following feedback from councillors, the Community Foundation were commissioned to administer the scheme on our behalf and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) was put in place.
- 3.7 In 2022 an interim evaluation was undertaken and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following this some minor changes were made to the scheme including changes to the application form to streamline the process. Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that a Task Group should meet to discuss matters relating to the governance process. The Leader of the Council also requested that the Task Group also investigate what would be deemed acceptable level of risks, recognising the balance between this and the low value of grants.
- 3.8 The Task Group met on 11th May 2022 to consider the governance and any risks associated with the current process. There was discussion regarding checks and balances of the scheme and issues experienced recently at another local authority and it was agreed that risks were lower at Lichfield District Council especially with the amount of grant available. Reputational risks of perceived inappropriate awarding were discussed however it was not considered a substantial concern, as there had not been any problems in the first round of applications and details of awards given by each Councillor to people along with details of purpose had been published and open to the public. It was reiterated that any concerns about potential conflicts of interest should be reported to the Monitoring Officer and any inappropriate awards would be dealt with via the Code of Conduct process.
- 3.9 To evaluate the impact of the pilot the following information has been collated and analysed:
- Feedback from councillors via an online survey
 - Feedback from groups who were awarded grants, via an online survey
 - Grant award information

4. Key Findings

4.1 Key findings include:

- 88% of the budget was spent in FY21-22 and 76% in FY22-23 (84% considering two additional awards which were made (Gazebo and Late Night Listeners).
- 68% of councillors spent their full allocation in 22/23, a decrease on the previous year of 78%.
- 92% of the respondents to the Community Groups survey found the application process to be easy, with 46% finding out about the fund directly from a local councillor.
- Community Groups quoted significant impacts on their groups from the funding, with 38% of respondents using the funding to purchase equipment.
- Just over half of the councillors who responded to the survey were happy with the guidance received and three quarters found the application process easy.
- Across both surveys, the need for improvement to communications was highlighted.
- The email form trialled in Year 2 to try to streamline the process created more issues for the Community Foundation as the correct information was not always provided and the form wasn't always filled out correctly.
- Councillors advised that they were not always clear on what needed to be completed in the form so there was a lot of back and forth with applications due to key information being missing from the application (such as bank details).
- The application process should be reviewed again to simplify it, to reduce the burden on community groups and avoid inefficiencies in having to go back and forth with applications
- The current SLA with the Community Foundation does not allow for them to administer the whole process and does not include sending out Grant Agreements, this part of the process was undertaken by District Council officers. Feedback suggests this created issues and inefficiencies.
- Given the value of the grants it is important that a proportionate approach is taken to requesting outcome and impact information from community groups.

4.2 If the decision is made to continue with the Fund, the following key improvements are recommended:

- Revise and simplify the application form
- Strengthen communication and guidance to councillors to encourage greater uptake and promotion of the Fund.
- Commission the Community Foundation to administer the Fund in its entirety on behalf of the District Council

4.3 The Community Foundation for Staffordshire is an independent charity dedicated to strengthening local communities across Staffordshire. They distribute grants for a range of different organisations as well as building and supporting endowment funds. As part of this evaluation, we have consulted with the Community Foundation and they would be willing to take on all aspects of delivering this Fund, including working with us to improve the application form, marketing and promotion, support to potential applications, supporting the decision-making process and grant monitoring. They have provided an indicative cost for this which is detailed in the financial implications section of this report.

4.4 Views are sought from the committee on the level of funding available per councillor. To increase the impact of the Fund, the Cabinet Member would welcome views on raising the level of funding available to £500 per councillor . This would increase the overall cost of the scheme to £24,675 as outlined in the financial implications section of this report. The current budget allocated in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is £14,100, as such if an increase in funding was agreed, this would create a pressure and options to fund it would need to be developed.

Alternative Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To not continue with the Councillor Local Community fund in 2024/25. To continue with the Councillor Local Community Fund in 2024/25 but at a different funding level per councillor than the current £300 or alternative £500. The funding earmarked for the scheme could be added into the funding for the larger CVS Funding Programme or used for other purposes. The CVS Funding Programme has a minimum award of £1,000 which may be too large for small grassroots organisations to apply for. To continue with the fund but to not use the Community Foundation to administer it. Instead, payments could be made payable direct from finance, however this would increase the administrative burden to the council. 												
Consultation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Community Foundation have been consulted for their feedback on the operation of the scheme. Councillors have been consulted via an online survey for their feedback on the scheme. Results are in Appendix B. Community groups have been consulted via an online survey for their feedback on the scheme. Results are in Appendix B. 												
Financial Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The funding of £14,100 is in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It is top sliced from the CVS allocation available for projects to support local communities. An increase from £300 to £500 would require an increase in budget of c£10,000: <table border="1" data-bbox="507 1274 1458 1431"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Amount per Councillor</i></th> <th>£300</th> <th>£500</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Total for 47 Councillors</td> <td>£14,100</td> <td>£23,500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Community Foundation Admin Fee @5%</td> <td>£705</td> <td>£1,175</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>£14,805</td> <td>£24,675</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> The funding can make a significant difference to local grass root organisations at minimum cost. If the Community Foundation continue to manage the scheme as in previous years, the cost is £423. Under the new proposal, with Community Foundations administering the entire scheme the cost would be £705; this is an additional £282 per year which is very good value for money and is much less that it would cost in council officer time to deliver. If the fund was increased to £500 the administration fee would be £1175. 	<i>Amount per Councillor</i>	£300	£500	Total for 47 Councillors	£14,100	£23,500	Community Foundation Admin Fee @5%	£705	£1,175	Total	£14,805	£24,675
<i>Amount per Councillor</i>	£300	£500											
Total for 47 Councillors	£14,100	£23,500											
Community Foundation Admin Fee @5%	£705	£1,175											
Total	£14,805	£24,675											
Approved by Section 151 Officer	Yes												
Legal Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The new Service Level agreement with Community Foundations will be assessed by the legal team before Cabinet if the fund is continuing in 2024/25. 												

Approved by Monitoring Officer	Yes
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding voluntary and community sector organisations makes a significant contribution to Enabling People and Shaping Place set out in the Strategic Plan 2020 to 2024. It will contribute to all outcomes identified in the draft Lichfield District 2050 Strategy.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Voluntary and community groups provide support to a range of groups and in particular children, older people and people with disabilities. 2. An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed if the decision is made to continue with the scheme.
EIA logged by Equalities Officer	Yes
Crime & Safety Issues	The funding could be used to impact (positively) on our duty to prevent crime and disorder within the district (Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1988) – e.g., security measures.
Data assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prosperous Communities - some of our wards are amongst the most income deprived in England, and in 2019, 8.4% of the local population was identified as income deprived. 2. Active Communities - we know around 35% of adults and 60% of children and young people in our district are not active for recommended weekly levels 3. Greener Communities – over 836,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases emitted across the district in 2019 and 149 protected wildlife sites exist across the district. 4. It is anticipated that the outcomes achieved by the funded projects will contribute to achieving the strategic objectives and result in improved outcomes in the data.
Environmental Impact (including Climate Change and Biodiversity).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The funding could be used to fund grassroots activities that have a positive environmental impact. 2. Funding community and voluntary groups that contribute to the green objectives of the district will promote sustainability, including use of renewable energy and other methods of conservation which will positively impact on the environment. 3. Groups can also raise awareness of environmental issues and impact on the district.
GDPR / Privacy Impact Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Privacy Impact Assessment was completed in 2021. This identified risks as inappropriate sharing of data and data being kept longer than required. The training and Member Code of Conduct provide the key mechanisms for minimising the risk and Data privacy notices will be developed. 2. There is no high risk to the rights and freedoms of any individuals through this process, the process hasn't fundamentally changed since the previous assessment and therefore no new Data Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA/DPIA). Only key information should be obtained in the initial form.

	Risk Description & Risk Owner	Original Score (RYG)	How We Manage It	Current Score (RYG)
A	Inappropriate awarding/ use of funding	Likelihood: Green Impact: Yellow Risk: Green	Members would make declarations about the use of funding, which would be in the public domain ensuring awards are transparent. The amount of funding available ensures there is no significant financial risk. Members are required to adhere to their code of conduct and training would help minimise the risks. The Community Foundation will administer the scheme and the SLA will be robust to ensure only appropriate funds are awarded.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Yellow Risk: Green
B	Funding not allocated	Likelihood: Green Impact: Yellow Risk: Green	We will promote the scheme to all councillors and provide all the necessary training. The scheme will be advertised on our website.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Yellow Risk: Green
C	Disproportionate officer support required	Likelihood: Green Impact: Yellow Risk: Green	Improved application form and processes will be put in place to ensure minimum support required. If the Community Foundations administer the whole scheme there will be significantly less officer time required.	Likelihood: Green Impact: Yellow Risk: Green

Background documents

Any previous reports or decisions linked to this item

<https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=268&MId=1807>

Relevant web links

Any links for background information which may be useful to understand the context of the report

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/community/can-i-fund-community-project>

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/community/can-i-fund-community-project/3>

[The Community Foundation for Staffordshire – Funding, Giving, Changing](#)

APPENDIX A – Analysis of Grant Award Information

A larger amount of the overall fund was spent by Councillors in FY21-FY22 compared with FY22-23.

Chart 1

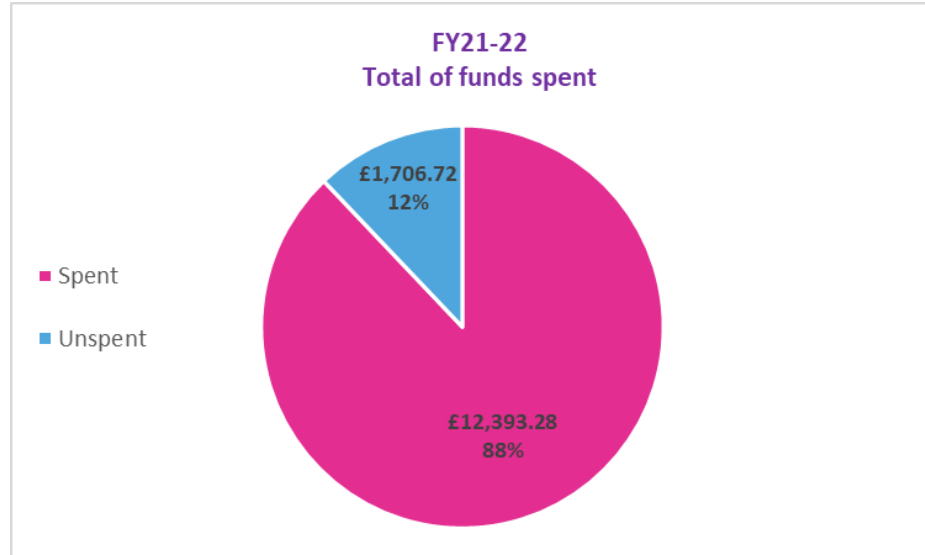
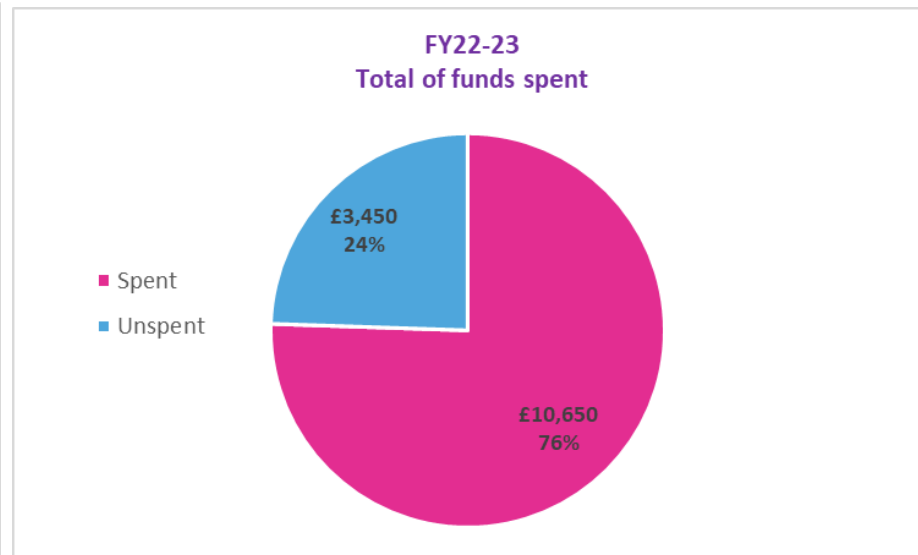


Chart 2



However, two additional awards were then given out of the remaining £3,450 in FY22-23 (Gazebo and to Late Night Listeners) – leaving an overall underspend from this fund of £1,903 (16%).

A total of 100 grants were given in FY21-22, and a total of 87 grants were given in FY22-23, with two additional awards also given (Gazebo and Late Night Listeners).

The charts below show that the overall number of Councillors to spend their full allocation in FY22-23 decreased from the previous year.

Chart 3

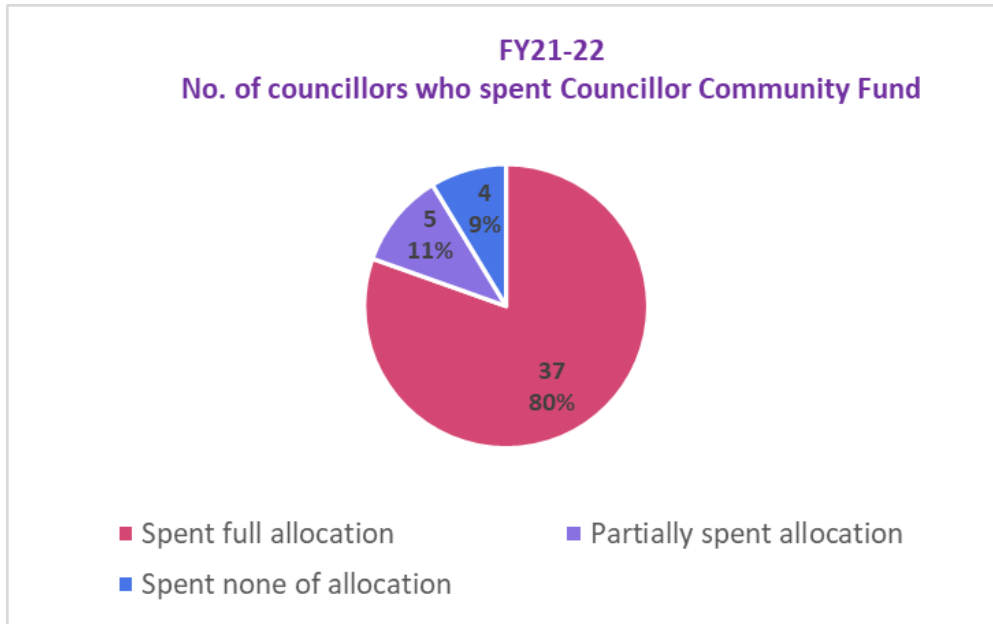
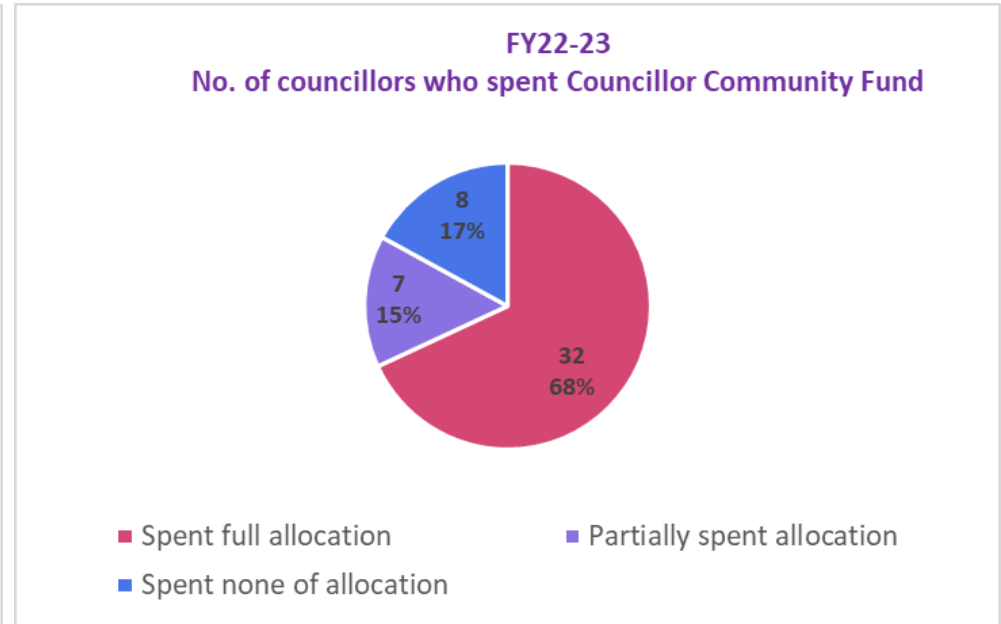


Chart 4



Across both years, sports groups received the most funding. There was a broad reach of types of organisations who benefited from the grants, such as arts groups, community groups and social groups.

Chart 5

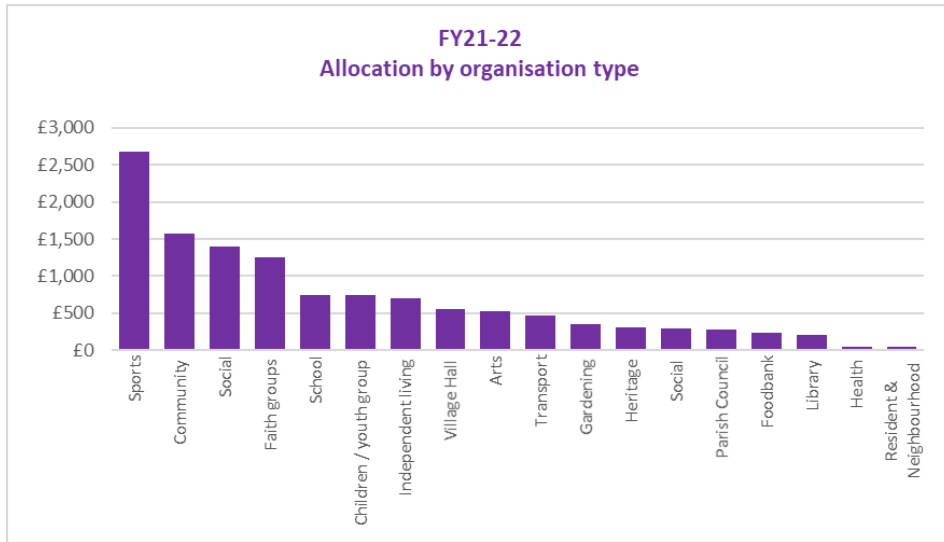
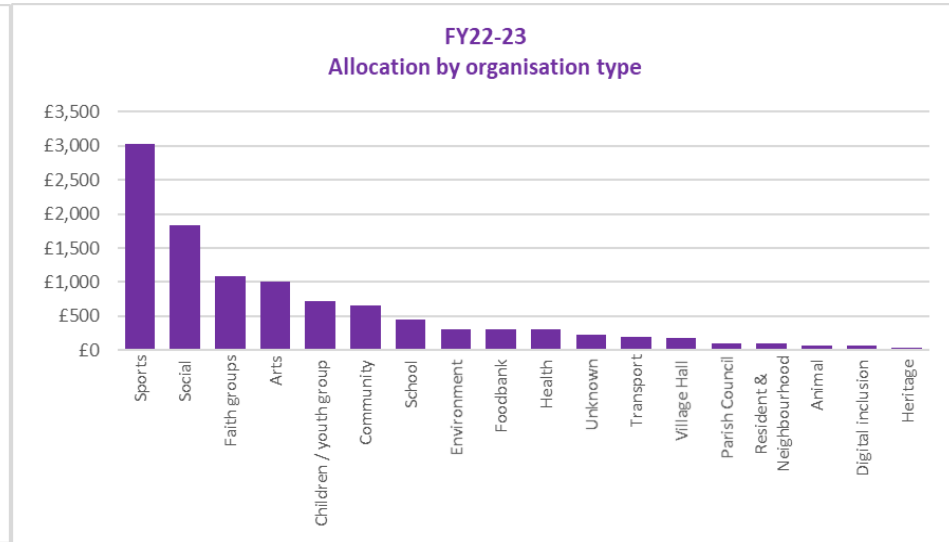
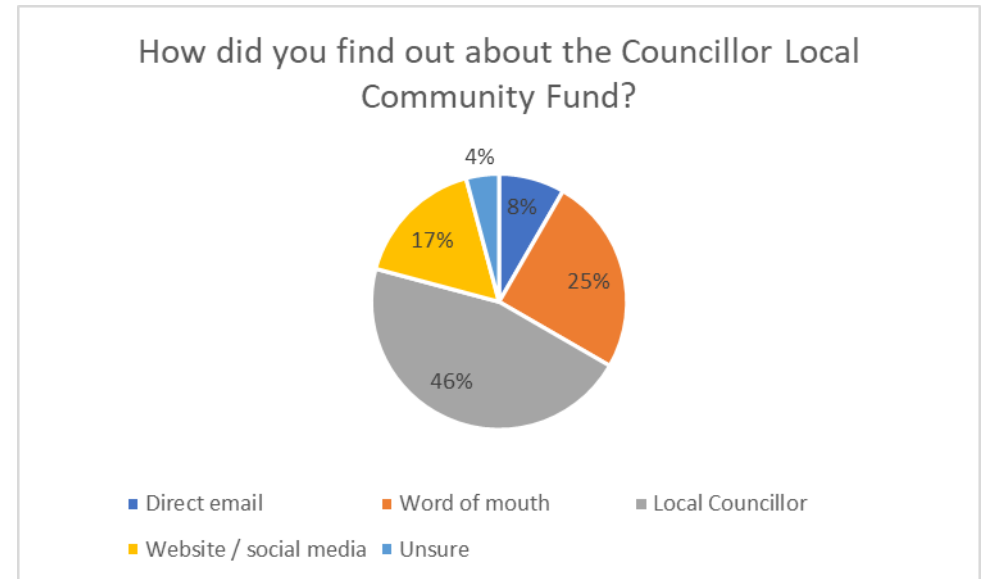
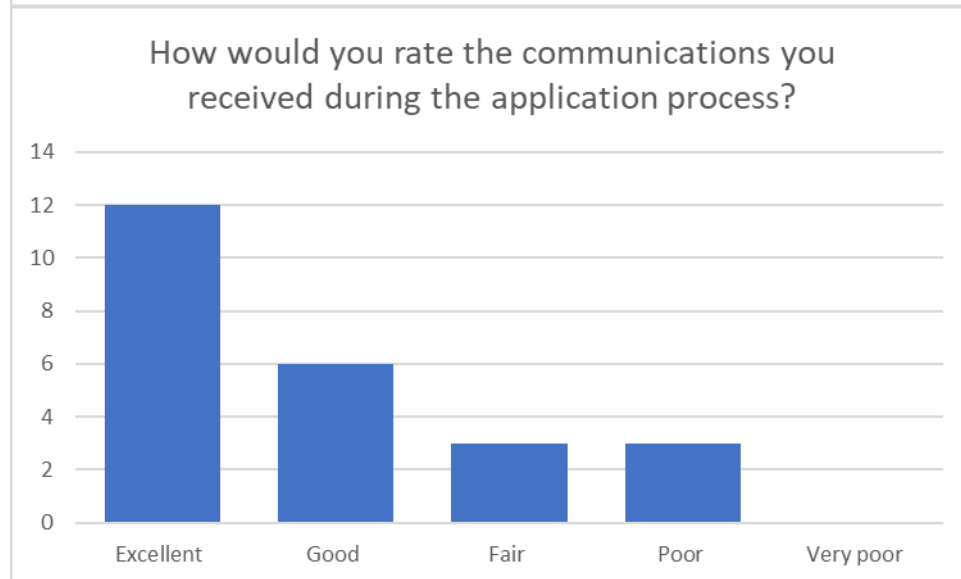
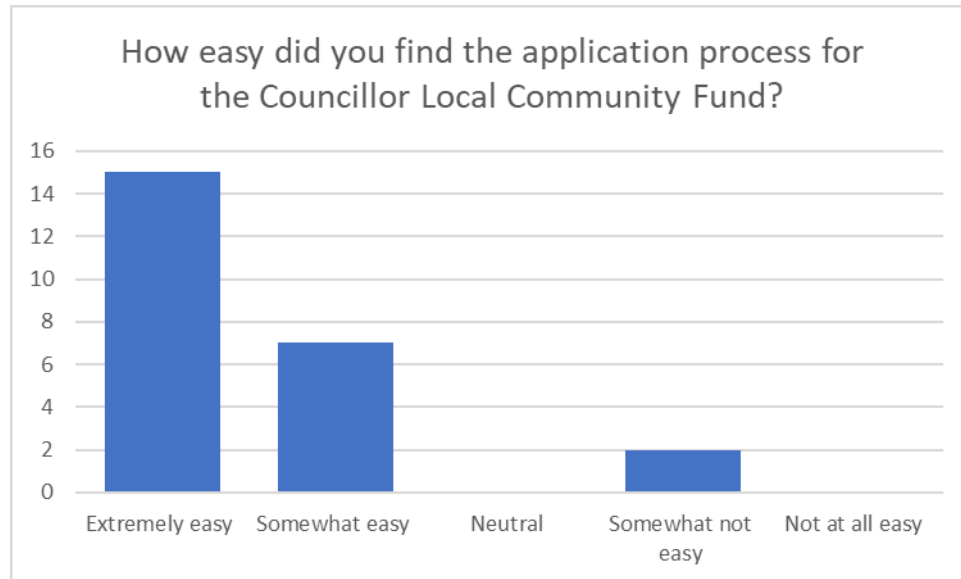


Chart 6



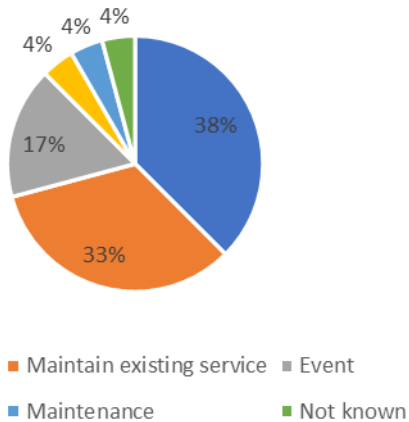
APPENDIX B – Analysis of Feedback

Community Group Online Survey - (24 responses received)



- 92% of those who responded found the application process to be either extremely easy or somewhat easy.
- Whilst the majority of those who responded found the communications during the application process to be excellent or good, 25% rated comms to be fair or poor.
- Community Groups found out about the Fund from a variety of methods, with 46% finding out directly from their Local Councillor.

What impact did receiving the funding have on your organisation?



- 38% of respondents used the funding to purchase equipment, whilst 33% used the funding to continue an existing service or function.
- 17% of respondents used the funding to run events
- Comments provided included:

“It will enable us to continue to feed adults and families in crisis”
“It could be lifesaving as its for a Defibrillator”
“A big impact. It meant we could buy the storage shed we desperately needed to be able to continue.”
“Significant. Allowed us to run the project for an additional month”
“It helped with a charity lunch and entertainment which raised nearly £900 for 2 local charities.”
“It makes it possible to hold an event for the community”

The survey asked for – any further comments on how the scheme could be improved. Limited responses were submitted for this question, however comments identifying possible improvements included:

“Better communication.”

“Make the application process and access to list of appropriate councillors easier and more transparent - also advertise scheme more widely. If councillors do not use any or all of their discretionary awards are they rolled over or lost to the community?”

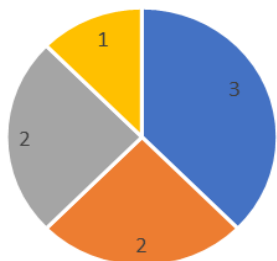
“More updates and communication with the process”

“ I think there should be more engagement with the councillors who have allocated their funds and some promo via your website/newsletter on all the projects. It would encourage others to apply for funds and would be good publicity for you as a council.”

Councillor Online Survey 2023 (8 responses received)

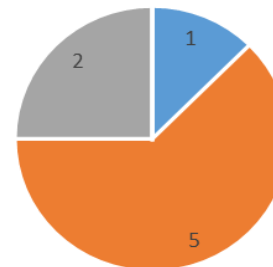
It should be noted that the survey was distributed to current Councillors, many of which were newly elected to the Council in May 2023.

How satisfied were you with the guidance given on the Councillor Local Community Fund?



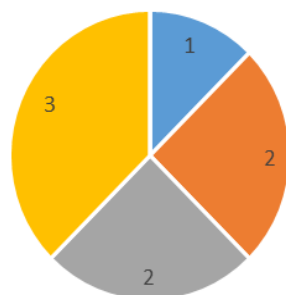
■ Very satisfied
■ Somewhat satisfied
■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
■ Somewhat dissatisfied
■ Very dissatisfied

How easy did you find the application process for the Councillor Local Community Fund?



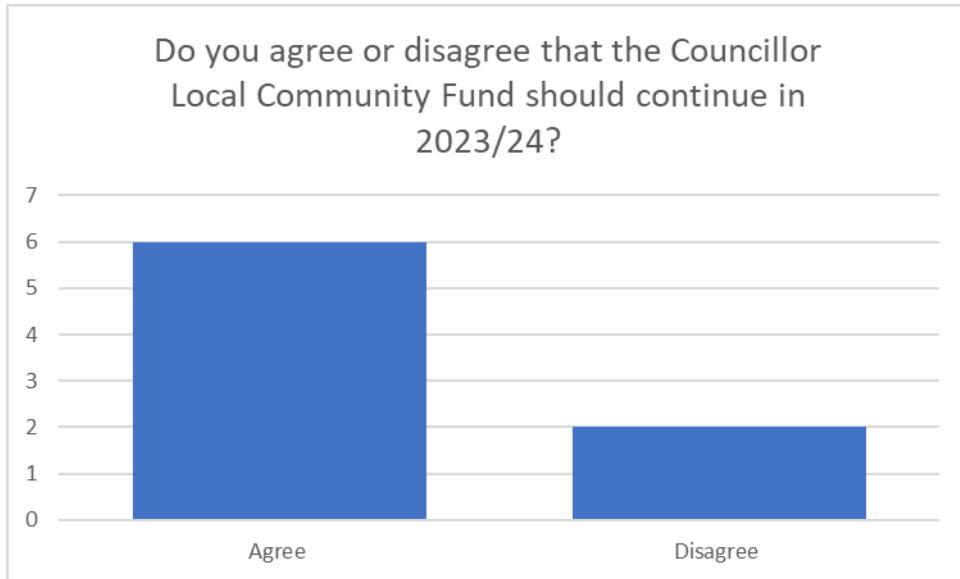
■ Extremely easy
■ Somewhat easy
■ Neutral
■ Somewhat not easy
■ Extremely not easy

How would you rate the communications you received during the application process?



■ Excellent
■ Good
■ Fair
■ Poor
■ Very poor

- 5 of the 8 respondents were satisfied with the guidance given on the fund
- 7 of the 8 respondents found the application process to be easy.
- There was a mixed view of the communications received during the process, with 3 out of 8 respondents giving a rating of 'poor'.
- 6 out of 8 respondents agreed that the Fund should continue in 2023/2024.
- Comments were given around improved comms with the need for clear comms and reminders.
- Also comments around more money per Councillor would be beneficial.



Respondents noted a variety of outcomes were achieved with the funding:

“Lots of community groups benefited. Helping out locally. Arts festival. Toddler group church afternoon teas and more.”

“Events held at Purcell Avenue Social Club, support given to Lichfield Foodbank, new computers secured for Code Club and new water butts secured at Curborough”

“Allowing small groups to receive small amounts of funding that makes all the difference.”

“Sensory garden provided for older people and children supported to attend a Christmas event”

How could the Councillor Local Community Fund be improved?

“Transparency is needed. The agreed funding must support the council's strategic plan. Elected members must be informed of the proposal - which must have more detail, including the detail of the applicant and who they anticipate will benefit from the grant applied for. There was a lack of information for members as to what other councillors were being included in the particular application.”

“I feel that the funds could be better used, if gathered together and given to one project and/or paid for time for staff member to support local groups in other funding bids and community development support”

