

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET3 June 2021Report by Deputy Chief ExecutiveCOVID-19 HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT FUNDING 2021/2022**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet views on proposals for the distribution of one-off Scottish Government humanitarian support funding within East Renfrewshire in 2021/22.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Note the availability of COVID-related Scottish Government funding in 2021/22 for Flexible Support and Financial Insecurity.
 - b) Approve the proposed 4-tier approach and proposed budget allocations for use of this funding including:
 - meeting appropriate COVID support needs arising as part of ongoing response in communities;
 - progressing a range of internal projects in line with the funding criteria;
 - conducting research and engagement to inform our recovery and renewal strategies and culminating in a community-bid process in the autumn.
 - c) Approve the recommended short-term spending proposals outlined at Annex 1.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

3. In response to COVID-19, the Scottish Government released several funds to local authorities throughout 2020/2021 to support residents in financial hardship; those struggling with the restrictions and guidance in place; those shielding and isolating as part of Test & Protect. A sub-group of the Council Resilience Management Team (CRMT) was established to oversee this area. The COVID Humanitarian Support Group has been overseeing these funds and has reported to the CRMT and CMT on progress and options. The details of the humanitarian response have been reported to Council as part of the regular updates on the COVID response. This report gives an overview of the funding to date and the funds available for 2021/22.

4. The COVID funding landscape has been complex over the last year, with fragmented funds each with varying criterion and central reporting requirements. Managing the various funding streams has been a significant commitment for the Council, but undoubtedly valuable to local communities. Today's report focuses on the funding streams made available for 'support for people' – we have used the umbrella term 'Humanitarian Support' in East Renfrewshire. This has included 'Supporting People' funding' (a flexible fund to support individuals at financial risk and support wellbeing); and the 'Flexible Fund' (to strengthen support available to people in Level 4 areas).

5. Over the last year this funding has been used in various ways, in consultation with services and our third sector partners, Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire, to support local communities. This has included establishing and running the Humanitarian Food Hub which operated between April and September 2020; supporting running of Voluntary Action's Community Hub; supply of supermarket vouchers and emergency hardship grants via Money Advice and Rights Team's (MART) discretionary

fund; helping with costs of prescription deliveries to those isolating or shielding in the early months of the pandemic; additional support for MART and the Scottish Welfare Fund to cope with increased demand; helping those on clothing grants with additional costs of winter clothing for outdoor education; supporting vulnerable Social Work clients and families with activity and wellbeing packs to ease tensions in households during lockdown; provision of digital devices to young people via Community Learning and Development services; supporting the establishment of local food larders as a longer-term solution to poverty-related food needs in East Renfrewshire; and additional support to the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

6. The Scottish Government has confirmed that councils can carry forward unspent funds from 2020/2021 and also allocated new significant funding for use in 2021/2022. There is no commitment to funding beyond 2021/22.

REPORT

7. East Renfrewshire Council has in the region of £246,000 underspend from 2020/2021 which will be carried forward and must be spent by the end of financial year 2021/2022 and the Council was also allocated new funding which will be used in 2021/22 as follows:

- £296,000 from Scottish Government's 'Flexible Fund' to strengthen local authority responses to meet emerging needs and support people in their communities struggling with the restrictions and guidance at all protection levels, particularly those at risk through health and social inequalities; and
- £196,000 from Scottish Government's 'Financial Insecurity Fund' to enable local authorities to support individuals at financial risk including providing cash-based support to food insecurity, support to meet fuel costs, supplementing Scottish Welfare Fund budget and Discretionary Housing Payments, and other activities and services, as necessary, to support individuals to overcome financial crisis and support wellbeing.

8. £161,000 of the budget noted above is committed to continuing the local discretionary fund provided by the Money Advice and Rights Team throughout 2021/2022, provision of shopping vouchers for food, short-term fuel support via Citizens Advice Bureau and officer time to manage increased demand on services responding to residents in socio-economic need (e.g. via the Scottish Welfare Fund).

9. The Humanitarian Support CRMT sub-group (including VAER), along with the Corporate Management Team, has developed a strategic approach to use of the remaining funding for 2021/22 which will be in the region of £577,000.

10. A 4-tier approach is proposed:

- a) Reserving a proportion to respond to any emerging COVID support needs in 21/22
- b) Progressing a number of internal proposals from Council and HSCP services
- c) Conducting community engagement and research to inform the broader recovery strategy and a community bid process
- d) Conducting an East Renfrewshire community-bid process later in the autumn 2021.

11. Whilst we do need to reserve a proportion of the funding to meet any emerging COVID-support needs over the year ahead, the focus of proposals is to build long-term, sustainable solutions which will help towards ongoing support for our most vulnerable residents as we recover from the pandemic.

12. East Renfrewshire Council and HSCP services have identified a number of areas where further support is required and we recommend the proposals outlined in Annex 1 be funded.

13. It is proposed that some quick community engagement and research work is undertaken to help us understand the impact of COVID on our residents, particularly the most vulnerable. This will include lived-experience feedback from residents and relevant data to highlight priorities and needs. This would allow for an evidence-based approach to inform short term support needs as well as the longer-term benefit of informing recovery and renewal. Findings will also inform our approaches to inequality including Vision for the Future and the Local Child Poverty agenda.

14. The research outcomes would be linked to the proposal for a community-bid process later in the autumn. This would be open across the whole East Renfrewshire area and findings from the research would shape the criteria for the bids. This would be open to all community and third sector (not-for-profit) organisations with a focus on capacity building and sustainable solutions and would be delivered in partnership with our Third Sector Interface, Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire.

15. Allowing for a small contingency for emerging needs and priorities, the proposed allocation of budget is as follows:

- £50,000 for emerging COVID community support needs - this will be monitored closely throughout the year and any underspend reallocated prior to the end of the financial year.
- £300,000 for projects highlighted in Annex 1 to support residents in need
- £40,000 for community engagement & research
- £150,000 for community projects to support residents in need

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

16. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report. The funding is issued by the Scottish Government as detailed above and must meet the conditions for use. This funding is only available in 2021/22 so there can be no ongoing commitments beyond the end of the financial year.

CONSULTATION & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

17. The humanitarian response to COVID in East Renfrewshire has been delivered through ongoing partnership working with Voluntary Action East Ren; including the development of this proposed approach. We have also consulted with the relevant stakeholder groups such as the Social Security Working Group, Local Child Poverty Action Group and Local Employability Partnership.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

18. There are no specific implications of this report in terms of staffing, property, legal, ICT, equalities or sustainability. Should the recommended approach be approved, any proposals funded will be required to consider these implications for that project.

CONCLUSION

19. The funding will provide much needed support to our most vulnerable residents who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. Service-led projects will address immediate needs; research and engagement will highlight priorities and vulnerabilities and inform our strategy for recovery and renewal; and funding community projects will support longer-term, sustainable solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the availability of COVID-related Scottish Government funding in 2021/22 for Flexible Support and Financial Insecurity.
- b) Approve the proposed 4-tier approach and proposed budget allocations for use of this funding including:
 - meeting appropriate COVID support needs arising as part of ongoing response in communities;
 - progressing a range of internal projects in line with the funding criteria;

- conducting research and engagement to inform our recovery and renewal strategies and culminating in a community-bid process in the autumn.
- c) Approve the recommended short-term spending proposals outlined at Annex 1.

May 2021

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- COVID-19 Recovery Actions – Update, Council 24 June, 28 October & 16 December 2020

ANNEX 1

Initiative	Amount	Target group	Details
Strengthen capacity at the front door of the HSCP for adults to allow staff to spend the time with the increased numbers of individuals contacting the HSCP who are presenting as stressed and distressed due the impact of the Pandemic	£35,000	Adults/older adults with mental health support needs	To employ an additional social work assistant (Grade 8) on a temporary basis to screen calls and provide a stronger dedicated between the ICT and Talking Points to ensure that the most vulnerable citizens of East Renfrewshire are receiving the right support in the right way at the right time. East Renfrewshire Voluntary Action have been involved in the development of this initial expression of interest and are fully supportive of the need to strengthen capacity to support people contacting and accessing services of the HSCP and VAER's Community Hub.
To provide sensory experience to individuals from both Barrhead and Thornliebank centres for Learning Disabilities and for other organisations within the local community who provide support to Individuals with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health issues.	£3,500	Individuals with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health issues	To purchase sensory equipment to enhance stimulation and wellbeing for all individuals who access the centres.
Providing a Travel to Work scheme to reduce the financial burden of travel costs for the increasing number of unemployed residents being supported by Work East Ren as a result of the pandemic	£5,000	Low-income/unemployed residents 16+	Maximum contribution of £254.50 per individual for one month travel. 20+ residents
Fuel poverty advice and support	£34,000	Low-income households	To employ a Fuel Poverty Officer (Grade 7) on a temporary basis
Establish a problem-solving detached youthwork response across ER to help address increased anti-social behaviour, large gatherings of young people/youth disorder, drug use/weapon carrying and mental health issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic	£49,000	Young people in poverty/vulnerable/mental health/youth unemployment/antisocial behaviour	To employ a part-time CLD Practitioner (Grade 9) on a temporary basis to coordinate and support 3 part time sessional detached youth work staff, who will be deployed across the authority where recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour and community perception of youth disorder are highest. This will include weekend periods/times currently not possible to cover. CLD Practitioner will provide link to the relevant schools.

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Provision of local training and support for staff, volunteers and community groups to assist residents with digital skills	£10,000	Low paid/income, socially isolated and digitally excluded/ low confidence with digital devices/services	To create a bespoke East Renfrewshire specific training course that would highlight the various services that are available to residents. This would include content relating to social security services, websites, YouTube and would work alongside the Communications teams that are looking at 'how to' provision for advice services.
Develop opportunities to reconnect and build a support network for parents/carers experiencing increased isolation and loneliness as a result of Covid-19	£27,500	Families living in poverty, with specific focus on unemployed parents and single parents	To employ a Family First Support Worker (Grade 8) on a temporary basis to co-ordinate and implement support
To provide skills and qualifications for those aged 16 to 24 with a focus on senior phase and post school who are unemployed and seeking.	£50,000	Senior phase pupils and post school young people unemployed and seeking - 16 to 24 year olds	Secure external training and provide travel contribution if required
To provide free breakfast for pupils at 9 schools in Barrhead and Neilston	£66,000	Children and young people living in poverty	Food and staffing costs
To provide Wellbeing supports to community staff and volunteers working on the frontline throughout the pandemic	£20,000	Frontline community staff and volunteers	To part-fund of a temporary Wellbeing Officer post to co-ordinate and facilitate wellbeing supports