

Briefing Note – Community Grants Programme

September 2024

Background context

On 22nd January 2024 the Executive received a report setting out the proposals for the Community Grants Programme for 2024/25 and how it could be funded using the Neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (NHCIL)

Key recommendations included:

- Agree the 11 recommendations relating to the Community Grants Programme
- Agree the 5 recommendations relating to Wellbeing Exeter
- The Portfolio Holder and Director of Culture, Leisure and Tourism be required to update the Executive on the progress of the transition of Wellbeing Exeter and the Community Programme by September 2024.

The report below highlights the progress made against the agreed recommendations through a summary report of progress against the key Community Grants programme workstrands.

Community Grants Programme recommendations and progress to date:

Recommendation	Progress
1. A strategic needs assessment of community buildings should take place before any further investment is made in building projects	<p>There has been no further grant investment towards rent for community buildings in 2024/25</p> <p>An internal audit and information exercise has been completed to gather all intelligence on the current status of all council owned community buildings</p> <p>This information will form part of specification to commission some external support to review information with leaseholders and assess their current business plans for long term sustainability</p>

<p>2. More stringent targeting should take place alongside proactive promotion of small community grants which could be more effective if linked into the work of Wellbeing Exeter’s locality-based Community Builders.</p>	<p>Wellbeing Exeter Community Builders working to promote and support local City Grants applications, evidence of this happening through Round 1 applications.</p> <p>ECI/Community Builder representation Grants Panel providing detailed support to grants panel decision making</p> <p>Further training for Community Builders planned and local interaction with ward members encouraged</p>
<p>3. Allocating grants to addressing specific issues faced predominately in priority neighbourhoods such as digital exclusion, where there is a strong evidence based on effective approaches that deliver measurable impacts.</p>	<p>City Grant priorities reviewed, ‘Digital Inclusion’ added to the list of priority criteria. Applicants must demonstrate ability to meet priority outcomes through all applications.</p> <p>Grant application form amended to reflect this Exeter grants programme - Exeter City Council</p>
<p>4. Placing a cap on the amount of grant funding that can be awarded to any one organisation over a 3-year period and also on the number of applications that can be made in any financial year. (Though it is recognised, and would need to be taken into account, that some of the larger organisations act as an umbrella organisation for smaller grass roots groups that are not constituted and do not have their own bank account).</p>	<p>Added to Terms & Conditions</p>
<p>5. The Executive to continue to allow for grant award decisions to be made by members on the cross-party Grants Panel but to consider more pro-active monitoring of the deployment of ward grants and reducing the annual allocation to better reflect average annual spend over the last 4 years: £3,000 per ward.</p>	<p>Incorporated into role and responsibility of 2024/25 grant panel members.</p> <p>Ward Grants now capped at 3,000 per ward per annum.</p> <p>Regular reporting of spend to Grants Panel at each meeting. Further review to take place after 12 months of new grants programme. Exeter Ward Grants - Exeter City Council</p>
<p>6. That more robust due diligence, including ensuring the receipt of impact evaluation be undertaken prior to the award any grant in excess of £5,000.</p>	<p>At present the maximum grant issued through the new grants programme is £2,500.</p> <p>Further work to be undertaken through impact and evaluation tender</p>

<p>7. A re-focus of grant giving on evidence-based approaches to make best use of the available funds. This could be achieved by linking ECC community grants into the work of Wellbeing Exeter's locality-based Community Builders which would ensure robust impact assessment in line with Wellbeing Exeter policy and practice.</p>	<p>This will require further focus in Q3 2024/25 now that the new lead delivery partner for Wellbeing Exeter (CoLab) is in place</p>
<p>8. Adopting a more explicit and positive approach to match funding.</p>	<p>The Exeter City Grants programme now has a formal requirement to provide 20% cash match funding to be eligible for a grant. Terms and conditions updated. Exeter City Grants - Exeter City Council</p>
<p>9. Switching from an open annual rolling grant programmes to a more structured approach opening the grant fund for limited periods 2 or 3 times a year. This would be less resource intensive for staff and members and provides flexibility in managing fluctuations in NHCIL income in year without disrupting the grants programme.</p>	<p>The Exeter City Grants Programme has been launched with 3 explicit grant application windows in August, October and December. This approach will be reviewed after 12 months. Positive feedback received from officers and members after Round 1. Ward Grants remain open on a rolling basis</p>
<p>10. The Information, Advice and Advocacy Contract comes to an end in March 2024 after two extensions and is unable to be continued in its present form. If the Council wish to continue to support the work of the work of Citizens Advice, it is suggested to use sources other than funding from Neighbourhood CIL.</p>	<p>A one-off grant of £70,000 (using alternative funds to nCIL) provided to CAB Exeter for 2024/25. Quarterly reporting on the grant funding outcomes being undertaken. Ongoing conversation between ECC Officers and CAB Exeter about long term sustainability planning. CAB Exeter have launched and are undertaking and external funding campaign</p>
<p>11. As the long-term future of Wellbeing Exeter is also under consideration it makes sense for the Council to consider embedding key aspects of the Exeter Connect contract into Wellbeing Exeter's future role. This makes financial and system sense and avoids duplication of effort and spend. If the Council decides to discontinue funding Wellbeing Exeter it could then reconsider if it is a priority for the Council to re-establish a VCSE support organisation in the city</p>	<p>The Wellbeing Exeter delivery contract (awarded to COLab) contains a requirement to deliver local strategic networking, coordination and support for the local VCSE. Two core delivery partners have been appointed: Exeter Community Initiatives (former hosts of Exeter Connect) and Exeter City Community Trust. Development work will be undertaken with CoLab in Q3 2024/25 to understand the ongoing capacity required to provide this support on an annual basis</p>

Wellbeing Exeter recommendations:

Recommendation	Progress
1. Continuing as Lead Commissioner for Wellbeing Exeter to ensure its strategic development continues to focus on achieving the Exeter 2040 Vision.	Exeter City Council remains the lead accountable body and initiated the procurement process to appoint the new lead delivery partner
2. Become a Core Funder under the new model providing resources to fund the Core Model within the targeted 20 priority neighbourhoods which will include: Community Building; Community Connecting; Resettlement Connector; Community Physical Activity Organisers and Network Support	Exeter City Council has committed £275,563 of nCIL funding to deliver the new Wellbeing Exeter core model in 2024/25. CoLab, Exeter Community Initiatives and Exeter City Community Trust are delivering the core model through the 2024/25 hosting the Community Connectors, Community Builders and Community Physical Activity Organisers respectively.
3. Fund an Enhanced Model to develop Community Building within the St James and Pinhoe Wards which are the areas in the city dealing with significant development	Exeter City Council has committed £125,940 of nCIL funding to deliver the Wellbeing Exeter enhanced model in 2024/25, with full time Community Builder posts operating in St James and Pinhoe wards.
4. Use its Core and Enhanced Funder status to secure match funding from other strategic partners/investors.	In year funding of £252,000 has been secured from Sport England in 2024/25 to continue as a core partner A place Partnership 'deepening submission' has been approved by Sport England (subject to contract) providing further investment of c. £750,000 to continue as a core funder of Wellbeing Exeter to 2028
5. Utilise Wellbeing Exeter reserves to provide funding to support the transition from the old to the new model and to assist in the securing of new leadership and governance arrangements.	The transition to the new delivery partner and model is complete with CoLab starting the contract

Progress of Community Grants Programme Workstreams

The Terms of Reference were agreed by the Panel, of which a copy is available on this [link](#). Grants panel members have been briefed/inducted on the new Terms of Reference and the new Community Grants programme

Strand	Ward Grants
Progress Status	<p>The Exeter Ward Grant enables community groups to apply for a maximum grant of £350, from an overall budget of £39,000. Each of the 13 wards has £3,000 to spend. A Ward Grant can support a community project, such as a community festival, theatre production or a craft group. Examples of costs that could be supported include equipment or resources, publicity, materials, and refreshments. Applicants for a Ward Grant will need to demonstrate that there is local community support for your project. For an applicant to be successful 2 out of the 3 ward members must approve the application. The current position in regards to spending is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount Available: £39,000.00 • Amount Awarded: £14,233.00 • Balance Remaining: £24,767.00
Next Steps	Regular monthly review of spend and ongoing support of members to issue ward grants.
Timeline	Ongoing – Quarterly reports to Director

Strand	City Grant Fund
Progress Status	<p>The Exeter City Grant was launched shortly after the July meeting and received 17 applications. This Grant Fund supports groups and organisations to help run events, festivals and projects that aim to encourage community participation in line with ECC priorities. This fund can also be used for a one-off purchase or repair of equipment. One-off grants to a maximum £2,500 are available from an overall budget of £50,000. This is split equally between 3 rounds, with approximately £17,000 allocated for each round. Each applicant must demonstrate a min. of 20% cash match funding.</p> <p>An inaugural meeting of the Grants Panel took place on 5th September 2024, and assessed 17 applications received. A total of £15,750 was awarded to 8 organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-Create Exeter CIC Exeter Colab (Colab Women) Exeter Pride Exeter Respect Isca Community Enterprises Outreach Southwest CIC Love Food CIC

	<p>Music in Devon CIC</p> <p>5 applications were deferred subject to further information. 4 applications were declined.</p> <p>Total Awarded in Round 1: £15,750.00 (of the allocated £17,000 for Round 1) Remaining Budget for Rounds 2 & 3: £34,250.00 Total Annual Budget: £50,000</p>
Next Steps	<p>Formal communication is being issued to all applications with next steps</p> <p>Round 2 Applications will be launched in October and assessed in November</p>
Timeline	Round 2 opens 7 th October; Grants Panel w/c 18 th November

Strand	Exeter Community Lottery
Progress Status	<p>In the first 12 months of the Exeter Community Lottery: 121 local good causes have signed up. The top performing local causes are Sylvania Community Stores, Exeter Strollers Walking Football Club, SW Therapy Centre, Heavitree Bowls Club, Devon Family History Society all receiving in excess of £1000.</p> <p>The initial annual set up and maintenance costs were £6,558 The Exeter City Council Central Fund has raised a total of £17,730 In total £48,378 was raised for local good causes and the central fund</p> <p>NB: 60% of proceeds go to good causes. 50% to the chosen good cause and 10p to the Operator (Exeter City Council) community Fund. 20% goes towards prizes for players 20% to the ELM for administration and VAT.</p>
Next Steps	Ongoing lottery maintenance and communication. A new licensee if required.
Timeline	Ongoing – Quarterly reports to Director

Strand	Digital Inclusion
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Progress Status	<p>Digital Grant Fund £20,000 has been allocated to tender for external organisation to support the delivery of digital inclusion work to enable digitally excluded residents in Exeter to be able to access support and services from ECC.</p> <p>A draft tender has been produced now needs to be finalised, approved by new Strategic Director and tender to go out to a number of agencies</p>
Next Steps	Finalise Tender and release to potential providers through mini competition
Timeline	October 2024
Strand	Impact and Evaluation
Progress Status	<p>We are proposing to deliver a mini procurement for the review and to help design a robust evaluation plan to strengthen the evaluation process with organisations in receipt of grants. £20,000 available to deliver this work.</p> <p>A draft tender has been produced. This now needs to be finalised, approved by new Strategic Director and tender to go out to a number of agencies</p>
Next Steps	Finalise Tender and release to potential providers through mini competition
Timeline	October 2024
Strand	Community Buildings
Progress Status	<p>An internal audit and information exercise has been completed to gather all intelligence on the current status of all council owned community buildings</p> <p>This information will form part of specification to commission some external support to review information with leaseholders and assess their current business plans for long term sustainability</p>
Next Steps	Finalise specification and tender and release to potential providers through mini competition
Timeline	October 2024

James Bogue September 2024