

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET25 November 2021Report by Deputy Chief ExecutiveCOVID-19 HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT COMMUNITY FUNDING**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the distribution of one-off Scottish Government humanitarian support funding within East Renfrewshire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Note the progress of the Humanitarian community engagement and research.
 - b) Approve the distribution of the humanitarian funding against the proposed themes in paragraph 7.
 - c) Agree that the Humanitarian Group will allocate any underspends across the themes to support local communities.
 - d) Delegate to the Director of Corporate & Community Services & Head of Accountancy, in consultation with the CRMT/CMT, to make appropriate arrangements for use of the Winter Support Fund in line with government guidance.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

3. In response to COVID-19, the Scottish Government released several funds to local authorities throughout 2020 and 2021 to support residents in financial hardship; those struggling with the restrictions and guidance in place; and those shielding and those isolating as part of Test & Protect. The details of the humanitarian response have been reported to Council as part of the regular updates on the COVID response.

4. On 3 June 2021, Cabinet approved the approach and approximate budget allocations for the Scottish Government funding for Flexible Support and Financial Insecurity, as follows:

- (i) £50,000 for emerging COVID community support needs
- (ii) £300,000 for projects to support residents in need
- (iii) £40,000 for community engagement & research
- (iv) £150,000 for community projects to support residents in need

5. This paper outlines the progress of the Humanitarian community engagement and research and gives further detail on how the £150,000 will be allocated to support local residents in need, using a participatory budgeting approach.

REPORT

6. An independent research agency was appointed to conduct community engagement and research work to help us understand the impact of COVID on our residents, particularly the most vulnerable. This work involves interviews with residents, businesses, community representatives and other key stakeholders to identify the key priorities and needs. All Elected Members have been invited

to take part in the research. In addition, researchers have analysed relevant local and national data relating to the impact of the pandemic.

7. The early findings from the research and engagement includes the following high level themes:
- Health and social care impacts, both direct and indirect. Themes include issues arising for those who were required to shield and/or take extra caution during lockdown, to loss of regular services or having remote appointments, to a worsening of physical and/or mental health, often compounded by a significant decrease in outdoor access.
 - Economic impacts on individuals and families; including employment and social security support
 - Wellbeing and quality of life, including contact with family and friends, challenges in adapting to home working and supporting children with home learning
 - Loneliness and isolation: this was an issue for many but in particular older residents, those required to shield and those caring for young children
 - Impact on children in relation to isolation from friends, adapting to remote learning and mental health particularly for older young people
 - Impacts on businesses: positive and negative experiences, ability to adapt to government restrictions and implement change, available funding, town centre footfall and business growth opportunities
 - Impacts on community groups, including any funding and practical support needs.

These are early themes emerging from the engagement and research work, which is now nearing completion.

8. In June 2021 Cabinet agreed that at least £150,000 would be allocated to fund projects or initiatives in local communities, based on a bid process. Participatory budgeting approaches will then be used to decide on the specific allocations. It is proposed that priority is given to bids that help address impacts and themes arising from the Humanitarian community engagement and research (see examples at para 7) and that these themes are used to allocate the £150,000. Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire has agreed to support the Council in the delivery of the participatory budgeting process and disbursement of the funds.

9. In addition to the £150,000, we will allocate a further c£50,000 for community capacity building and support. This will include a bid from East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for a total of £23,000 to meet a shortfall in resources for their Helping East Renfrewshire Online (HERO) project over the next 2 years, which ties in closely with digital inclusion and the Connecting Scotland programme. When the original HERO funding was approved by Cabinet as part of Welfare Contingency funding (see separate paper on today's agenda) no commitment was given for future additional funding and CAB has only been able to obtain external funding from DWP up until 31 March 2022. It should be noted that the contribution from Humanitarian funding is based on one-off funding so will not be repeatable.

10. Two additional available funding sources should be noted: the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Fund, which is to be directly routed through Third Sector Interfaces (i.e. VAER locally) by March 2022 and a new Scottish Government Winter Support Fund to be administered by councils. These funds should aim to complement Humanitarian funding and the COVID Humanitarian Group, including VAER, will link closely on utilisation of these funds. While detailed guidance and allocations are still to emerge, it is suggested that it may be possible for the Council to top-up the planned winter child payments using this new fund. Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Director of Corporate & Community Services, in consultation with the Head of Accountancy and CMRT/CMT for appropriate use of the new winter support fund in line with Humanitarian Support requirements and government guidance.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

11. There are no mainstream financial implications beyond the allocation of the nationally ring-fenced humanitarian funding. The funding has been issued by the Scottish Government for

humanitarian pandemic support as detailed above and there is close contact with the Accountancy Service to monitor spend and monitor the conditions for use.

CONSULTATION & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

12. The humanitarian response to COVID in East Renfrewshire has been delivered through ongoing multi-agency partnership working. Community research and engagement has been central to the proposed approach.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

13. There are no specific implications of this report in terms of staffing, property, legal, ICT, equalities or sustainability. The intention of this funding is to support work to mitigate the widening inequalities arising from the pandemic. Should the recommended approach be approved, any proposals funded will be required to consider these implications for that project.

CONCLUSION

14. The funding will provide much needed support to our most vulnerable residents who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. The research and engagement is highlighting priorities and vulnerabilities and will inform our strategy for recovery and renewal; and the funding for community projects will support the development of more sustainable solutions through a participatory budgeting deliberative decision-making approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. It is recommended that Cabinet:

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- d) Delegate to the Director of Corporate & Community Services & Head of Accountancy, in consultation with the CRMT/CMT, to make appropriate arrangements for use of the Winter Support Fund in line with government guidance.

November 2021

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- COVID-19 Humanitarian Support Funding 2021/2022 Cabinet 3 June 2021
- COVID-19 Recovery Actions – Update, Council 24 June, 28 October & 16 December 2020

ANNEX 1

Item	Details	Estimated spend
Direct support costs	Discretionary payments, supermarket vouchers, fuel payments, officer support costs	£236,000
Emerging COVID community support needs	COP26 accommodation, staff wellbeing support	£30,000
Projects to support residents in need	As agreed 3rd June Cabinet. Including social work support, school breakfast provision, 16-24 year old training, problem solving youth work, sensory equipment for learning centres.	£300,000
Community engagement and research	To understand impact of Covid	£34,000
Community projects and capacity building support	Community project fund, CAB HERO project, community and third sector capacity building	£200,000
Total		£800,000

N.B. These are indicative estimates of spend. If there is an underspend in some areas (e.g. if discretionary payments are lower than projected) then the Humanitarian Group will seek to reallocate within funding streams to make best use of funds to support local residents.