

Local Connections Fund

Improving Local Places – Your Community You Decide

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1. Introduction and Context

The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) welcomes Essex County Council's (ECC) initiative to set up a new Supporting Communities – Local Services Fund program aimed at supporting communities across Essex. This program will provide local communities with the opportunity to directly prioritise, enhance, develop and grow local capability, thereby making a real difference in the villages, towns and communities across Essex. The Local Services fund will support the creation of formal, traditional services that will improve local places by being more locally responsive whilst relieving the burden on ECC in the provision of simple but locally important community tasks.

The aim of this ECC fund is to provide revenue and other grants to Parish Councils and other local community organisations to undertake single activity or ongoing services to satisfy locally determined community benefit or enhancement.

The EALC is ideally placed to support ECC in the end to end operational management of the Supporting Communities – Local Services Fund, using its existing and comprehensive communications network serving Parish and Town Councils and extend this network to Essex resident associations and voluntary sector groups thereby ensuring all areas are presented with an equal opportunity to access this grant fund. The EALC will achieve this using its many partnership engagement programmes to achieve Essex wide coverage.

This will include the following networks

- Essex Rural Strategy
- the Essex Partnership
- The Rural Crime Forum

- Neighbourhood Planning group
- local policing groups (including but not limited to Community Speed Watch and Neighbourhood Watch groups)
- Residents Associations
- Essex County Councillors
- Area Forums
- Essex Housing Officer Group
- Community Voluntary Service
- Essexinfo.net

As a fundamental part of promoting this ECC fund, the EALC will produce a database that will identify the extent of the community voluntary sector, residents associations and other groups across the county that will further enhance the existing database held on parished areas.

Whilst Essex consists of a small number of major towns, it has a large number of small towns and villages all having a large number of actual and potential volunteers. It is estimated that across Essex there are estimated to be 40,000 actual volunteers and as such local residents are best placed to appreciate the many small but significant pieces of work which, when delivered can make a real difference to their lives and help further strengthen communities. The opportunity presented by ECC to access a revenue fund adds a further dimension to being able to deliver services locally to meet the needs, wants and aspirations of local communities.

The ‘Local Connections’ Fund – an overview

Fund Element	Budget	Application Cycle	Eligibility	Definition
Local Service Provision	A maximum of £500,000 fund amount (£10,000 per bid or £15,000 over 3 years) Expectation of matched funding	Annually – aligned to financial year	Local Councils (i.e. parish and town councils) & Formally constituted groups (e.g. residents’ or housing association)	Funding to support a set of actions undertaken to deliver a product provided to, or on behalf of, those who live or work in the area for which they are responsible)

2 EALC Proposed General Support for the Fund

EALC propose that in all aspects it will publicise the fund as being an Essex County Council initiative aimed at helping communities of all sizes to help themselves in the delivery of enhanced local services. To meet this objective the EALC will introduce briefing meetings to raise the profile of the fund during training sessions, community meetings and partnership events. The minimum plan is as follows:

Applicant Briefing sessions – EALC Great Dunmow Offices	4 per year
Funding Support Sessions – support for application bid writing	4 per year
Circulation of information and publicity for applications	Monthly
The EALC will promote the ECC Fund at every event that it hosts or manages. This will include events attended by EALC staff or its Executive Members to ensure the fund receives maximum publicity and prominence.	At Formal EALC Events
To be launched at the EALC AGM and joint ECC Conference – 19 th September 2017 Foakes Hall, Great Dunmow. Cllr Simon Walsh to introduce the fund and Cllr Gagan to give more details The EALC to provide information to delegates on the fund.	Initial Fund Launch
To be held in the EALC Offices with an invitation list including National and Countywide organisations and institutions	2nd Launch
To access all areas of the County	Press Releases
Information dissemination to all EALC and relevant Partner networks to aid in reaching non-parished communities Connections Fund Data Base	Monthly
Use of weekly newsletters and social media outlets to reach all areas of the County	Weekly

3 Managing the Fund

The EALC propose managing the fund using appropriate skills coupled to effective use of its existing communication network and links. These links will be enhanced to reach non-parish community groups. Whilst this work cannot be wholly absorbed by current EALC resource in the initial period the EALC has a staff member that can be immediately assigned to the role until such time as the EALC can recruit into the role on a long-term basis.

Initially the role can be managed on a 4-day working week, with the addition of other employment costs.

4 Fund Objectives and Constructs

It is understood that ECC will limit grants to £10,000 for each once-off project, or £5,000 per annum for a maximum period of three years for revenue related applications. Whilst 100% match funding will not be a prerequisite, levels of match funding will be expected from applicants at or close to match funding levels in order to maximise the spread of available funding across the county.

All applications to the fund will be assessed as to future utilisation and/or sustainability benefits within the community organisation thereby providing assurance that successful applications will have the capacity to meet community aspirations without additional support being necessary when ECC funding comes to an end.

The 'Local Connections' component of the Fund is aimed at supporting **new** local community schemes to help improve, rather than bolster extant services. For clarity this should ensure priority is given to implement new services that provide additional community benefit.

Funding applications will be invited at regular intervals and in all cases the endorsement of the relevant local County Councillor being a prerequisite.

Successful applicants will be required to feedback within set timeframes on the project achievements and the success of service(s) delivered.

The definition of community benefit associated with the fund includes both the place/location and the lives of residents.

Types of Service that might Qualify for Funding

The list below is a guide as to the type of services, which the fund is likely to support. This list is for guidance only and should not be considered as an exhaustive list.

- Greensward protection and maintenance - preventing antisocial parking, litter clearance etc.
- Public Rights of Way - Protection & maintenance, finger post provision and access clearance etc.
- Community Café – Start up funding and on going funding support
- Community handyman schemes - Start up funding and on going funding support
- Apprenticeship schemes – aimed at developing community skills in younger residents
- Community Special Constable provision – meeting training and support costs during initial years
- Hedge maintenance – clearing hedging from footways and preventing obstruction of street furniture
- Community litter picking and removal

- Training and qualification attainment for community volunteers to undertake parking warden, dog warden and zone warden duties within designated and approved areas

Funding Governance, Administration and Award of Grants

The EALC believes that good and relevant governance will provide the foundation to underpin the Local Services Fund program. If chosen the EALC will establish a governance process that includes:

- Publicity and awareness of the fund across the county and how to apply
- Application submission and vetting
- Forming a balanced judging panel to make funding awards based on local community need and service fulfilment
- Post award administration – interfacing with the successful applicant and ECC funding regime
- Success Monitoring – Fund performance, Applicants experience, project success stories

5 Establishment of the Funding Board

The EALC proposes the establishment of a Funding Board with an objective to determine successful applicants and make recommendations as to the respective award value.

- All Board Members will be agreed with ECC with the Independent Member being specifically selected by the Leader of ECC.
- Funding Board Venue – EALC Offices in Great Dunmow
- Funding Board Members are expected to attend a minimum of 3 meetings per year
- Funding Board Members may have a named substitute
- Funding Panel Members will be fully briefed by the EALC
- Funding Board Members will be expected to promote the fund as widely as practical within the county
- The Funding Board will comprise of 11 Members
- The quorum of the Funding Board will be 6 Members
- Funding Board Members expenses should be paid by the nominating body
- The EALC Staff will act as the Secretariat of the Board

Initially the Funding Board and application process will be supported by Dr Paul Probert, Head of Community Resilience Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities.

The EALC proposes a Funding Board is established as shown in the table.

Local Connections Funding Board	
Funding Board Member	Number / Area Represented
Chairman of Funding Panel	1 EALC Chairman or substitute
Parish Representatives	3 Representing differing sizes of councils across Essex – small, medium and large
Essex County Council Representative	1
Voluntary Sector Representative	2
Independent Member (Appointed by the Leader of Essex County Council)	1
Church	1
Residents Association	2
Panel Member Totals	11

6 The Application/Assessment process

The EALC will develop a template for applicants to complete which will identify the intended purpose of the application, achievement targets and timelines, resource requirements where applicable and all match funding sources relevant to the application. This template will be agreed with ECC and will be designed where practical with an objective to make the application process simple and easy to complete.

The template will be based on the current CIF application form

- Endorsement of all funding application by the respective County Councillor will be a requirement.
- The EALC will support applicants throughout the process offering advice and direction as appropriate.
- Briefing sessions will be organised by the EALC to assist applicants to understand how the fund will operate, define the funding “in scope” services, what is expected and what is required to achieve the best possibility of application acceptance at funding panel meetings.
- Applicants will be offered funding briefing sessions and given an opportunity to meet with EALC Officers and obtain assistance in the completion of funding applications. The EALC has successfully developed and delivered this approach within the National Transparency Funding program, which it manages on behalf of the National Association of Local Councils.

7 Fund Size

It is expected the fund will initially operate for three years, begin the third and fourth quarters of 2017/18. It is understood ECC plans to allocate £0.5m per annum to the fund by creating an earmarked reserve and releasing funding tranches in equal quantities across three-year periods of each the funding award.

8 Fund Award Monitoring

The EALC will operate a light touch, but comprehensive procedure to ensure that available funds are awarded in line with the stated purpose and to assess whether the stated goals in each application initiative are being, or have been achieved.

More than one funding application may be submitted during the initial three-year period; subsequent applications will be assessed taking historic performance into account. After the fund has been in operation for two years following the grant award date, a review will be undertaken by the EALC to assess whether funding should continue and at what level, at the conclusion of the three-year initial project period. These findings will be made available to ECC

The EALC shall expect successful applicants to

- Report back to the EALC regularly and no greater than a 6 month period between reports
- Issue a press release when funding is agreed and then when the work is being completed or when the project is complete. The release must acknowledge the support given by ECC making the initiative possible.
- Provide service launch invitations as appropriate relating to new service implementation
- The EALC will produce a newsletter twice yearly showcasing the services undertaken, to which successful applicants will be expected to contribute.
- The EALC will produce a report for ECC on a regular basis and no less than every three months on the performance of the fund, projects that have received funding and the stage of implementation. The template for these reports will be agreed with ECC.

9 Accessing Funds Awarded

Following the conclusion of each Grant Funding Board meeting, the EALC will provide ECC with a list of the successful applicants together with sufficient financial details to permit a bank transfer to be created against each successful application. Grant funding will be held and disbursed by ECC.

10 Financial Proposal

This financial proposal is based on an annual charge to include fund administration resource costs to include printing, postage and office overheads specifically applicable to funding board meetings plus a onetime set up charge to cover the provision of dedicated additional office equipment for the fund co-ordinator.

Panel board members are expected to provide their time on a voluntary basis at no cost to the programme; however panel board members should be compensated for any travel costs incurred (if their appointing body does not provide expenses) at prevailing EALC mileage rate. An estimate of the travel costs is included within this proposal and is subject to an annual review, which will be undertaken by the EALC and shared with ECC as required.

The associated EALC cost elements incurred through the administration and promotion of the fund consists of the following elements.

- Staff costs involving 4 days per week to include employee overhead, pension provision and Supervisory/management oversight
- Funding panel meeting costs
- Applicant briefing sessions and coaching
- Funding panel expenses including mileage allowances
- Funding program launch events
- Stationary and print costs associated with funding panel meetings
- Program one time setup costs – IT equipment etc.

The first year fund service charge will be £ 25,700

Subsequent year fund service charge will be reduced, removing 1st years costs and taking into consideration of increases in payroll costs and inflation.

It is proposed that all charges will be reviewed annually and full supporting information will be provided by the EALC where an increase in service charge is found to be necessary.

