

Forward Plan reference number: Not applicable

Report title: Amendments to Community Challenge Fund (CCF) allocated funds to support the Cost of Living Strategic (COLS) Group	
Report to: Councillor Chris Whitbread – Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs	
Report author: Richard Puleston – Director, Policy	
Date: 11 th October 2022	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All County Divisions affected all Essex.	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 The approval of amendments to the allocations of the Everyone's Essex funds will directly support those affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 Levelling up and empowering communities are key components of Everyone's Essex

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to use £250,000 from the £500,000 previously drawn down from Everyone's Essex reserve to fund Community Challenge Fund to support the Cost of Living proposals, as set out in 5.1.
- 2.2 Agree to the creation of a Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme of £100,000. These are to support the provision/creation of Winter Warmth and Welcome Spaces and activities for local communities in Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock).
- 2.3 Agree to the creation of a £100,000 fund for future Cost of Living activities purposed by the Cost of Living Strategic (COLS) Group to enable immediate priorities in the Essex system to be addressed, so Essex County Council (ECC), where necessary, can act proactively.
- 2.4 Agree to the creation of a £50,000 fund to be allocated for internal services within Essex County Council, including libraries and ACL, for Cost of Living activity such as creating activities in warm spaces.

3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1 Inflation on the items that drive household bills is running at the highest level for decades. This is creating a challenge for all of us. The government is intervening to offset the worst impacts for citizens and businesses. Even with this support, many households across Essex will still struggle, and for a small

number of households, the impacts of the rise in cost will force them to make difficult choices about economising on necessities.

- 3.2 The cost-of-living challenge will be experienced by every household in Essex, but some households will be more affected than others because they have a lower level of discretionary income, they can use to offset the increased costs of essentials like food, heating, and transport.
- 3.3 Our approach to tackling the cost-of-living challenge is based on three pillars: Response, Resilience and Root Causes.
- 3.4 To fulfil this approach and respond to the short-term challenges we have a six-point plan to support residents:
 1. Support with the provision of essentials
 2. Keeping warm
 3. Eating well
 4. Money management
 5. Information, advice and guidance
 6. Wellbeing
- 3.5 The £100,000 to be allocated to the Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme, the £50,000 to be allocated for internal services within Essex County Council and the £100,000 to be allocated for future Cost of Living activities purposed by the Cost of Living Strategic (COLS) Group, all support point two, 'Keeping Warm', within the six-point plan (see Appendix 1).
- 3.6 The £100,000 to be allocated to the Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme will be accessed by applying to Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) through a dedicated webpage, please see appendix 2. Eligibility criteria can be found on the webpage and in a dedicated guidance document downloadable on the website, please see appendix 3. It will be a rolling grant scheme programme until funds are spent or until the deadline passes on the 31st March 2023, which ever happens first. Applications will be assessed by a panel of ECC officers and EALC officers on a rolling weekly basis, panel recommendations will then be shared with the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance. The fund is administered by EALC who will send a grant award letter setting out T&Cs for spend. Monitoring is in place to understand impact of projects.
- 3.7 The £50,000 to be allocated for internal services within Essex County Council must support the COL crisis. All proposals will be subject to a separate decision that will be shared with Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance.
- 3.8 The £100,000 to be allocated for future Cost of Living activities purposed by the COLS Group will be subject to a separate decision that will be shared with Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance and the COLS Group.

- 3.9 The £250,000 to support the Cost of Living proposals will be repurposed from the £500,000 Community Challenge Fund due to the increased pressures on Essex residents due to the Cost of Living crisis. It is also unlikely all the £500,000 Community Challenge Fund will be spent by the closing date for the fund on the 31st March 2023. The Community Challenge Fund has awarded a total £19,564 awarded to individuals and organisations to date.
- 3.10 The approval of amendments to the allocations of the Everyone's Essex funds will directly support those affected by the cost-of-living crisis, however some people are impacted by the costs of living challenge more than others. Our evidence suggests there are three broad groups who will be finding things particularly tough right now. They are working families on low incomes; single parents – especially women; and single women aged over 65. These groups tend to have the lowest incomes relative to household costs (see appendix 1).
- 3.11 The cost of living challenge will be experienced by every household in Essex but some households will be more affected than others because they have a lower level of discretionary income they can use to offset the increased costs of essentials like food, heating, and transport.

4 Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision:
- Strengthen communities through participation
 - Unite behind a sense of identity
- 4.2 Approving the recommendations in this report will have the following impact on the Council's ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030
- To build community capacity and provide a mechanism to support local community based environmental ideas.
- 4.3 This report links to the following strategic priorities of 'Everyone's Essex'
- Health, wellbeing and independence for all ages
 - A good place for children and families to grow

5 Options

- 5.1 Approve an amendment to the current allocation of Everyone's Essex reserve to (recommended)
- (1) allocate £250,000 of the total £500,000 funds from the Community Challenge Fund to the support the Cost-of-Living Support for Households and Communities Plan

(2) divide the £250,000 allocated to the Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Programme as follows

- a. £50,000 will be allocated to internal services within Essex County Council, including libraries and ACL, for Cost of Living activity such as creating activities in warm spaces.
- b. £100,000 will be allocated for a Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme
- c. £100,000 will be allocated as a fund that the Cost of Living Strategic (COLS) Group can draw on for future Cost of Living activities and projects, subject to approval from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance

5.2 Do not approve the amendments

The Council could decide not to approve the amendments. This would retain the current allocation of funds and potentially mean that well considered, community-based projects that look to support individuals with cost of living do not go ahead.

6 Issues for Consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 It was agreed on 20 December 2021 that £500,000 could be drawdown from the Everyone's Essex reserve to create a Community Challenge fund.

6.1.2 The funds will now be split with £250,000 for the Community Challenge Fund and £250,000 for the Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Programme set out in our Cost-of-Living Support for Households and Communities Plan.

6.1.3 The £250,000 fund for the Community Challenge fund enables applicants to apply for between £300 to £5,000 for any single grant application.

6.1.4 The Community Challenge Fund will continue to run until the full fund is awarded or the by 31st March 2023, whichever is the sooner.

6.1.5 The £250,00 for Cost of Living will be divided as such:

- a. £50,000 will be allocated for internal services within Essex County Council, including libraries and ACL, for Cost of Living activity such as creating activities in warm spaces
- b. £100,000 will be allocated for a Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme.
- c. £100,000 to be allocated for future Cost of Living activities purposed by the Cost of Living Strategic (COLS) Group.

- 6.1.6 The Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Programme will continue to run until the full fund is awarded or by the 31st of March 2023, whichever is the sooner.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 All applications for grants are considered by ECC officers against criteria. Successful applications will be shared with the Cabinet member for information.
- 6.2.2 These changes make it easier to award to a more diverse range of organisations and projects and reduce the risk of projects being defaulted upon.

7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.1.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.1.3 The Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment (ECIA) indicates that the proposal in this report will not have an adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic, please see appendix 4.

8 List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Cost of Living Support for Households and Communities September 2022

Appendix 2 - Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme dedicated webpage

- <https://ealc.gov.uk/winter-warmth-and-welcome-spaces-fund/>

Appendix 3 – Winter Warmth and Welcome Grant Scheme Guidance

Appendix 4 - Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment

9 Background Papers

None

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Councillor Cllr Chris Whitbread – Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs	29.11.22

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Councillor Louise McKinlay – Deputy Leader of the Council	29.11.22
Executive Director, Corporate Services (S151 Officer)	18.11.22
Andrew Page on behalf of Nicole Wood	
Laura Edwards on behalf of Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)	29.11.2022