

Forward Plan reference number: FP/916/12/20

Report title: Allocation of Contain Outbreak Management Fund for self-isolation payments and community support	
Report to: Councillor David Finch, Leader of the Council	
Report author: Mike Gogarty, Director, Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities	
Date: 24 December 2020	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Kirsty O'Callaghan, Head of Strengthening Communities – kirsty.ocallaghan@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek approval to provide financial support to those residents in Essex who are ineligible to receive payments under the central government Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme (the Scheme) and that District and Borough Councils in Essex implement the payments on ECC's behalf.
- 1.2. To seek approval to transfer additional funding to District and Borough Councils in Essex where they have exhausted the funds made available to them by central government to make payments under the Scheme.
- 1.3. To seek approval to support those with learning disabilities and autism and their carers by raising awareness of the services available to them at this time.
- 1.4. To seek approval to allocate funding to build capacity of the community campaign model to deliver key messaging around the three pillars of inform, prevent and assist.
- 1.5. To seek approval to commission the Behavioural Insights Team (BiT) to provide both tactical and strategic advice to ensure our communications and interventions strongly encourage citizens to behave in a way that limits the spread of Covid-19.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Agree that up to £3m for the period to 31 March 2021 can be given to district, city or borough councils experiencing high rates of COVID-19 infections and where there is a need to curb the transmission of the virus by providing financial assistance to residents who have been told to self-isolate but who are ineligible under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme.
- 2.2. Agree that the allocations by District/Borough/City Council are set out in Table 1 and are on the basis of per capita. This will only apply whilst the Scheme is active. Any payment will be made subject to the condition that surplus funds

will be returned to the Council on cessation of the Scheme. This funding is in addition to the £180,000 already approved to support this initiative on 4 November 2020.

- 2.3. Agree the Director, Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities may allocate up to £1m to District/Borough Councils to top up central government allocations made to them under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme that have been exhausted. This will only apply whilst the Scheme is active. Any payment will be subject to the relevant authority agreeing that surplus funds or funds subsequently covered by direct government funding to Districts for this purpose will be returned to ECC on cessation of the Scheme.
- 2.4. Agree that Basildon Borough Council will receive an immediate payment of £300,000 for this purpose and that the Director, Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities is authorised, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer to agree payments to other District/Borough Councils who exhaust their allocations in the future until the Scheme expires on the basis of evidence of need being provided by City/District/Borough Councils' Directors of Finance.
- 2.5. Agree that the Head of Strengthening Communities, in consultation with the Director, Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities, may agree the terms of the agreements to distribute the funding based on those areas experiencing high rates of COVID-19 infections.
- 2.6. Agree that £100,000 will be used to support Essex residents with learning disabilities and autism and their carers. Of this, £50,000 will be allocated to the Rural Community Council of Essex to support the Community Agents programme, and £50,000 will be allocated to Carousel to support digital campaigns to raise awareness of available services.
- 2.7. Agree that the Head of Strengthening Communities, in consultation with the Director, Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities, may agree the terms of the agreements to distribute the funding to the Rural Community Council and Carousel.
- 2.8. Agree that £100,000 will be used to build the capacity of the community campaign model to deliver key messaging around the three pillars of inform, prevent and assist. Of this, £60,000 will be allocated to fund the operation of Essex Coronavirus action to include creation of all assets and messaging to ensure that we can reach people at scale with key public health information. £40,000 will be allocated to ECC Corporate Communications to contribute towards advertising costs and other key communications tasks.
- 2.9. Agree that up to £50,000 will be used to commission BiT to control the spread of the disease by ensuring communications approaches and incentives are designed to drive citizens to get tested when they should, to follow covid restrictions, to self-isolate and to accept the vaccine when offered. The rate of spread of disease during lockdown demonstrates a reasonable section of the population are not doing these things.

- 2.10. Agree to the drawdown of up to £4.25m from the COMF reserve to fund the activities set out in this report.

3. Summary of issue

Self-Isolation Payments to residents who are ineligible under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme

- 3.1. As efforts continue to mitigate the impacts of the COVID pandemic, further funding has been made available through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (the “COMF”) which has been set up to support Local Authorities to carry out their responsibilities in managing outbreaks during this crisis.
- 3.2. A decision was taken on 4 November 2020 to set aside ‘hardship’ funding of £180,000 to assist residents who may not be entitled to government assistance but who have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or who have tested positive for the virus and must stay at home. The hardship funding is intended to assist those who need to stay at home for these reasons but who may feel that they need to continue to attend work due to their financial situation as they are not entitled to the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment from Central Government.
- 3.3. A further allocation of ‘hardship’ funding is now needed to ensure that those that must stay at home are given the financial means to do so. The £500 grant per resident will be a one-off payment to cover the two-week period of self-isolation.
- 3.4. It is proposed that the funding will be allocated to district and borough councils for distribution to residents and will be based on per capita as set out in Table 1 in paragraph 5.
- 3.5. Agreements will be put in place with those district and borough councils who receive the funding requiring such funding to be spent in accordance with the District Councils COVID-19 Test and Trace discretionary grants scheme criteria with an additional focus on supporting those without recourse to other COVID employment support; for example those in hardship on zero hours contracts; those self-employed who have been trading for less than one year at the time of COVID; or those self-employed without access to support because of low trading returns. The provision of the funding by the Council will be subject to monitoring requirements to monitor spend and outcomes. Those district and borough councils in receipt of funds will report to the Council on a monthly basis.

Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme Top up Payments

- 3.6. Due to high infection rates and significantly more residents than expected by Central Government making a claim under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme, some Districts have exhausted the funds transferred to them

by Central Government. To ensure that no residents experience undue financial hardship as a result of insufficient funding, the Council is proposing to top up the funds available for this purpose of up to £1m.

- 3.7. If alternate funding streams come forward from Government to ensure sufficiency of the isolation payments at a District level, the money will be reimbursed to the Council to be made available for other infection control purposes.
- 3.8. Basildon Borough Council have already exhausted their original allocation and have confirmed an additional funding requirement of up to £300,000. This allocation will be on top of previous funding provided to Basildon of £180,000. Other Districts/Borough Councils are expected to also exhaust their allocations as infection rates continue to rise and more people are asked to self-isolate.

Community Support

- 3.9. It is also proposed that £100,000 of the COMF will be allocated to build additional capacity to support people with Learning Disabilities and Autism and their carers during the coming months. £50,000 will support the work of the Community Agents at the Rural Community Council of Essex. Another £50,000 will be allocated to Carousel, a registered charity that works with learning disabled artists. Funds will be used on staffing and campaign costs to ensure this cohort of people understand how to access support and are connected with the appropriate community support incorporating digital campaigns.
- 3.10. ECC will require the Rural Community Council of Essex and Carousel to sign agreements agreeing to spend their allocations as set out in the agreements and agreeing to monthly reporting.
- 3.11. A specification and waiver have been prepared to outline the deliverables ECC expects from BiT including use of existing research from other councils and from the Covid Taskforce as well as analysing Essex data to design Essex-specific interventions.
- 3.12. It is proposed £100,000 of the COMF will be allocated to build additional capacity of the community campaign model to deliver key messaging around the three pillars of inform, prevent and assist. Of this, £60,000 will be allocated to fund the operation of Essex Coronavirus action to include creation of all assets and messaging to ensure that we can reach people at scale with key public health information. £40,000 will be allocated to ECC Corporate Communications to contribute towards advertising costs and other key communications tasks

4. Options

Option 1 – Do Nothing

- 4.1. Doing nothing is not recommended. It is considered that the allocation of this funding will assist in reducing the transmission rate of COVID-19 infections in Essex.

Option 2 – Distribute the funding as set out in this report – Recommended Option

- 4.2. The recommended option will assist in lowering the transmission of the virus by financially supporting those that need to stay at home when other support is not available. It is considered that the allocation of this funding will assist in reducing the transmission rate of COVID-19 infections in Essex by providing financial support to those who may be required to stay at home and self-isolate but who do not have the financial means to do so and who are not entitled to financial support from central government. The funding for additional capacity to support people with learning disability and autism and their carers know how to access support at this time, and funding allocated to build capacity of the community campaign model will enable key public health messaging reach people at scale.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1. ECC has received £11.9m from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) from DHSC to support costs associated with ongoing public health and outbreak management costs of tackling COVID. Allocations are made to upper-tier authorities, who are able to devolve funds accordingly where that is determined an appropriate application in accordance with the conditions of the grant.

Self-Isolation Payments to residents who are ineligible under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme

- 5.2. ECC are proposing up to £3m is given to district and borough councils to provide financial assistance to residents that have been told to self-isolate but are ineligible under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme. Allocations to district and borough councils are shown in Table 1 below and are on a per capita basis. This will only apply whilst the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is active and for a period up to 31st March 2021. Any surplus funds will be returned to the Authority on cessation of the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme. Agreements will be in place with relevant district and borough councils setting this out and monitoring returns will be required.

Table 1:

	Population	District Allocation of £3m
Basildon	185,862	377,317
Braintree	151,561	307,683
Brentwood	76,550	155,404
Castle Point	90,070	182,851
Chelmsford	177,079	359,487
Colchester	192,523	390,839
Epping Forest	131,137	266,220
Harlow	86,594	175,794
Maldon	64,425	130,789
Rochford	86,981	176,580
Tendring	145,803	295,994
Uttlesford	89,179	181,042
Total	1,477,764	3,000,000

Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme Top up payments

- 5.3. ECC are proposing up to £1m is distributed to District and Borough Councils to top up central government allocations made to them under the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme that have been exhausted. This will only apply whilst the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is active. Any surplus funds will be returned to the Authority on cessation of the Test and Trace support Payment Scheme.
- 5.4. It is proposed that Basildon Borough Council will receive an immediate payment of £300,000 for this purpose. Payments will be made to other District or Borough Councils who exhaust their allocations in the future until the scheme expires on the basis of evidence of need being provided by the district's Director of Finance.
- 5.5. Agreements will be in place with relevant district and borough councils setting out the terms of the agreements and monitoring returns will be required.

Community Support

- 5.6. A further £100,000 will be allocated to support people with Learning Disabilities and Autism via Community Agents at the Rural Community Council of Essex and Carousel. This will provide for staffing and campaign costs to ensure this cohort of people understand how to access support.
- 5.7. ECC will require the Rural Community Council of Essex and Carousel to enter into agreements, which will set out the conditions with which the funding is to be spent, along with reporting expectations. Any unspent funds will be returned to ECC by the end of the agreement period.

- 5.8. It is proposed £50,000 will be used to commission BiT to control the spread of the disease by ensuring communications approaches and incentives are designed to drive citizens to get tested when they should, to follow covid restrictions, to self-isolate and to accept the vaccine when offered. The rate of spread of disease during lockdown demonstrates a reasonable section of the population are not doing these things.
- 5.9. It is proposed £100,000 of the COMF will be allocated to build additional capacity of the community campaign model to deliver key messaging around the three pillars of inform, prevent and assist. Of this, £60,000 will be allocated to fund the operation of Essex Coronavirus action to cover the costs of digital asset creation and messaging by Digital Community Managers. £40,000 will be allocated to ECC Corporate Communications to contribute towards advertising costs and other key communications tasks
- 5.10. Where required ECC will enter into, or revise existing agreements, which will set out the conditions with which the funding is to be spent, along with reporting expectations in support of the delivery of the Essex Coronavirus Action campaign. Any unspent funds will be returned to ECC by the end of the agreement period.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1. It is lawful to give these grants but proper internal controls are required to make sure that the money is spent on the intended purpose.
- 6.2. Appropriate agreements should be in place to ensure that the funding is spent in accordance with the requirements set out in this report.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

- 7.1. 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.
- 7.2. 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).

- 7.3. As with any grants programme it would be sensible to ensure that there is some monitoring and criteria to ensure that grants are targeted at need and do not disproportionately benefit particular groups in a way which cannot be justified. It is understood that no equality impact assessment has been undertaken as a result of the need to spend this money quickly.

8. List of appendices

None

9. List of Background papers

None

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Leader of the Council, Councillor David Finch	24 December 2020

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Executive Director for Finance and Technology (S151 Officer)	23 December 2020
Nicole Wood	
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)	17.12.20
Katie Bray on behalf of Paul Turner	

Exemption from call in

I agree that it is in the best interests of the Council for this decision to be implemented urgently and therefore this decision is not subject to call in (paragraph 20.15(xix) of the constitution applies).

Councillor Mike Mackrory – Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 23 December 2020