

Cabinet

28 January 2021

Revenue Investment Funds 2020/21 December Report

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1) Support the progress made on the Commercial Strategy with the Ecology Licence project for Great Crested Newts approved by Corporate Board under the authorisation delegated to Chief Executive at a cost of £0.072m.
- 2) Approve the bid as detailed in section 2, amounting to £0.169m from the Sustaining Prevention Fund.
- 3) Authorise the Strategic Directors for People and Communities to procure and enter any agreements to give effect to the above proposals on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

1. Purpose of the report and context

- 1.1. As part of the 2020/21 budget, Council approved the creation of four Revenue Investment Funds, with a total allocation of £20m, to provide opportunities to run initiatives to meet objectives of tackling climate change, investing in commercialism, sustaining prevention of demand within communities and investment in place shaping including scoping capital and development opportunities for better value service provision. The indicative allocation of the resources between the funds was then updated by Cabinet in June to reflect the increased need to invest in economic recovery post Covid-19, and the remaining Early Intervention Fund from 2019/20 was added to the Sustaining Prevention Fund.

The breakdown of these funds is below:

Council Investment Funds	Total £000s
Sustaining Prevention Fund – A fund to pump-prime upfront investment in demand management and early intervention initiatives prior to the financial benefits accruing.	5,404
Climate Change Fund – A fund to invest in priorities flowing from the Climate Change Task and Finish Group and Council Plan 2025	4,000
Commercial Fund – A fund to deliver commercial investment in outcomes for Warwickshire arising from the commercial strategy.	3,500
Place Shaping and Capital Investment Fund – A fund to support capital feasibility work, investment in place and to improve delivery.	7,500
Total MTFS Allocation	20,404

- 1.2. The funds are outside of core budgets, and members approved a four-stage approval process for projects seeking funding:
- Stage 1: A project proposal document is developed and reviewed by Gateway Group/Corporate Board as to the strategic fit with the priorities in the Council Plan;
 - Stage 2: The business case for the project is then prepared and an Investment Panel, made of representatives from Finance, Project Management Office and managers from services across the organisation, provides a technical evaluation and commentary on the proposal;
 - Stage 3: Gateway Group use this technical evaluation alongside their own analysis of project governance and feasibility, to recommend the projects to Corporate Board if under £0.1m per project, or Cabinet if over this value for approval; and
 - Stage 4: Cabinet approve/reject the allocations over £0.1m and note the projects under this value approved by Corporate Board. If the project is approved, funding is transferred to the service, and if savings have been identified flowing from the investment these are built into the medium-term financial strategy.
- 1.3. The scheme detailed in sections 2.1 to 2.3 of this paper is part of a programme, led by People Directorate, covering wellbeing aligned to the Council's Covid-19 recovery plan and wider prevention strategies. Initiatives under the programme will focus on the objectives of enhancing residents' resilience, wellbeing and coping abilities in response to the pandemic; managing demand to Social Care services and avoiding pressure on other statutory Council services. Programme oversight will ensure that planning and monitoring include evidence of sustainability and developing clear breaks to exit safely when programme funding ends, as well as ensuring delivery and monitoring spend. One new project is being put forward for Cabinet approval, further to the four projects under this programme approved by Cabinet in December. Subject to Cabinet's decision today a total of five projects will now

be funded from the Sustaining Prevention Fund, leaving £3.268m in this fund for further initiatives across the next four years.

- 1.4. The scheme detailed in section 2.4 to 2.5 is part of the Commercial Strategy, but with close links to Climate Change and Place Shaping strategies. This scheme has been approved by the Chief Executive under her delegated authority to approve funding from the Investment Funds under £100,000. A total of four projects will now be funded from the Commercial Fund, leaving £2.603m in this fund for further initiatives across the next four years.

2. Description of the Investment Fund bids

Information and Advice

- 2.1. Corporate Board recommend approval of £169,000 from the Sustaining Prevention fund for the Information and Advice project with the project sponsor being the Assistant Director, Business and Customer Services.
- 2.2. Funding will be used to complete a project previously initiated, and build on the research already carried out to develop a web-based information and advice platform for potential social care customers and their carers. The outcome of the project will be a tool to enable Warwickshire residents easily to access information and advice about a range of community services to improve their wellbeing and find out about other activities in their communities of potential benefit to them, helping them remain independent, and lead healthy and happy lives.
- 2.3. During its evaluation, the panel has requested that emphasis during the design phase of the joint working between different services within the organisation, and Gateway Group have requested emphasis is put on the ongoing maintenance of the information available. The non-financial benefits to citizens are well detailed in the business case, and on this grounds the project is recommended for approval, but there is a request across the Sustaining Prevention bids to ensure longer term, indirect financial benefits from reduced demand to social care services are clarified and monitored. This feedback has already been incorporated into the delivery of the project through the design of a detailed engagement plan.

Great Crested Newts

- 2.4. Corporate Board have approved £72,000 from the Commercial Fund for the Great Crested Newts licence project with the project sponsor being the Assistant Director for Environment Services.

- 2.5. This project supports the Council's climate change, place shaping and commercial objectives. Currently, GCNs are considered within planning consenting regimes and later by Natural England licencing before works can start. This requires surveys for newts in all ponds within 500m of a development site (be this a householder or large application) that involve up to 6 site visits to be carried out between March-June and last for 2 years. These constraints cause delays and are expensive. They can also be unreliable in estimating population sizes and subsequent compensation packages. The funds requested will be used to obtain a District Level Licence from Natural England for ecological surveys and set up the framework needed to carry out and licence developments. This will reduce costs through removal of the third-party licence holder, improve positive ecological impacts from development and reduce delays in development time.

3. Environmental Implications

- 3.1 The new Great Crested Newts licence arrangement is one that is promoted by Natural England, offering benefits to local authorities, developers and to the environment. They note that the new approach would "ensure that development provides a net benefit to the conservation status of Great Crested Newts and enabling increased quality of wider greenspace Conservation status enhanced via creation of appropriate and linking habitat, [through] not being reliant on dispersed and small scale mitigations."

There are no other environmental issues or concerns arising from the initiatives proposed in this document.

4. Financial Implication

- 4.1 The cost of the projects are limited to the amounts detailed above, with any ongoing costs from the initiatives to be managed within the relevant service's existing budget. The Investment Panel have highlighted exit strategies to ensure further funding is not committed without prior approval being sought. The anticipated financial benefits from the investments are contribution to savings already built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy proposals currently being considered.

5. Background Papers

None

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