

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13 December 2023

County Councillors' Grant Fund 2020 to 2023

Recommendation

That the Committee notes and comments on the use of the County Councillors' Grant Fund for the period 2020 to 2023.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report offers an overview of projects funded by the County Councillors' Grant Fund since 2020, highlighting the range of supported initiatives. This is the first such report since the start of the Pandemic.
- 1.2 For the financial years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, the Fund had a total value of £342,000, with each of the 57 Councillors therefore having £6,000 to award. For the financial year 2022/2023, the Fund value increased to £456,000 with each of the Councillors having £8,000 to award.
- 1.3 Since 2020 the Fund has been aligned to the County Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020 to 2025, with the vision and purpose to create "a thriving, sustainable and dynamic voluntary and community sector that improves the lives of individuals and communities in Warwickshire".
- 1.4 The Fund also aligns to the key outcomes of the Council Plan 2022 to 2027:
 - we want Warwickshire to have a thriving economy and places that have the right jobs, skills, education, and infrastructure;
 - we want to be a County where all people can live their best lives; where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily, and independently; and
 - we want to be a County with a sustainable future, which means adapting to and mitigating climate change and meeting net zero commitments.
- 1.5 The Fund strongly aligns to the principles of Community Power and Levelling Up. The many projects supported by the Fund are in response to locally identified priorities with the aim of addressing solutions identified by communities and are often being delivered by communities. There is a strong focus amongst the projects on tackling inequality amongst our most vulnerable communities and residents, which is at the heart of the Countywide Approach to Levelling Up.

- 1.6 A key feature of the Fund since it started in 2012 is that Councillors have a substantial amount of discretion in the funding awarded to local projects. This report provides information on all funding awards made to voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector groups for the three financial years between 2020 and 2023. Reflecting the circumstances of the first year of the Pandemic, the initial funding round in 2020/2021 was simplified and streamlined to get funding onto the ground as quickly as possible. This included reduced requirements to report as frequently and in as much detail given the pressures of the pandemic and to enable groups to focus on providing critical support to communities.
- 1.7 Over the three financial years covered in this report, the Fund has received a total of 1,494 applications with figures demonstrating a year-on-year increase since 2020. The overall success rate of applications remained at 74% over the period. Where applications were unsuccessful this tended to be due to a lack of detailed evidence within the application or a failure to align with the priorities in local communities. In some areas Councillors received more applications than could be supported within the available funding envelope.
- 1.8 Section 4 sets out in more detail the types of projects supported in each area. A full list of projects and awards can be provided upon request but has not been attached to this report due to its size.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 2.2 The report covers the spend for periods 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 with the following total spend breakdown:

2020/21	£346,121
2021/22	£331,916
2022/23	£457,747

- 2.3 Councillors were encouraged to award their full allocations each financial year and this was mostly achieved. Where there were any underspends, these were carried over with the agreement of Cabinet. On the few occasions where any overspends occurred, as per the Borough and District breakdown, this was balanced by the subsequent year's allocation. Additional scrutiny has been implemented for 2023/24 and the forecast is to award the full allocation for all Councillors.

3. Environmental Implications

- 3.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 All applications to the Fund have been assessed against the Council's commitments to reducing climate change and increasing biodiversity. One of

the Fund's criteria, "To improve the physical environment or reduce the environmental impact" has been present since 2019.

4. Supporting Information

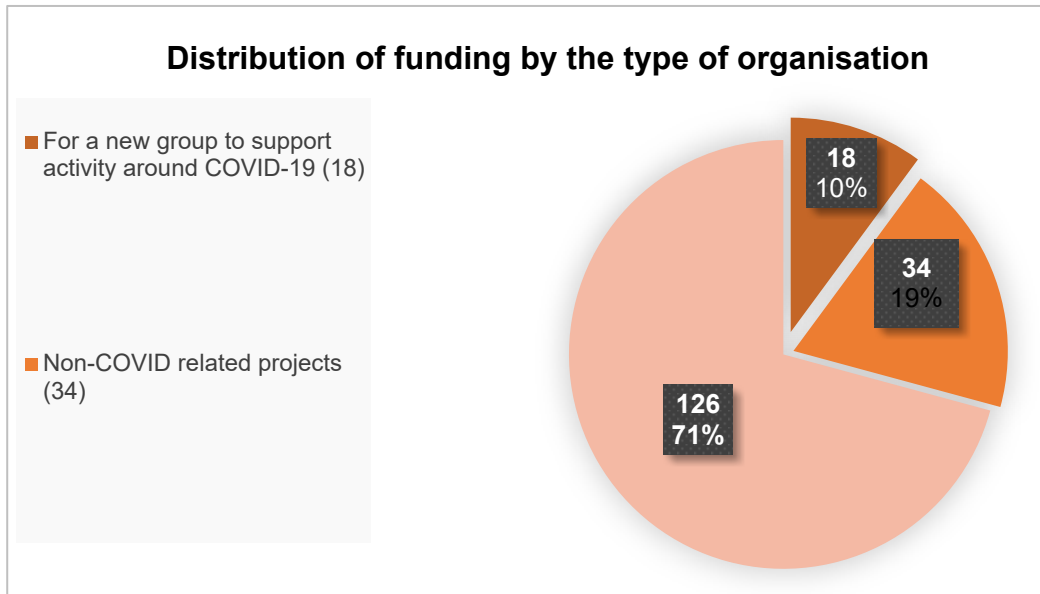
Councillors' Grant Fund 2020/2021

Round 1

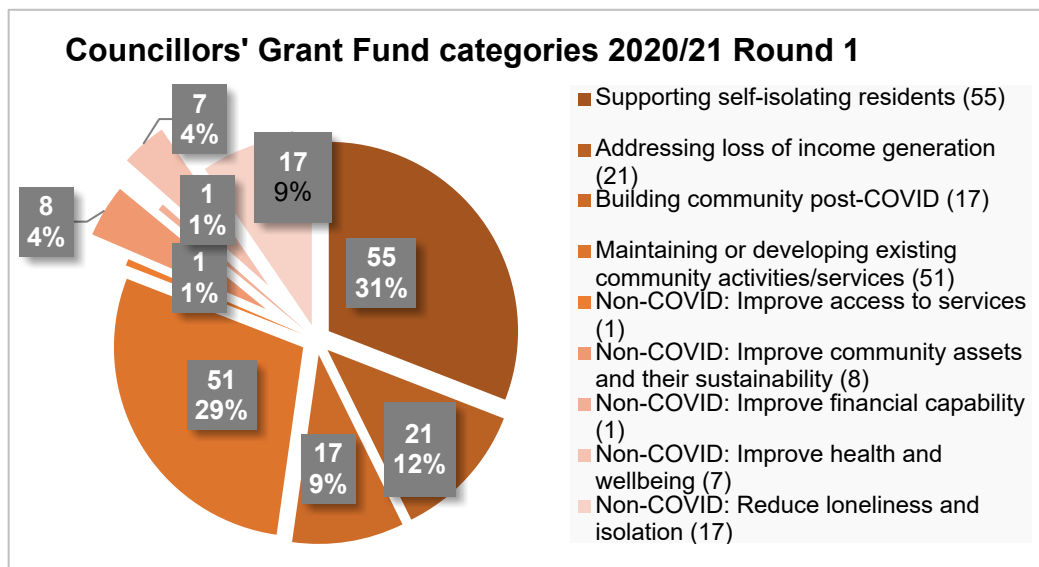
- 4.1 As a response to the early stages of the Pandemic, the Fund's priorities were adapted for Round 1 of 2020/2021 to reflect the rapidly changing needs of communities, to introduce additional flexibility, and to ensure funding reached recipients without undue delay.
- 4.2 A wide range of projects received funding including youth engagement activity, "scrubs" production for NHS workers, and a socially distanced singing group who performed outside care homes and community venues to raise spirits. Other projects receiving funding were set up to help those shielding, to help vulnerable people to access food and medicines, and to provide health and wellbeing activities in ways appropriate to the constraints of the pandemic.
- 4.3 Other successful Round 1 projects supported the provision of digital technology to allow projects and services to adapt to online delivery, and to cover the costs of utilities such as gas and electricity for village halls and community centres to maintain their function during the Pandemic.
- 4.4 The Fund supported the following types of groups to mitigate the impact of the Pandemic:
 - I. Supporting newly formed groups with activities to help:
 - People self-isolating or in quarantine.
 - The community to be resilient against the wider impacts of the Pandemic.
 - Develop community networks to support the above.
 - II. Supporting existing groups to:
 - Continue activities through the Pandemic.
 - Helping sustain continuing operation of community groups beyond the Pandemic.
 - III. Supporting applications not related to the Pandemic but relating to one or more of the following priority categories:
 - Improve community assets and their sustainability.
 - Improve access to services.
 - Improve financial capability.
 - Reduce loneliness and isolation.

- Improve health and wellbeing.

4.5 The chart below shows how the funding was awarded, broken down by the type of applicant. Most of the funding was awarded to existing groups to either support their Pandemic related activities, or to support groups through Pandemic related loss of income. Out of the 178 groups that received funding, 160 were already in existence pre-Pandemic.



4.6 A further breakdown of the funding awards can be seen below. The single biggest category related to projects supporting self-isolating residents.

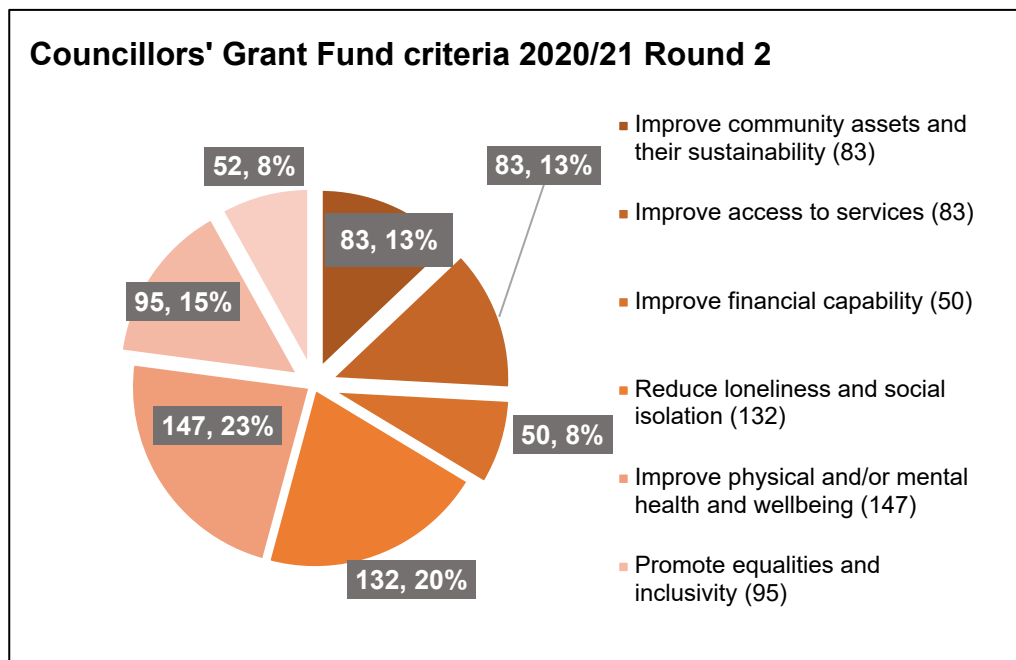


Round 2

4.7 Round 2 of the Fund in 2020/2021 reverted to the usual format, utilising the following criteria whilst continuing to support projects that were addressing the impact of the Pandemic:

- Improve community assets and their sustainability.
- Improve access to services.
- Improve financial capability.
- Reduce loneliness and isolation.
- Improve physical and/or mental health and wellbeing.
- Promote equalities and inclusivity.
- Improve the physical environment or reduce the environmental Impact.

4.8 The following chart provides a breakdown of project criteria (with some projects aligning to more than one).



Summary

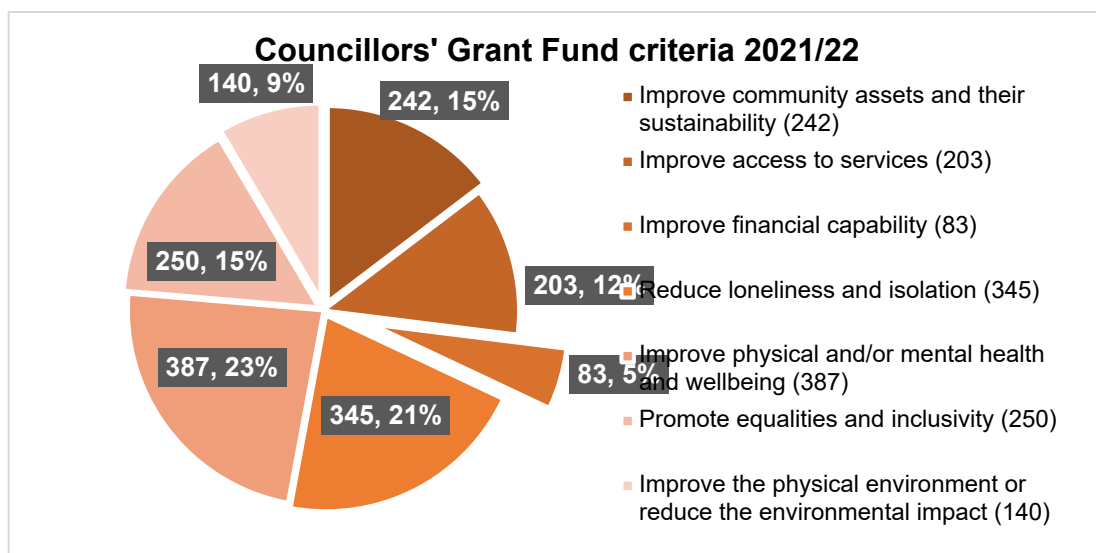
4.9 The total amount of funding awarded per Borough and District was as follows:

Borough/District	Total allocation in 2020/21	Total awarded in 2020/21	Percentage of awarded funding
North Warwickshire	£42,000	£43,190	102.83%
Nuneaton & Bedworth	£78,000	£74,240	95.18%
Rugby	£60,000	£59,658	99.43%
Stratford-on-Avon	£78,000	£76,605	98.21%
Warwick	£84,000	£92,428	110.03%
Total	£342,000	£346,121	101.20%

- 4.10 348 awards were made, out of a total of 468 applications received, with a total value of £346,121. The total amounts awarded include any underspend and any returned funding from previous years.
- 4.11 Out of 195 groups that reported on their projects, 159 have indicated that their projects were completed. A total of 158 new volunteers have been recruited and over 31,375 volunteer hours have been dedicated to projects equating to the approximate economic value of £560,985 (calculated using an hourly multiplier of £17.88 per hour and using the Annual Survey for Hours and Earning methodology 2022). A minimum of 23,579 individuals have benefitted from projects, however, this figure is likely to be much higher in projects where the organisations found it difficult to quantify the beneficiaries.
- 4.12 Due to the uncertainty created by the Pandemic some of the organisations faced challenges in delivering their projects. This was mainly due to lockdown restrictions and the evolving guidelines causing practical delivery issues. Localities and Communities Officers offered support to these organisations on an individual basis. The extent and detail of reporting on the projects was balanced to prioritise providing support to the communities.

Councillors' Grants Fund 2021/2022

- 4.13 The Fund continued to support projects under seven core criteria. The following chart provides a breakdown by criteria of both Round 1 and Round 2 projects. Some projects aligned to more than one criterion.



- 4.14 Out of the 313 groups that reported on their projects, over 930 volunteers were recruited. 40,384 volunteer hours were recorded equating to an equivalent economic value of approximately £722,000 (calculated using an hourly multiplier of £17.88 per hour and using the Annual Survey for Hours and Earning 2022 methodology.)

4.15 The organisations reported that more than 36,000 people benefitted from projects. The actual number of beneficiaries is likely to be much higher, particularly in instances where the Fund contributed towards purchasing equipment that will be sustained for many years after the funding has been spent, or where, for example, it helped to fund a public event.

4.16 The total amount of funding awarded per Borough and District was as follows:

Borough/District	Total allocation for 2021/22	Total awarded in 2021/22	Percentage of awarded funding
North Warwickshire	£44,300	£42,030	94.87%
Nuneaton & Bedworth	£81,760	£71,849	87.88%
Rugby	£60,000	£53,935	89.89%
Stratford-on-Avon	£78,000	£79,022	101.31%
Warwick	£84,000	£85,080	101.29%
Total	£348,060	£331,916	95.36%

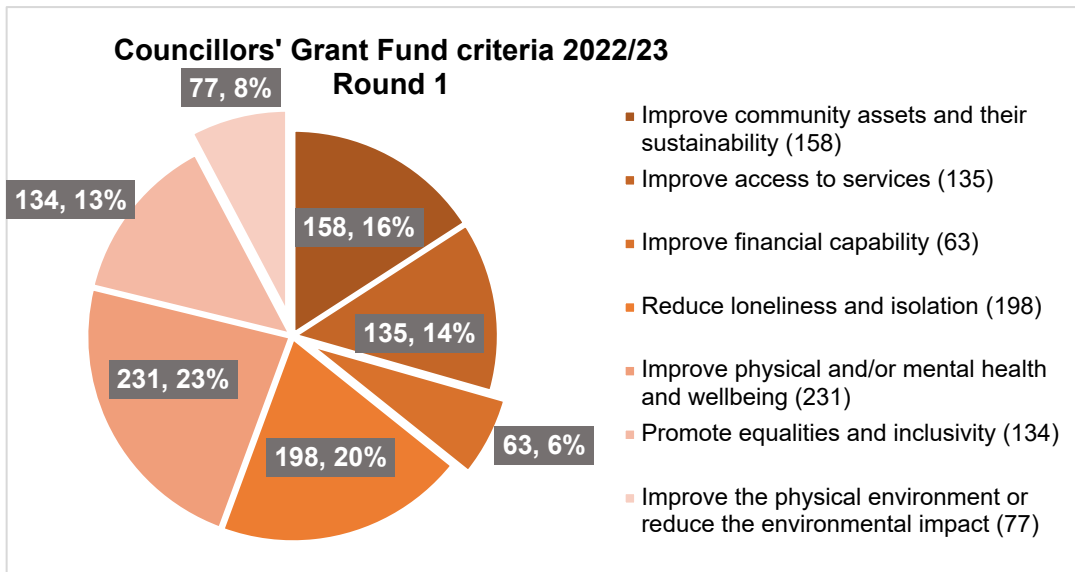
4.17 361 grants were awarded out of a total of 486 applications received, with the total value of £331,916. The total amount awarded reflects any funding returned from 2020/21.

Councillors' Grant Fund 2022/2023

Round 1

4.18 In 2022/2023, the grant outcomes were revised to align them to the refreshed Council Plan 2022-2027. In this year, the Council also approved an increase to each Councillor's allocation from £6,000 to £8,000. This reflected an increased emphasis on community powered approaches. This increased the total fund value up to £456,000.

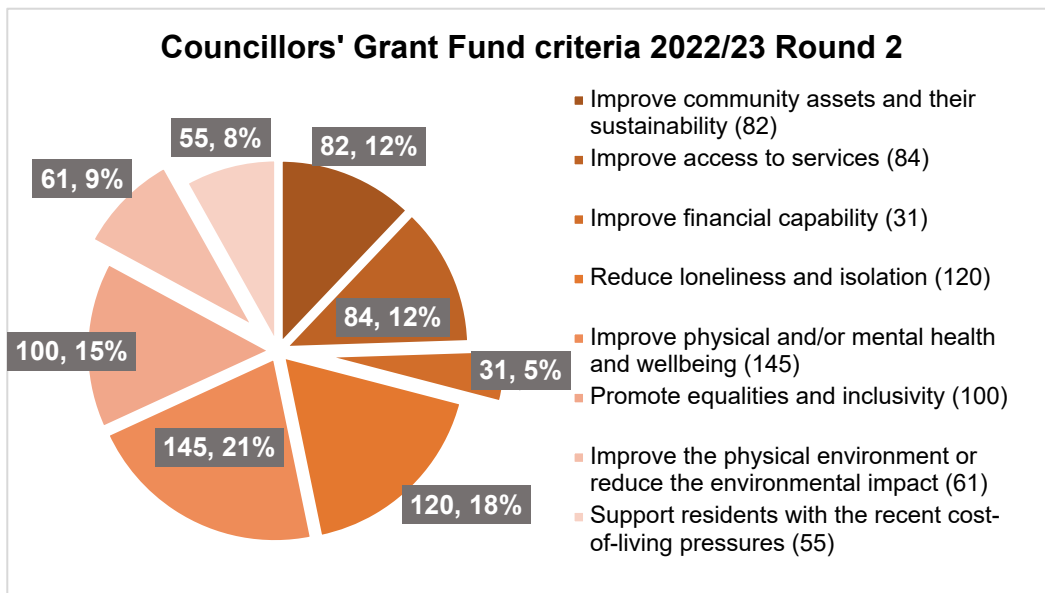
4.19 244 grants were awarded. The chart below provides a breakdown by criteria. Some projects aligned to more than one criterion:



Round 2

4.20 Round 2 incorporated an additional criterion to fund projects reflecting increased cost of living pressures. Successful projects under this criterion included setting up warm hubs, the provision of food parcels, and improved access to community transport services.

4.21 156 awards were made. The chart below provides a breakdown by criteria. Some projects aligned to more than one criterion:



4.22 400 grants were awarded in 2022/23 out of a total of 540 applications received, totalling £457,747.

4.23 The total amount of funding awarded per Borough and District was as follows:

Borough/District	Total allocation for 2022/23	Total awarded 2022/23	Percentage of awarded funding
North Warwickshire	£58,337	£59,812	102.53%
Nuneaton & Bedworth	£110,281	£103,399	93.76%
Rugby	£87,653	£86,169	98.30%
Stratford-on-Avon	£104,320	£104,416	100.10%
Warwick	£112,000	£103,951	92.81%
Total	£472,591	£457,747	96.85%

The above figures reflect the underspend and any funding returned from the previous year.

- 4.24 As with previous years, most of the projects aligned to the “We want to be a County where all people can live their best lives; where communities and individuals are supported to live safely, healthily, happily and independently” outcome.
- 4.25 Data around sustainability of projects was collated for the first time in 2022/2023. Out of the 400 funded projects, 244 indicated in their application that the project would continue after the funding had been spent. The Fund receives a number of repeat applicants each year. Following the Pandemic, some of the applying organisations face challenges with their sustainability. In many cases, Localities and Communities Officers work with these organisations and signpost the applicants to Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action to explore alternative funding opportunities and to provide additional support.
- 4.26 Information on the impact of 2022/2023 is not yet available as the End of Project Reports are not scheduled to be requested until after this report goes to Committee.

Conclusions

- 4.27 The County Councillors’ Grant Fund strongly aligns with Community Powered Warwickshire and with the Levelling Up principles. Evidence of partnership working, building on strengths, and long-term approaches are required for the applicant to score highly. Many of the projects also address root causes by offering early intervention services. ‘Improving physical and/or mental health and wellbeing’ is the most addressed priority at 22%, closely followed by ‘Reducing loneliness and social isolation’ at 19.75%. These locally driven solutions build on strengths from within the community, hence harnessing the power of our communities to tackle inequality and social inclusion.
- 4.28 The following quotes are extracted from earlier end of project reports and demonstrate how communities benefited from projects funded by the

Councillors' Grant Fund.

2020/2021

- I. *With the grant that has been provided by the Councillors grant fund we have managed to make a start on our community garden we have purchased benches, British lavender plants, some decorative aggregate wind chimes and garden decorations. The outside area has now started to take shape which has been a welcome asset with the current pandemic and hot weather. We hope that the garden will be finished by November 2020 when we will have the fence erected and community vegetable raised beds (Community Sensory Garden, Arley and St Michael's Community Centre)*

- II. *Wilmcote Scrubbers [dedicated] 184 volunteer hours. Completed scrubs were collected by the Hub, organised by Wellesbourne Scrubbers. There was a shortage of scrub sets and volunteers stepped up to make these from materials purchased from the Councillor Grant. [The project] exceeded original expectation. Nursing staff, NHS community dental staff and other NHS staff benefited from supplies held within the Hub. Staff are part of the local community. (Wilmcote Scrubbers, Stratford-on-Avon District)*

- III. *People living in Bedworth, Nuneaton, Exhall, Bulkington, and on the outskirts of Coventry have been given food parcels from the Foodbank. We provide food for people from the age of 5 upwards to 90+. The number of people who benefited from the project = 15 adults and 40 children. "Thank you so much for the food parcel, I am overwhelmed. When the children go back to school, I would like to volunteer." "Without you, we wouldn't have coped." "Helped me through a rough patch." By giving regular food parcels along with toiletries and cleaning products, families have benefited from this ongoing assistance. (Bedworth Foodbank)*

- IV. *78% of the girls Improved mental wellbeing (using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale). 72% of the girls who improved, did so significantly, (the improvement was statistically meaningful, according to the scale used). The girls were taught a range of strategies for emotional resilience over 6 online group sessions. 57% felt less isolated by the end of the course.
Parent/carer feedback
"I want to say a huge thank you to you and all concerned at Flourish as it really helped F, she really looked forward to it each week and was sad when it finished."
"The course came at a very helpful time for us as it was helpful to have it running during the summer months when school is shut. The course offered a discrete opportunity for my daughter to engage in a positive process that I feel has benefited her wellbeing before returning to school."
"B really enjoyed the mindfulness part of the course and suggested that*

this has helped her a lot outside the course. (You Can Flourish, Warwick District)

- V. *We have spent the money as we laid out in our application on the recruitment, induction training and management of placement counsellors, we also processed the referrals to the service of parents who wished to access counselling, undertook assessments of them prior to counselling and sought monitoring data from them at the beginning and end of the 18 weeks counselling. Through this specific funding 4 parents were able to access counselling, we average that each family has 4 people, so we anticipate that an additional 12 people indirectly benefited from the counselling. Counselling has been well received by parents and they have engaged well in accessing counselling through an online tool or telephone. We have received feedback that for many parents it has been beneficial, in that they have not had to seek childcare for their children, have felt safe at home and able to share information more easily. Our aim through this funding was to prioritise parents who were pregnant or had given birth over the last 6 months, the counselling service has been a vital life lone for many parents in this situation, as there has experienced isolation due to professionals and family being unable to visit them particularly during lock down. However, the impact with respect to professionals remains as Midwives and Health Visitors are still unable to make home visits, unless there is a clinical need. (Parenting Project, delivered in Rugby Borough)*

2021/2022:

- I. *Our group have loved the garden, especially during Covid as it feels safe to be outdoors and the sensory aspect of the garden is just lovely. The group went to select plants and made a conscious effort to pick perennial plants as well as those that smelt lovely, felt lovely and we have a herb garden. The amount of this funding, £527.46 enabled us to purchase garden furniture that will hopefully last several years if treated annually. (Cohort 4, Time to Relax: Our Outdoor Space)*
- II. *We achieved everything we set out to achieve. Once again, we have brought high-quality professional affordable theatre to our local schools and community. Our adaptations of Shakespeare are accessible to all audiences of all ages. Our volunteer programme continues to thrive. Direct feedback from a beneficiary: "Just wanted to thank you and [team member] for such a magnificent day yesterday! You covered all the areas we were concerned about and brought the text to life. Your instinctive handling of our very challenging students was AMAZING....wonderful!" 'I have never seen a Shakespeare play before and wouldn't have ever seen one, but because it was local I thought that I would come along. I absolutely loved every moment. (Aunty Jen Productions, Macbeth - Shakespeare for Schools Project)*

- III. *We collected comments from people using the service which included: "This is great, so many of my friends are finding it hard right now, this really makes a difference to us". "I saw this on Facebook and thought I'd come down to see what all the fuss is about. There are some great bits in here for the lunchboxes, I can't always afford the nice bits and bobs so the kids will love this". "I swear we have beans on toast 5 times a week before pay day, but tonight we don't have to. I know I'm laughing but I feel so relieved that I don't have to worry about it". "Thanks for putting me in touch with the college [Adult Learning Service], I've wanted to do something for years but never had the guts to go for it". 186 families benefitted directly from this service over the 5 visits. Within those families were 187 children/infants. Beneficiaries came almost entirely from Stockingford with the exception of a minority from neighbouring areas. (Nuneaton and Bedworth Healthy Living Network, Bag a Bargain Project)*
- IV. *The mats unit has benefitted our bowls group who meet weekly at the hall. There are approximately 20 members of varying ages but mainly over 60 years. The mats have to be stored in a back room and transferred to the main hall and the unit has made moving the mats around much easier. Without the unit the group would have folded.... The leader of the group, who wrote a letter of support, was very worried that because of the age and mobility of many of the members, the mats were getting considerably heavy and more difficult to manoeuvre. However, the new unit has solved this problem and the leader is very grateful for the funding. (Carpet Bowls Storage Unit, Binley Woods Village Hall)*
- V. *At the Sydni Centre project, everybody that I've had feedback from has said that it has lifted the mood of the building, having improved the aesthetic look and feel of the space as a whole. Staff have also said there has been a noticeable increase in footfall. The trustee committee of the centre are looking into further funding streams to allow Brink to continue their mural work across their buildings, indicating the success of the projects we've completed with them to date.*
- VI. *The Mill Road project has also received glowing feedback from a number of people who work across the road at No. 1 Mill Street, who look directly out onto the mural. They particularly appreciated the positive impact the bright colours of the mural had on the local area they work in, often brightening their days. Feedback has also been provided by members of the Leamington Society, one of which said words to the effect of: 'even though several of our members were in opposition of this concept when we first heard about it, now we've seen it finished, we feel that it is a wonderful addition to the local urban landscape. (Brink, Leamington Mural Festival Project)*

4.29 The County Councillors' Grant Fund continues to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Warwickshire residents and communities. The

projects supported by the Fund consistently deliver excellent value for money and represent an efficient and effective use of resources. The Fund continues to support Warwickshire communities by empowering them to find their own solutions and building on their strengths.

5 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 5.1 A further report will be presented to Committee in 2024/2025.
- 5.2 The Fund's application process was simplified in 2023/24 to reflect the feedback received in recent years. The application form used branching to provide an option to apply for low value grants with fewer application questions and a quicker turnaround. As a result of this change, Round 1 of the fund has seen an increase in applications received by 55%.
- 5.3 Feedback from applicants and Councillors will continue be sought to further improve the process, making it attractive to new organisations and providing even better value to the Council and the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise sector in Warwickshire.

Appendices

None, but the full list of projects and awards, broken down by Borough/District, is available upon request.

Background Papers

None.

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): None – county wide report

Other members:

Cllr Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder), and Cllr Adrian Warwick, Cllr Parminder Singh Birdi, Cllr Sarah Boad, Cllr Sarah Feeney, Cllr Wallace Redford, Cllr Will Roberts, Cllr Ian Shenton, Cllr Richard Spencer, Cllr Robert Tromans (Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee)