



Report To: Housing Portfolio Holder
Lead Officer: Director of Housing

15 March 2017

Community Housing Fund

Purpose

1. To note the funding allocation from DCLG under the Community Housing Fund for 2016/17 and agree its proposed use.
2. This is not a key decision but has been brought before the Housing Portfolio Holder for information because it is a new initiative and to get formal approval of the grant spend.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Housing Portfolio Holder notes the funding allocated for community-led development and approves the proposed use of the funds outlined at Options A.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. To enable the Council to support local communities to bring forward affordable housing schemes in their villages as an alternative option to rural exception site schemes. This was identified as a key priority within the service plan for 2017/18.

Background

5. In late December 2016, the government announced a new annual fund of £60m to help almost 150 councils to tackle the problem of high levels of second homeownership in their communities. The aim of the Community Housing Fund is to put local groups in the driving seat and help them deliver affordable housing aimed at first-time buyers in response to the problem second homes can cause in reducing supply.
6. The first year of funding is to be used to build capacity within local groups, such as improving technical skills, setting up support hubs to offer advice, business planning and providing staff to review local housing needs. It is expected that local authorities will work closely with community-led housing groups and other stakeholders, such as the Community Land Trusts network and the Homes and Communities Agency to ensure the right tools are in place to ensure efficient delivery of new homes in subsequent years. Funding for the following year will then be used to deliver housing on the ground for local people.

Considerations

7. In total the Council has been allocated £50,329. This is paid in two tranches, the first of which was received on 16th January 2017 for £25,165, with the second tranche being released upon successful application of the local authority's spending plan.

8. The Council does not have the expertise internally to provide the dedicated support to communities or the capacity within the timescales of the funding to upskill staff. Initial discussions have been held with CLT East who can offer guidance and support. CLT East is an umbrella organisation operated by East Cambs DC serving the East of England and is registered with the National CLT Network. It is offering various service packages to local authorities to help them to develop community-led schemes and comply with the grant funding. The packages offered are:

Bronze Package (£5,000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online portal – containing directory of services and key contacts, document library, learning materials and additional specialist knowledge and advice. One year’s access • Dedicated telephone and email support. One year’s access
Silver Package (£10,000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online portal – containing directory of services and key contacts, document library, learning materials and additional specialist knowledge and advice. One year’s access • Dedicated telephone and email support. One year’s access • 2 x workshop/ introductory sessions delivered on-site to your whole team • Additional workshops charged at £2000 per session
Gold – Kickstart Package (£50,000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-6 month programme • Online portal – containing directory of services and key contacts, document library, learning materials and additional specialist knowledge and advice. One year’s access • Dedicated telephone and email support. One year’s access • 2 x workshop/ introductory sessions delivered on-site to your whole team • Continuing 1:1 specialist support to map your sector, de-risk your project and deliver your plans • Dedicated support for internal team from our base in Ely and your offices • Maximum 50 day’s support as part of a 3-6 month programme

9. DCLG are also keen for local authorities to have joint plans across the local area. Cambridge City Council has also been allocated £52,342 grant funding and we are currently working with them to see if there is scope to deliver a joint community-led programme.
10. Whilst the Council has a good track record for developing affordable housing for local people through its exception sites policy, it is acknowledged that there is a growing interest from parishes to set up Community Land Trusts. There has to be community buy-in and involvement to bring schemes forward but it does give communities more control through collective ownership of land and property assets. CLTs would therefore offer an alternative model for providing affordable housing for communities that wanted to pursue this route, rather than the existing exception site scheme.
11. As part of the spending plan, the Council will be seeking expressions of interest from communities with the view to progress a pilot scheme in 2018/19 that can attract future funding from the Community Housing Fund. We will also link this work to the current work being undertaken through Neighbourhood Plans.

Options

12. **Option A** – To agree to explore the potential for a joint community-led programme with the City Council, with CLT East providing the Gold Kickstart Package. This will provide dedicated support for the Councils to be able to resource community-led development that will enable a bespoke service that will help sustain future funding for our communities in the area. By working with the City Council, there may be scope to tailor the package offered by CLT East at a cost saving and also the opportunity to align policies and share good practice. Any surplus funding can then be used to help seed-fund set up costs for local communities. It will also ensure that both authorities are able to make best use of the resources so that it is not lost to other areas.
13. **Option B** – To purchase a lower package of support from CLT East. This would not offer the dedicated support that the Council needs in terms of servicing its communities. It is likely that without this support, affordable housing would not come forward through this route, and the Council may lose the opportunity for further funding targeted at communities in the District.
14. **Option C** – Not to work in partnership with the City Council with regards to developing community-led housing. This may not provide best value for money in terms of buying in services and would lose the opportunity to work jointly across the two Councils.
15. **Option D** – Use the grant funding to resource additional staffing. There is little scope to provide the management support and expertise in this area and unlikely to be able to recruit someone with the required expertise and skills within the timescales. Funding is likely only to be secured for one year and therefore it is unlikely that the Council would be able to continue to give dedicated support to communities after the first year in order for them to progress schemes. This option is not considered to provide best value for money.

Implications

16. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

There are no significant implications arising. The proposal is to use the grant funding allocated to buy in services. This should therefore have little impact on staff resources and no additional financial requirements.

Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)

17. None.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – Homes for our Future

18. li) Increase the range of housing and tenure options for residents, including Right to Build and Starter Homes.
lv) Help parishes and villages wishing to shape their own futures by developing Neighbourhood Plans that address community priorities

Aim 2 – Connected Communities

19. Support our villages to strengthen their communities and social networks, reducing isolation by improving access, delivering effective community-led services and targeted support for the rural economy.

Background Papers

None.

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