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| Report to: | Cabinet | 16 April 2024 |
| Lead Cabinet Member: | Cllr Bill Handley, Lead Cabinet Member for Communities | |
| Lead Officer: | Anne Ainsworth, Chief Operating Officer | |
| Key Decision: | No | |

Proposed administration of the Northstowe Community Activation Grant Fund on behalf of Homes England, criteria and award process

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - a. approves the Council administering Homes England's Activation Grant Fund as set out in paragraphs 8-10.
 - b. approves the scheme criteria and guidance for the Community Activation Fund as set out in Appendix A.

Details

2. Homes England is the master developer of Phase 2 and 3 Northstowe, which will bring forward 8,500 new homes, in addition to the 1,500 new homes nearing completion in Phase 1 (L&Q). Through its Section 106 developer agreement, Homes England provides substantial funding to support the needs of the developing community. This includes a £1 million place making fund, administered in the main by Cambridgeshire County Council to ensure services can be provided to this new population, such as child and family support. Some of this funding is also made available to the district council to provide community development workers and a future small-scale community grant fund, similar to the Council's Community Chest will be developed.
3. However, a gap in the funding available to support larger scale community activation initiatives has been identified. Such community-led activities are vital to establishing a thriving and welcoming community. Such activities can also project the benefits of living in a new community, purpose built to support wellbeing, as they are targeted at both current and potential residents. The Community Activation Fund would provide £20,000 a year for five years to help fill this gap.

4. Homes England itself has no direct experience of offering these grants that are aimed at community led organisations; it is therefore asking the district council to partner with them and administer this service due to its strong track record of distributing grants of a similar scale.
5. Homes England is already funding one community development officer post at Northstowe, but it is recognised by both parties that the administration of this proposed scheme will produce additional demands above those duties and therefore a 5% administration fee on all grant applications administered under this scheme by the Communications and Communities team has been agreed with Homes England in principle.
6. The details of the proposed scheme, including guidance for applications and grant award criteria, are set out in Appendix A. The funding has been agreed and the approach endorsed by the relevant management team at Homes England.
7. The grant fund is proposed to remain open throughout the financial year, so long as there are still unallocated funds.
8. The assessment of grants will be made on receipt of the application by a panel of South Cambridgeshire District Council and Homes England officers, familiar with the Northstowe development and the community development landscape. Details of the applications received will also be shared with the local elected District Councillors to provide comments.
9. Applications recommended for funding by the officer panel would be considered by The Council's Chief Operating Officer, who is the authority's Senior Responsible Officer for Northstowe. An officer decision notice would then be published.
10. Successful applicants would be required to acknowledge Homes England as the source of funding and the role of the district council in administering the grant.

Reasons for Recommendations

11. There is a genuine gap in the structure of available funding available locally to encourage larger scale community activation events and initiatives at Northstowe. Homes England recognises this but lacks the relevant capacity and experience to process and administer grants of this nature but has committed funds to enable a partner organisation to administer this fund on its behalf.
12. South Cambridgeshire District Council's Communications and Communities Team is active at Northstowe and has a wide range of community contacts and knowledge of the current range of networks and activities present. It is well positioned to encourage and support applications to this fund, and the technical expertise to administer the funds effectively.
13. By providing the administration of this fund South Cambridgeshire District Council will be able to work in partnership with Homes England to positively influence the strength and character of the new community at Northstowe.

Options

14. To agree and accept in full the proposed grant scheme criteria, guidance and administrative arrangements.
15. To agree in principle to the proposal, but with changes recommended to the proposed scheme criteria, guidance or administrative arrangements, giving reasons.
16. To reject the proposal to administer this grant scheme, giving reasons.

Implications

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

Financial and Fraud Risk

18. The grant scheme funding will be provided by Homes England on an annual basis. The usual controls applied to grant schemes to prevent fraud or inappropriate use of funds will be applied to this fund as set out in Appendix A.

Staffing

19. An officer from South Cambridgeshire District Council's Communications and Communities Team will sit on the officer panel and provide administration support for the Activation Grant Scheme. A 5% administration fee on all grant applications administered under this scheme by the Communications and Communities team has been agreed with Homes England in principle.

Risks/Opportunities

20. The proposal offers an opportunity to enhance community development support at Northstowe and support positive community action which will enhance the reputation of Northstowe as a good place to live, contributing to the success of the new community, as a key component of the sustainable housing growth planned for the district.

Equality and Diversity

21. As with all grant schemes administered by the District Council, the merits of the projects considered for funding will be judged with equality and diversity in mind, such that the whole community may benefit from the successful projects.

Climate Change

22. The scheme's grant criteria specifically encourage projects which will support Net Zero Carbon and movement towards a circular economy.

Health and Wellbeing

23. The scheme's grant criteria permit projects with an emphasis on health and wellbeing benefits, in keeping with Northstowe's development as a Healthy New Town.

Consultation responses

24. Northstowe Town Council and local elected District Councillors have been informed of this potential grant scheme. Both district councillors for Longstanton Ward have expressed support for the proposal. The Town Council supports the proposed grant scheme; however, their feedback was that the level of support available from community development officers to support project development should be made clear and that other sources of match funding signposted. They wanted clear direction as to eligible costs and the typical size of awards.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

25. The projects delivered through this proposed grant scheme will enhance the reputation of Northstowe as a location to both live and do business, with the potential to attract investors to the Local Centre, Enterprise Zone and Town Centre,

Being green to our core

26. The scheme's grant criteria specifically encourage projects which will support Net Zero Carbon and movement towards a circular economy.

A modern and caring Council

27. The proposed scheme will bring activities and events to the residents of Northstowe, without the need to travel, and at no cost to residents.

28. The district council has invested heavily in Northstowe and its community and the proposed scheme consolidates and extends this investment in Northstowe as a thriving new community.

Appendices

Appendix A: Guidance notes for the Community Activation Fund

Report Author:

Clare Gibbons – Growth Manager - Communities

Telephone: (01954) 713290