

TITLE OF REPORT: **Supporting Communities and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Partners**

REPORT OF: **Colin Huntington, Strategic Director, Housing, Environment and Healthy Communities**
Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on national funding allocations for the COVID-19 response and in particular to set out the funding support provided to VCSE partners to enable and scale up essential activities.

Background

2. Funding from the **Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)** for Public Health response to COVID-19 has been allocated to Gateshead Council at various points during the pandemic with the aim of reducing the direct impact of the virus on residents and also to mitigate the impact of national restrictions on communities.
3. In June 2020, the Council received £1.5m Test and Trace Grant to address outbreak management, much of which has already been allocated. In addition, a further £5.89m has been received from Contain Outbreak Management Fund for 2020/21 to deal with the pandemic response. There are many priorities involved in protecting the public's health and one of these is how the Council supports residents to self-isolate.
4. In order to support residents to self-isolate, the Council is maintaining the Community Hub infrastructure. At its meeting in July 2020, Cabinet approved the community hubs approach be used as part of the route map for recovery from COVID-19 and build a more resilient Gateshead (minute C8 refers). This approach allows residents who need support to self-isolate to have access to:
 - routine shopping services (via procurement of a service from Age UK at a cost of £16,800 for one year)
 - emergency food provision for those that cannot afford to buy food or who have an immediate need pending access to a routine shopping service
 - referral to social welfare advice via Citizens Advice Gateshead for those who are experiencing money or other practical problems e.g. help with utilities or benefits as a result of their self-isolation
 - emotional support and counselling services for residents self-isolating who are experiencing adverse effects from their isolation and/or covid more generally (via

procurement of a service from North East Counselling Services at a cost of £80,000 for one year)

5. Further, funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), known as the Winter Grant, to be used by the Council to provide winter grants for residents who are at risk of going hungry or being cold over the winter months has been extended from the initial allocation of £740,349, by a further £257,830. Within this funding the following allocations have been made to ease resident poverty by providing support for food and energy costs to residents, and by allocating small grants to the Council's food partners, to include food banks, food co-operatives and agencies providing hot meals.
 - Meal vouchers were issued to c6,000 families in receipt of free school meals during the February half term and Easter holidays, £320,448.
 - Grants to 14 VCSE organisations, £66,776
 - The support of 13,709 families via a variety of methods including prepaid payment cards, family food boxes at Easter, a contribution towards emergency food parcel boxes, £610,955.
6. A further tranche of the Winter Grant funding of £174,200 has recently been provided and it is proposed to allocate this funding as set out below, subject to Cabinet approval. The funding has also been renamed the Covid Local Support Grant for this allocation, however the purpose and monitoring requirements remain consistent with previous allocations as the Winter Grant. There is some urgency to this as the money must be distributed to residents (not just allocated) by 20 June 2021.
 - Free school meal vouchers – circa £109,000
 - Households identified as hard to heat
 - New sign-ups for emergency housing
 - Care leavers
 - Food agencies
 - Some ad hoc distribution via Community Hubs and Citizens Advice based on presenting and immediate issues.
7. Finally, the Council has received £486,300 from the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MCHLG) for the delivery and promotion of the Community Champion programme. A one-year Fund to support people shown to be most at risk from Coronavirus (COVID-19) including those from an ethnic minority background, disabled people and others to follow safer behaviours and reduce the impact of the virus on themselves and those around them.
8. From this national funding, 4 substantive grants have been awarded to:
 - Edberts House to create and deliver a Junior Covid Champion programme targeting over 2,000 children - £72,000

- Age UK to promote street-based volunteering, insight, support and Covid Champion recruitment - £52,300
 - Citizens Advice Gateshead to provide social welfare support to Community Hubs - £160,000
 - GEM Arts to provide a Community Development Worker to continue targeted work on Covid awareness in out BAME and asylum seeker communities - £37,000
9. In addition, it is proposed that a small grants programme with a total value of £75,000 be distributed, with three priorities in mind, namely:
- a. Growing the Covid Champion volunteer numbers and demographic to include members of the public, businesses and faith groups.
 - b. Increasing awareness, comfort and vaccination take-up within Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic Minorities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers and other communities who may be experiencing social or geographic inequalities.
 - c. Covid recovery, supporting Gateshead residents to improve their health, wellbeing and physical activity levels.
10. The proposed grants to VCSE partners to achieve the above priorities are:
- Integration station £9,800
 - Peace of Mind Communities £2,402
 - Gateshead Community Organisation - £2,550
 - Pickle Palace - £1500
 - Labruit Healthy Living Centre - £5,000
 - TW Skills - £10,500
 - Bensham Court Residents Association - £3,000
 - Comfrey Project - £1875
 - Best of Bensham - £5,190
 - St Chads - £2,673
11. The above proposed grants amount to £44,490. The small grant programme closes on the 31st May 2021. Three further applications have been received from The Chev, from 2WayTenancy Solutions and from the Blaydon Community Centre with a combined value of circa £15,000; we are working with Connected Voice and the Neighbourhood Management Team to promote the fund and take-up by VCSE partners of the remaining funds.

Recommendations

12. Cabinet is requested to:

- (i) Note the position in relation to the allocation of funding received from the Test and Trace Grant, the Contain Outbreak Management Fund, the Community Champion programme and the DWP winter grants funding.
- (ii) Approve the allocation of the Covid Local Support Grant as set out in paragraph 6.
- (iii) Approve the proposed small grants to VCSE partners and authorise the Director of Public Health to allocate the remainder of the funding available for small grants.

For the following reasons:

- To enable delivery of the MHCLG Covid Champion programme.
- To enable the DWP Local Support Grant to be distributed (previously known as the DWP Winter Grant programme) before the deadline of 20th June, failure to do so will result in the clawback of the funding.

Policy Context

1. The Thrive Policy Framework and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy are driving our decisions around the distribution of the DWP Winter Grant and the MHCLG Covid Champion grant.
2. The Council is committed to supporting and helping to sustain a vibrant voluntary and community sector in Gateshead, and the Council from the start of Covid-19 has worked tirelessly to enable VCSE activity and to pass funding to the VCSE wherever possible.
3. The distribution of the DWP Covid Local Support Grant seeks to help vulnerable residents avoid food and energy insecurity, supporting them to take greater control over what happens in their households.

Consultation

4. The Cabinet Members for Communities and Volunteering Portfolio and the Deputy Leader of the Council have been consulted.

Alternative Options

5. The Council could decide on different priorities for the Covid Local Support Grant, however, there has been extensive consultation and a working group concluded this was the most effective method of distribution considering the time frame available and the risk of clawback should be fail to distribute by the 20th June.

Implications of Recommended Option

8. **Resources:**
 - a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that the DWP Local Support grant covers all intended expenditure at local level and the VCSE grants described herein are covered by the Covid Emergency Fund or by the MHCLG Covid Champion Funding.
 - b) **Human Resources Implications** – None
 - c) **Property Implications** - There are no property implications for the Council from the proposals.
9. **Risk Management Implication** - There are no risk management implications for the Council from the proposals.
10. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - The DWP local support grant will help address the main challenges facing some of the most vulnerable households in Gateshead with a one off payment of £75 and by the provision of free school meal vouchers during the May school holiday.

The MHCLG Covid Champion programme will enable VCSE agencies to support the Council with consistent health messaging, vaccination reassurance and take-up.

11. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications for the Council from the proposals.
12. **Health Implications** - The project will help address the wider determinants of health and wellbeing increasing income and confidence in vaccination take-up.
13. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** – There are no climate emergency and sustainability implications.
14. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no Human Rights implications for the Council from the proposals.
15. **Ward Implications** – The DWP Covid Local Support grant is distributed to families and children at risk of food or energy insecurity and as such it is not a universal benefit, some wards may have a higher eligibility than others.