



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COMMUNITY



North Herts Council

Community Investment Fund

In February 2023, North Herts Council's Executive Member for Finance and IT announced the intention to launch a community fund of £100,000 from council reserves, at a meeting of Cabinet.

Following this, officers worked on developing the details of how this fund would operate, with guidance from the relevant Executive Members. The Members involved wanted the fund to enable community groups who offer important services and support to North Herts residents to improve and increase their capacity. By enabling community groups to invest in themselves, wider benefits to the community could be made possible. The fund was therefore named the Community Investment Fund.

Officers began developing a policy and criteria for the Community Investment Fund. The criteria established that the fund would be available for capacity building activities which would ultimately result in community value.

The policy highlighted that capacity building activities could include training or mentoring for staff or volunteers to fill skills gaps; developing a business plan; engaging a wider audience; doing more work in the community; purchase of resources or equipment; developing financial resources or fundraising capabilities; activities to attract or retain volunteers; or building a network of contacts to work with.

Ultimately, the capacity building activities should enable the community group to operate on a long-term basis, increasing their resilience and ability to meet the challenges that they experience.

Community value was defined as where the community benefits in terms of economic support and opportunities, social opportunities, wellbeing, or environmental protection and improvement.

It was decided that grant values would range from £5,000 to £20,000.

Once the Officer and Member group agreed the policy and criteria, the decision was taken in August 2023 to establish the Community Investment Fund, with a launch date of 11th September 2023.

By the application deadline in November 2023, the fund was oversubscribed by three times. A scoring matrix was developed from the criteria to ensure a fair and transparent assessment process. Two officers were responsible for the initial scoring of the applications, and peer-reviewed each other's scoring. Once this initial scoring had taken place, other officers were involved with verifying the scoring in order to produce a shortlist of the top scoring applicants, with senior officer sign off, to then be put forward to the Grants Panel.

Eight applications were put forward to the grants panel, including from groups working on mental health support, building resilience in young people, reducing energy usage and carbon emissions, and supporting families facing crisis situations.

The panel recommended the grants for approval by the Executive Member for Community and Partnerships, and the Service Director for Legal and Community. The grants were subsequently approved, and the successful applicants informed in February 2024.

We are looking forward to seeing the progress of the capacity building projects over the next year, and the community value that these produce.

The project reflects a number of the CCIN's values and principles. The values of **self-help** and **self-responsibility** are key to the project, as the fund encourages community groups to identify where their capacity could be developed and enables them to improve their service through skills development, fundraising capabilities, and attracting more volunteers, for example. The group is therefore responsible for finding ways to help themselves and taking responsibility for ensuring that they can continue to operate on a long-term basis.

The principle of **Social Partnership** is also integral to the project, with the fund being made available from the council for community groups due to a shared sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of our residents and communities.

While the Council already runs a community grants programme, the Community Investment Fund also marked an **innovative** approach in making funds available for community groups to invest in themselves to ensure longer term sustainability. In doing so, we are able to **maximise the social value** that is delivered by these community groups, thereby creating better social and economic outcomes for North Herts residents.

The full list of projects funded is as follows:

Growing Resilience in Teens, a registered charity in Hitchin, towards hiring a fundraiser to develop their fundraising capacity.

The Creative Mental Health Charity PoetsIN, which currently mainly works in Hitchin, to cover the costs of a salaried project worker to expand their extensive programme across the district, which is structured so that it continues to offer ongoing layers of support.

Baldock Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association towards redeveloping land in Baldock to create 30 half-plots to meet local demand.

Active in the Community, a CIC covering the whole district, to develop a comprehensive database of active sports clubs in North Herts, and look specifically into clubs' challenges with a focus on volunteering, to help create more sustainable clubs.

Green Heat Coop to develop and launch a home energy and retrofit advice service to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions, initially in the Royston area with a view to expanding to all of North Herts.

Home-Start Royston and South Cambs towards training new volunteers who will support and visit local vulnerable families struggling with diverse and complex issues facing possible crisis situations, such as family breakdown and children being taken into care.

Royston Museum Trust towards an educational consultant to develop sessions aimed at local Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils, to strengthen their education offering to local schools and other educational groups.

For further information contact:

Reuben Ayavoo

Policy and Communities Manager – North Herts Council

Reuben.Ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk | 01462 474 212 | www.north-herts.gov.uk