

Title of Report:	Additional DfC funding for Social Supermarkets and Covid Access to Food
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	21 December 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Community & Culture Community Development Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£0
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	33201
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide members with information about additional funding that is expected from the Department for Communities and to seek approval in principle for the spend.

2.0 Background

In response to recommendations in the Welfare Reform Mitigations report, the Department for Communities (DfC) has operated a Social Supermarket Pilot programme since October 2017. Five pilot projects across N. Ireland received funding, including Vineyard Compassion in Coleraine.

Following an evaluation of the pilots, DfC now intends to expand the concept to all council areas using a co-design process to develop tailored models that best meet the needs of local communities and build on the existing structures and partnerships.

In addition to social supermarkets, as a response to the pandemic, the Department supported a number of food support interventions during 2020/21 to councils. This provided emergency food support for the short term through three strands of a Covid Community Support Fund and a Food and Essential Supplies Fund as well as support to address fuel poverty in areas of deprivation through the Warm Well & Connected Fund.

DfC has provided funding to Councils in 2021-22 to support a transition from emergency support to a more strategic and sustainable response to food poverty and to address the root causes of poverty as well as in terms of individual and community wellbeing and socio-economic fallout.

3.0 Current DfC Additional Funding for 2021-22

The following are the strands of additional funding that DfC have been provided to Council already in 2021-22:

Food & Essential Supplies Transition Fund	£126,139
Community Support Programme additional monies for Advice Services	£60,000
Community Support Programme top up for Covid recovery related interventions in relation to community well-being	£98,267

Proposals for interventions to be put in place with this funding were developed in line with the Anti-Poverty Action Plan and Council's Community Development Action Plan for 21-22 and based on ongoing engagement with the community and voluntary sector. These were approved by the Department and recommended by Leisure & Development Committee in August and October 2021 and ratified by Council in September and November respectively.

The interventions that have been agreed are as follows:

Sustainable Food Grant Programme - Grants of £2,500 for community groups for projects that move from the emergency food support to more sustainable responses to address food poverty eg. community fridges, grow your own schemes, catering equipment for luncheon clubs.	Budget: £76,139 Update: 24 applications to a value of £54,492 awarded in round 1. £21,648 remaining - Round 2 opened with a closing date of 8 th Dec.
Wraparound Support Programme – to provide individually tailored one to one support to people who have been adversely impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic and who need additional assistance to navigate the support services.	Budget: £50,000 Update: Contract awarded to consortium led by Limavady Community Development Initiative (LCDI) and including Vineyard Compassion, Ballycastle Foodbank, Ballymoney Foodbank, Community Advice Causeway and LCDI Advice Centre.

<p>Extension of existing Generalist Advice Service - to increase opening hours during evenings and weekends for telephone and email enquiries and face to face appointments in relation to benefit, money and debt, employment, housing and other issues.</p>	<p>Budget £60,000 Update: Existing Generalist Advice Service contract extended – consortium of Community Advice Causeway and LCDI Advice Centre.</p>
<p>Community Support Programme activities to address the impact of the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Community Centres Creative Activity Programme to support a return to community centres as hubs for community activity. ii. Well-being Resource Allocations (in effect grant aid) for small community and voluntary organisations for activities that address social isolation and loneliness. iii. Participatory Budgeting initiative in one area and roll out a Participatory Budgeting foundation learning programme to encourage community engagement and participation £15,000. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Budget: £30,000 Update: To be delivered internally, not yet committed. ii. Budget: £53,267 Update: Contracted to NACN to deliver. iii. Budget: £15,000 Update: Contracted to NACN to deliver.

4.0 Further Additional Funding from DfC for 2021-22

The Department has indicated that the following further funds will be provided to Councils in 2021-22:

Financial Inclusion Fund	£70,541
Social Supermarket funding	£9,686
Covid Access to Food Support	£25,350

4.1 Financial Inclusion Fund

The purpose of the Financial Inclusion Fund is to help build financial resilience and improve overall financial wellbeing through access to money management, low cost/affordable credit, promoting savings and linking into holistic debt advice service and income maximisation support.

4.2 Social Supermarket Funding

The aim of a social supermarket model is to seek to help address the root causes of poverty. This is achieved through the provision of a referral network for wraparound support which includes, but is not limited to, advice on debt, benefits, budgeting, healthy eating, housing, physical and mental health referral, and education, training and volunteering opportunities to enhance employability skills, all the while having access to food at a reduced cost over a period of months.

The objective of the Social Supermarket funding allocated by DfC to Council in 2021-22 is to support the co-design process, capacity building for future implementation, and testing/piloting where appropriate to prepare for the transfer of the Social Supermarket Programme to Councils to roll out in 2022-23.

4.3 COVID Access to Food Support

DfC has advised that the Covid Access to Food Support is complimentary and Council can combine it with the Social Supermarket funding to provide longer term sustainable support through a social supermarket approach or can continue or enhance other sustainable interventions supported through the Food & Essential Supplies Transition Fund.

As the policy intent of this element of the funding is COVID Recovery, council will have flexibility to utilise this element of the allocation if required, to bridge the gap between the supports provided through the emergency response and more long term sustainable solutions to food poverty. This fund can therefore be utilised to enhance existing crisis food support provision if there is an identified need.

5.0 Proposals for Spend

Further to debate at the Full Council meeting on 7th December, particularly in relation to fuel poverty, officers contacted the Department to discuss the potential for spend of the further additional monies that are due, and also to explore, in light of emerging needs, if some of the earlier additional monies could be reprofiled.

5.1 Fuel support

DfC have advised that Council may consider reprofiling the Community Support Programme Covid recovery top up monies to support people experiencing financial hardship *as a result of the pandemic*. If support is to be provided to individuals it should be done through a proper assessment of need. A fuel voucher scheme could be put in place as an addition to the existing Wraparound Support Programme where the advice centres could receive referrals and carry out assessments of need.

It is proposed therefore that £20,000 of the Community Centres Creative Activity Programme budget that isn't yet committed be reprofiled for the purposes of such a Fuel Voucher Scheme.

5.2 Financial Inclusion Fund

A pilot Wraparound Support Programme was funded in 2020-21 through the Financial Inclusion Fund. In August Council agreed to support the Wraparound Support Programme in 2021-22 through the Food & Essential Supplies Transition Fund which was offered by DfC earlier this year, however now that a Financial Inclusion Fund (FIF) has been confirmed for this year it is proposed that the FIF monies are used to fund the Wraparound Support Service Project thus freeing up the Food & Essential Supplies Transition Fund, which unlike the other funds does not need to be spent by end of March 2022.

5.3 Food & Essential Supplies Transition Fund

The situation will be monitored in the next month in close liaison with Anti-poverty Steering Group members and Elected representatives and a decision will be made as to the best use of the remaining FESTF monies that had initially been allocated to the Wraparound Support Programme and any underspend that may result from assessment of Round 2 of the Sustainable Food Grant Programme which closed on 8th December. DfC has advised that the FESTF must be used for a transition away from emergency response to a more sustainable approach to supporting access to food and essential household supplies.

5.4 Social Supermarket Funding

It is proposed that the Social Supermarket funding is used to secure technical expertise to assist in updating and aligning the existing pilot Wraparound Support Service with the DfC pilot Social Supermarket scheme in order to be able to commission a service that best meet the needs of local communities and builds on the existing structures and partnerships.

In addition, through the existing Wraparound Support Service contract, it is proposed to roll out a pilot project to explore ways to extend the reach of the existing DfC pilot Social Supermarket at Vineyard Compassion along with the self-funded Social

Supermarket operated through Roe Valley Community Foodbank at LCDI. In line with DfC's recommendations to councils, this resource will underpin the co-design process that DfC advocates and have encouraged all 11 councils to progress, while capacity building for future implementation.

5.5 Covid Access to Food Support

Based on need identified, it is proposed to reopen the Food & Essential Supplies Fund which operated in 2020-21 and provide grants of up to £2,000 to established community and voluntary organisations to provide support for crisis food and household essentials.

These proposals have all been identified following feedback from the Department and are in line with the Anti-poverty Action Plan developed by the Anti-poverty Stakeholder Steering Group.

6.0 Recommendations

Members are requested to approve the following, subject to confirmation of DfC funding.

- i. Social Supermarket Funds – secure technical expertise to assist in updating and aligning the existing pilots to commission a service that best meet the needs of local communities and builds on the existing structures and partnerships and roll out a pilot project through the Wraparound Support Programme to explore best ways to extend the reach of existing social supermarkets.
- ii. Covid Access to Food Support – reopen the Food & Essential Supplies Fund which operated in 2020-21 and provide grants of up to £2,000 to community and voluntary organisations to provide support for crisis food and household essentials.
- iii. Reprofile £20,000 of the Community Centres Creative Activity Programme budget to develop a fuel voucher scheme to be delivered through the existing Wraparound Support Programme with process to assess need and support people who have suffered financial hardship as a result of Covid.