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| Title of Report: | DfC Social Supermarket Support Fund |
| Committee Report Submitted To: | Leisure and Development Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 19 September 2023 |
| For Decision or For Information | For Decision |
| To be discussed In Committee YES/NO | NO |

| Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25) | |
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| Strategic Theme | Healthy, Active & Engaged Communities |
| Outcome | The Borough comprises cohesive and stable communities which work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to address issues and deliver on opportunities |
| Lead Officer | Head of Community & Culture; Community Development Manager |

| Budgetary Considerations | |
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| Cost of Proposal | n/a 100% external funding |
| Included in Current Year Estimates | YES/NO |
| Capital/Revenue | |
| Code | |
| Staffing Costs | |

| Legal Considerations | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Input of Legal Services Required | NO |
| Legal Opinion Obtained | NO |

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| 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 seek approval for spend of Social Supermarket Support Fund monies received from Department for Communities (DfC) for 2023-24 and to agree a forward approach for the Social Supermarket Support Fund transferring in full from DfC to Council in 2024-25.

2.0 Background

Social Supermarkets provide members, who are struggling financially and meet certain criteria, with the opportunity to shop in a reduced cost food shop for a set period of time (usually 3- 6 months) alongside engaging in wraparound support including advice on debt, budgeting, benefits advice, healthy eating, training and employability skills, signposting, for example to family support programmes etc. It is a membership programme where members pay a weekly membership subscription to shop for a variety of fresh, frozen & store cupboard food products.

The aim of the social supermarket model is to offer a longer term and sustainable response to food insecurity by seeking to help address the root causes of poverty rather than the short term crisis food provision that foodbanks provide.

Department for Communities has operated a Social Supermarket (SSM) Pilot Programme since October 2017, where it has directly funded 5 pilot social supermarkets, one of which is in Causeway Coast and Glens, called Reset which is operated by Vineyard Compassion in Coleraine. There is a second social supermarket operating in Causeway Coast and Glens, operated by Limavady Community Development Initiative (LCDI) which does not receive DfC funding.

The DfC pilots have rolled over annually since 2017 and following a positive evaluation of pilot programme DfC now wishes to extend the programme to all of NI, to be delivered through Councils.

Last year funding from the Department's Welfare Reform budget was provided through a Social Supermarket Support Fund (SSMSF) to Councils to support the co-design of a social supermarket model in the Council area.

Council contracted Ulster University to undertake a Scoping Study to look at how to extend the existing social supermarket provision in Causeway Coast and Glens and this was presented to Council in September 2022.

In February 2023, Council agreed to provide the remaining funding of £25,973 from the DfC 2022-23 SSMSF to Vineyard Compassion, as the DfC recognised provider, to work with the other Social Supermarket provider LCDI, to help sustain, develop and extend the reach of the Social Supermarket services within the Borough.

Officers have since worked with the 2 current providers to determine what is feasible for Council and the current Social Supermarkets to deliver with the resources available, both in the short and medium term.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 DfC funding for 2023-24

DfC have provided direct funding to Reset, the pilot Social Supermarket operated by Vineyard Compassion for the 23-24 financial year. In addition to this an offer of funding for £59,073 has also been made available by DfC to Council.

3.2 DfC direction for 2024-25

When an approach has been agreed with DfC for next financial year ie. 2024-25 DfC will cease funding to the pilot at Vineyard Compassion and provide the full allocation for social supermarkets in Causeway Coast and Glens to Council to fund a service directly. This is expected to be in the region of £115-120K in 2024-25.

3.3 Current coverage

In 2022-23 the Reset Social Supermarket at Vineyard supported 101 households. The funding secured from DfC has a target of supporting 90 households (each household receiving support over an approximate 6 month period). By securing other funding and their own fundraising Vineyard were able to support the additional number of households. The amount of DfC funding has remained at the same level since 2017 while the energy costs of operating the storage facility with fridges and freezers have tripled in the last 2 years. The social supermarket is on track to support 140 households this year based on demand to date and is in need of additional funding to deal with this demand.

LCDI operates a social supermarket which supports approximately 120 households per year over a 12 week period, which is equivalent to 60 households per year over a 6 month period. Following the loss of annual ESF funding they will struggle to be able to deliver the service without external funding.

In order to make a decision about how to allocate the £59K funding from DfC to council in 23-24, and to plan for allocation of the full funding pot in 24-25, Council officers have reviewed the current catchment area of the 2 current providers, Vineyard Compassion and LCDI. Staff have calculated, based on the number of households across the borough, what proportion of the households that the current social supermarkets cover and identify any gaps.

Vineyard Compassion's current catchment is the DEAs of Coleraine, Bann, Causeway and the upper part of Ballymoney DEA. LCDI has a catchment of Limavady and Benbradagh DEAs. Gaps were identified in coverage for The Glens DEA and lower Ballymoney DEA; these tend to be areas that are over 15 miles from the existing 2 social supermarkets. While households from those areas could avail of the social supermarket at Vineyard Compassion, there are factors such as travel distance, time and cost that may affect how worthwhile it is for someone living in these areas to participate in the social supermarket programme.

3.4 Addressing gaps in coverage

The Ulster University scoping study highlighted that no one organisation has the optimal location, premises or staffing capacity (support workers) to meet the current need; operating costs are concerning, with energy prices, which are particularly high given the amount of refrigeration and freezers required, cited most often as a pressing issue; and face to face support that can offer the services with the required intensity is not achievable via remote/online delivery.

Officers have worked with the current providers and other stakeholders on the Anti-poverty Stakeholder Steering Group to consider a number of ways that the service could be extended to provide borough wide coverage: delivery and storage of food items (perishable and non-perishable) and other essentials in outreach locations with one to one support provided in outreach locations or online; or a contribution towards the cost of transporting service users to Coleraine or Limavady.

All of these accommodations come at significant additional cost, particularly in relation to staff time, suitable delivery vehicles and refrigeration equipment. The learning from the pilot is that, while the food aid is important, the wraparound support offered is at

least equally as important and should food shortage form a critical aspect of support needs on a short term basis, clients are still able to access support from foodbanks in Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Coleraine and Limavady. In terms of medium to long term positive impacts, relationships are key to keep participants supported and accountable on their journey. Those clients who don't engage fully with the one to one support are the people that don't always achieve a positive outcome.

The demand for the services of both the current providers exceeds their current capacity and both operate waiting lists, meaning that they are unable to meet the cost and time involved in providing one to one support on an outreach basis in other areas, without significant additional long term funding.

Both Social supermarkets are keen to collaborate and share learning and would be willing to partner with organisations in other areas where there is a gap in coverage if there was another organisation interested and able to deliver a SSM model.

In order to address the gap in provision it is proposed that Council invite expressions of interest from organisations that would be interested in exploring and setting up a social supermarket model to cover the areas where there currently are gaps ie The Glens DEA and lower Ballymoney DEA. Capacity building and seeding support will be provided including expert mentoring in governance, financial planning, policies and procedures, as well as purchase of equipment, training for volunteers and some staffing costs. The organisation/s will be encouraged to aim to achieve DfC criteria/standards for social supermarkets which includes:

1. the person is experiencing food insecurity;
2. has a low disposable income;
3. that a financial transaction takes place (membership or donation);
4. that it is a time bound intervention;
5. that there is a healthy eating element and
6. wrap around supports are in the form of debt, budgeting, benefits advice, healthy eating, training and employability skills;
7. signposting is provided.

3.5 Proposed spend of DfC 2023-24 SSMSF

An amount of £12,000 will be allocated from the DfC funding for a social supermarket capacity building and seeding support programme for those organisation/s that respond to the expression of interest invitation in areas where there isn't currently coverage.

It is proposed that the remainder of the DfC SSMSF monies provided to council this year (£59,073) are allocated to Vineyard Compassion and LCDI to deal with the increased costs of operating and an increase in number of households. Based on the current demand for Vineyard SSM it is estimated that they will support 140 households this year (an increase of 60 from DfC initial target) while LCDI SSM projected equivalent number of households participating is 60. It is recommended that this funding is allocated to Vineyard Compassion, as the DfC recognised and contracted provider through its funded pilot scheme, to work in partnership with the other social Supermarket provider, LCDI. The calculations are as follows:

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| DfC DIRECT funding for Causeway Coast and Glens - pilot SSM Reset at Vineyard Compassion | £58,331 |
| DfC funding for Causeway Coast and Glens - balance offered to Council | £59,073 |

Therefore, it is proposed that council funding should be apportioned as follows:

| Proposed providers | Allocation of DfC funding to council | DfC direct funding 23/24 to existing pilot |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| SSM capacity building and seeding support to cover gaps in areas in CCG – invited through EOI | £12,000 | |
| Allocation of funding to Vineyard (due to 70% of current coverage of 2 existing SSM) | £15,452 | £58,331 <i>(does not cover additional numbers supported)</i> |
| Allocation of funding to LCDI (due to 30% of current coverage of 2 existing SSM) | £31,621 | |
| Total | £59,073 | £58,331 |

4.0 Planning ahead for 2024-25

Planning ahead for transfer of DfC funding in full for 2024-25 it is proposed that Council seeks to engage a consortium capable of collectively providing social supermarket coverage across Causeway Coast and Glens in order to promote collaboration, reduce gaps in and avoid duplication of provision. This could include the 2 current providers and any other organisation/s that come forward as a result of the call for expressions of interest for coverage in the gap areas. If approved, Officers will take guidance as to the appropriate procurement process in the form of tender or grant funding, and external independent support may be sought to support the organisations to develop a collaborative approach.

5.0 Recommendation:

That approval is sought for the following:

- 1) Provide funding of £47,073 from the DfC Social Supermarket Support Fund to the 2 established Social Supermarkets in CCG (**£15,452 to** Vineyard Compassion and **£31,621 to** Limavady Community Development Initiative) respectively to both support the increased costs of operating and an increase in number of households participating in the scheme. The funding to be allocated to Vineyard Compassion as the DfC recognised provider, to work in partnership with LCDI.
- 2) Invite expressions of interest from organisations that might be interested in exploring and setting up a social supermarket model to cover the areas where there currently are gaps ie The Glens DEA and lower Ballymoney DEA. An amount of **£12,000** be allocated from the DfC funding for capacity building and seeding support.
- 3) Seek to engage a consortium capable of collectively providing social supermarket coverage across Causeway Coast and Glens in 2024-25 by preparing a procurement process and supporting interested organisations to develop a collaborative approach.