

**STRATEGIC GRANTS AND SOCIAL FUND –
TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP**

22 April, 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Taylor (in the Chair); Councillors Newall, EA Richmond, S Richmond, H Scott and Tostevin.

Councillor Newall declared a non-pecuniary interest in the items listed below.

SGSF1. SOCIAL FUND - OVERVIEW – The Group met to consider the effect of the MTFP proposals on the Social Fund and the implications of those proposals.

The Assistant Director – Housing and Buildings Services and the Senior Engagement Officer gave an overview of the current service, explained the proposals for each of these areas going forward and the rationale behind those proposals.

It was stated that over the last six months an analysis of the Social Fund had been undertaken to ensure referrals were being made appropriately and covered the full range of client groups. Reference was also made to the linkages with Section 17 funding and to the relatively low number of families with young children not accessing the Social Fund compared to Section 17 funding. Many of the referrals came from Housing Related Support Services and this was reflected in the number of Social Fund applications from young single people.

The Senior Engagement Officer explained why people applied to the Social Fund and the Assistant Director – Housing and Building Services explained that the proposed add back of £170k comprised £50k for crisis support and £120k for community support, excluding food banks which would no longer be funded by the Council. It was stated that negotiations were currently ongoing to find an organisation to administer the £120k for community support to individuals without costly overheads; and the £50k for crisis support had been added to the financial advice support service.

Members noted that combining the elements created the opportunity to reduce admin costs and the crisis and financial contract was to be placed on the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) with contracting timescales in line with the MTFP budget proposals. All tenderers would be advised that assurances would be sought that the service would continue after September and that the contract was subject to available funding.

SGSF2 – STRATEGIC GRANTS – OVERVIEW – The Senior Engagement Officer gave an overview of the current service, explained the proposal and the rationale behind that proposal.

It was stated that several organisations were affected by various MTFP proposals and that an impact assessment had been undertaken on all voluntary organisations

currently in receipt of strategic grants. Details were supplied of a quarterly performance report received from all organisations and it was stressed that some PI's were due to financial situation and not through a poor or non-delivery service.

Following a question the Group was advised that the Darlington Credit Union (DCU) had always been part of the Financial Inclusion Group which had not met recently; that a Teckal arrangement had been investigated but dismissed following consultation with the sector; and talks were ongoing with DCU relating to difficulties around the MTFP proposals and the impact of Universal Credit on housing tenants. Members were informed that there was a minimum eight week period before payment was made and people needed to make arrangements to ensure they set money aside for household bills to avoid any debt issues.

In relation to the key areas of impacts within the voluntary sector the Group was advised that the Council was aware that some organisations faced a small budget cut that would have a massive impact whereas some larger organisations would feel less of an impact resulting in various consequences.

Reference was made to the decline in Shopmobility usage due to increased ownership of mobility scooters. In addition, going forward, the Key Point of Access for homeless and potential homeless people would be delivered solely by the Council's Housing Options Team instead of being shared with First Stop, although the IT resources would continue to be available to enable other agencies to refer their clients into the Key Point of Access.

Members were reminded that there were proposals within the Futures Fund to mitigate some of the impact of the cuts to housing related support services, although the Sector had been consulted on the worst case scenario and that it was hoped each Client Group would still receive some element of Housing Related Support.

All voluntary groups and organisations had received a letter in relation to discretionary rate relief, which was applied for each year, and a further letter would be sent detailing the cuts they would receive.

Members were informed that the Executive Director of Darlington Partnership was currently investigating promotion of public sector volunteering and Members agreed that it was essential organisations were encouraged to apply to the County Durham Community Foundation for funding although it was recognised that the application was a complicated process.

IT WAS AGREED – That the information provided at this stage be noted.