

**CABINET**  
**13 APRIL 2021**

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**COUNCILLORS STRONGER COMMUNITY FUND**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Jonathan Dulston, Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Managing Director**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To establish a pilot scheme to enable Councillors to utilise the fund at their discretion to deliver the objectives of the Stronger Communities Fund (SCF).

**Summary**

2. The approved MTFP allocated £50,000 to establish a Stronger Communities Fund, this report proposes a Pilot Scheme for Cabinet's consideration. The scheme will operate for one year during which time it's success will be reviewed, and Council will consider whether the pilot becomes a permanent feature of the MTFP.
3. £1,000 will be allocated to each Councillor to be used to deliver the objectives of the SCF. The initial objectives of the fund are to build Stronger Communities by :-
  - (a) Supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.
  - (b) Investing in environmental improvements that enhance the local area to the benefit of the local community.
4. The scheme will be administered with maximum flexibility to enable learning and benefits to be easily achieved by the pilot.
5. Councillors can merge their allocations with other Councillors within their wards and across the Borough, should they so wish. They may also use a third party to allocate funds on their behalf.
6. Grants and investments should only be made to individuals or "not for profit" organisations.

**Recommendation**

7. It is recommended that Cabinet :-

- (a) Approve the Pilot Stronger Communities Scheme as described at paragraphs 10 to 12.
- (b) Delegate responsibility to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities to determine if any proposals made by Councillors are out with the “spirit” and procedures of the fund.

## Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To determine the scheme
- (b) To govern the scheme flexibly

**Paul Wildsmith  
Managing Director**

## Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

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S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no implications as a direct result of this report
Health and Wellbeing	There are no implications as a direct result of this report
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no implications as a direct result of this report
Diversity	There are no implications as a direct result of this report
Wards Affected	All wards included
Groups Affected	All groups have access to the fund.
Budget and Policy Framework	The MTFP includes provision for the fund.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	There are no implications as a direct result of this report
Efficiency	There are no implications as a direct result of this report
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

- 9. Council agreed to the establishment of a Pilot SCF as part of the approved MTFP. The Council indicated that a detailed report on the scheme would be presented to

Cabinet, this report proposes a scheme for Cabinet's approval.

10. The proposed objectives of the fund are set out below :-
  - (a) Supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.
  - (b) Investing in environmental improvements that improve the local area to the benefit of the local community.
11. These are wide objectives to enable maximum flexibility during the pilot to maximise learning and the benefits delivered; examples of how the fund could be used are set out below but clearly this is not an exclusive list :-
  - (a) Supporting local groups with rent or events
  - (b) Supporting individuals to excel in sport or education
  - (c) Providing equipment for individuals in need of support
  - (d) Contributing towards or funding the purchase of environmental improvements such as providing a park bench or play equipment.
12. Each Member will enter into an agreement with the Council regarding the use of the funds which, amongst other things, will stipulate that:
  - (a) The process of awarding grants is open and transparent
  - (b) Grants are made without prejudice or favour
  - (c) The funds will not be used for Members' personal or political gain
  - (d) Members will be responsible for ensuring as far as possible that the grant has been used for the purpose that it was provided
13. The process for managing the use of the fund will be as follows :-
  - (a) An account for each Member will be set up at Darlington Credit Union countersigned by an officer of the Council but allowing the Member to authorise payments individually from their individual established bank account. This may include making payments to the Council should a Councillor wish the Council to provide goods or services.
  - (b) The Council will advertise the scheme and Members will be responsible for publicising the fund within their ward should they so wish. They may also want to announce their particular focus for the fund based on the needs in their ward.
  - (c) Members will be required to ensure each applicant completes and signs a grant application form which gives details of the lead individual applying, description of what is being applied for together with justification for the payment. This will form the basis of an agreement between the member and the recipient should a grant be awarded.
  - (d) It will be made clear in the agreement between the Council and Members that any grant they provide must not commit the Council to any future spend, for

example ongoing maintenance. This will also be made explicit in the form completed by applicants.

- (e) At the end of the financial year members will be responsible for providing evidence of spend that tallies with the account statement from the credit union. Members will be required to provide a report outlining how the way they have used the Stronger Communities Fund has supported their ward. In this first year Members will be requested to provide a report on the first 6 months of the scheme to allow a review of the scheme to inform decisions regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan.
  - (f) Should there be doubt whether the proposal been made by a member adheres with the scheme they should consult with the Chief Executive who will review the proposal in consultation with the portfolio holder for Stronger Communities.
  - (g) On a quarterly basis the Chief Executive and the Cabinet member for Stronger Communities will review progress of the scheme and on completion of quarter one Communities and local services scrutiny committee be asked to review the pilot scheme.
14. Councillors may pool their budgets with other Councillors within their Ward and more widely across the Borough, the only limitation on beneficiaries of the grant is they must be Darlington residents. Members may also carry forward any balance of their fund to a following year subject to the continuation of the fund.

### **Pilot Review**

15. A review will take place prior to the preparation of the MTFP in late 2021 and Members will be asked to prepare a note on what they have delivered from their budgets. Council will then be able to review the outcomes and decide whether to progress with the pilot.