

**COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
2 JANUARY 2025**

STRONGER COMMUNITIES FUND

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To review the spend, to date, against the Stronger Communities fund and to consider and make a recommendation as whether the scheme should continue in the next financial year.

Summary

2. As Members will be aware, Cabinet, at its meeting held on 6 February 2024, agreed to the continuation of the Stronger Communities Fund into the 2024/25 financial year as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25. The fund enables Councillors to use an allocated amount of money to deliver the objectives of building stronger communities.
3. Each Councillor has been allocated £1,000 with the aim of :-
 - (a) supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health and well being outcomes;
 - (b) investing in environmental improvements that enhance the local area to the benefit of the local community.
4. This report sets out the spend against the £50,000, to date, together with information on what has been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis (**Appendix 1**). It should be noted that all of the funding must be given to the grant recipient by 31 March 2025. Some Members have not, as yet, allocated any funding.
5. There is no provision in the current MTFP proposals for the continuation of the scheme in the next financial year and Members are requested to consider this and forward a recommendation thereon to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
6. If the fund does continue into the next financial year, any funding not spent by a particular Member may be carried forward for utilisation in the next financial year, however, their overall individual budget will remain at £1,000.

Recommendation

7. Members are requested to :-
 - (a) note the current spend against the £50,000

- (b) To consider the progress of the scheme, review the outcomes and forward a view to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on whether the scheme should continue in the 2025/26 financial year

Councillor Jim Garner
Stronger Communities Portfolio

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Shirley Wright: Extension 5998

Council Plan	The report contributes towards the Council Plan through Members allocation of the Stronger Community Fund. The Stronger Community Fund might contribute to 'Communities' – Working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities' and 'Local Environment' – A well-connected, clean and sustainable borough.
Addressing inequalities	The report does not contain any proposals that impact on diversity issues.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no specific carbon impact issues in this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The report contains updated information regarding the MTFP.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to health and well being which this report needs to address.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific crime and disorder implications in this report.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected.
Groups Affected	No specific groups are particularly affected.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	The report does not require a key decision.
Urgent Decision	The report does not require an urgent decision.
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

8. This report has been written mid-year to allow an early assessment of its value to be included in the considerations around the MTFP.
9. In the 2024/25 financial year each Councillor was allocated £1,000 with the aim of :-
 - (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.
10. Each Member was required to enter into an agreement with the Council regarding the use of the funds which, amongst other things, stipulated 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
11. As part of the scheme, Councillors can, if they wish, pool their budget with other Councillors within their Wards and more widely across the Borough, the only limitation on beneficiaries of the grant is that they must be Darlington residents.
12. Any funding remaining after 31 March 2024 will be reclaimed by the Council.
13. There is no provision in the current MTFP proposals for the continuation of the scheme in the next financial year and Members are requested to consider this and forward a recommendation thereon to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Spend To Date

14. There has been a wide variation in take up of the fund. Some members have made good use of the fund whilst others have, to date, not utilised any. Appendix 1 sets out the spend, to date, against the £50,000, together with information on what has been delivered in Wards on an individual Councillor basis.