

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

06 January 2021

Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance & Transformation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 COVID WINTER GRANT FUND

A report providing a brief description of the new Grant and making recommendations for its use.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Government has recently announced that a Covid Winter Grant will be paid to upper tier councils to ensure that vulnerable households, particularly those with children, are not struggling to pay for food or fuel over the winter months. Full guidance for the grant is attached at Annex 1.

1.1.2 Kent County Council has retained some of this funding to deliver additional support to families via Kent Support and Assistance Service (KSAS) including issuing vouchers to schools to support the families in greatest need. However, a proportion of the money has been distributed to district councils, with Tonbridge and Malling receiving £58,017.55.

1.1.3 Similar to the Emergency Assistance Grant (which was distributed in September 2020), our approach has been to invite bids from groups working in the community to sustain or supplement their services. An email message was also sent to Members and parishes to gain reach. To be eligible for a grant, organisations were asked to submit bids based on the following requirements:

- The funding is to be used up to the end of March 2021 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills
- Nominations from organisations who have seen an increase in the number of clients they are now supporting due to the pandemic will be particularly welcome
- Organisations will need to be able to track the number of clients supported and provide monitoring information

1.2 Applications received

1.2.1 Following a 10 day window of applications, 9 requests were received, a summary of the bids is shown below:

Organisation	Summary of Project Proposal	Amount Required
Tonbridge Baptist Church	To support 30 identified vulnerable households who have been adversely affected by Covid with £100 per month for three months, to help towards gas and electricity bills from January to March. Grants will take the form of monthly credits to prepayment fuel cards.	£9,000
Aylesford Parish Council	To enable the Parish Council to make cash donations to local food banks, church groups and charitable organisations, such as Home Start and St.Peter and St.Pauls Church, to support the vulnerable residents of Aylesford Parish.	£3,000
St Peter and St Pauls Church, Aylesford	To operate a new food bank in Aylesford, industrial shelving is required in order to store and distribute food items in a safe and proper manner, allowing volunteers to carry out rotation of stock in date order. Screening is also required between those attending foodbank and those working in sorting/packing area.	£1,428
Community Engagement Social Action Team Rochester Diocese	To provide slow cookers and low energy/LED bulbs to households accessing foodbanks or debt advice post-Christmas. By using the slow cookers, cheaper meat can be cooked, the use of fresh vegetables is encouraged and the cookers themselves are highly energy efficient thereby reducing utility bills. The provision of low energy light bulbs will also mean reduced energy bills for those struggling and unable to afford the investment cost of switching bulb types. Cook books and food provision would also be included.	£5,000
East Malling Community Larder	To increase operation to a 3rd day (we currently run on two days per week). An indicator of need, is that our numbers had fallen to only 47 per week at the beginning	£15,000

	<p>of November but is already heading towards 80 (at the peak of the first wave we reached 90). The majority of these are parents with school aged children. We estimate that our costs for a three day per week operation would be around £5000 per month. This includes staffing costs £2600, the purchase of food £1500, incidentals such as bags, PPE and cleaning materials required to maintain COVID secure status £1100. The Centre has obviously suffered a loss of general income as a result of the various lockdowns and now entry to Tier 3, including the permanent loss of two long term hirers. The Community Larder currently occupies the Cafe which is unable to operate.</p>	
Feast (Tonbridge)	<p>Feast was set up in 2018 to address holiday hunger, in March 2020 an emergency food bank was set up to respond to the pandemic. The grant will cover food costs for Jan, Feb and March. Support with food costs will enable Feast to progress a project in 2021 to support a Fuelbank and Family Fund project, to address fuel poverty.</p>	£5,000
Age UK Sevenoaks & Tonbridge	<p>To relieve poverty for older people. Grant would cover costs of emergency food purchase, utility bills and other small items. Currently older people are supported from the Personal Support Fund, which is now depleted. During Covid, many older people cannot rely on their families to assist them or may not have anyone to help.</p>	£3,000
Citizens Advice in North and West Kent	<p>To provide targeted financial support for vulnerable households and families, in the form of crisis payments to meet urgent essentials such as utility or water bills, where they have no other realistic alternative to meet the need. This would also include vouchers for supermarkets, or mobile phone credits to enable the person to access other urgent assistance such as family support.</p>	£10,000

The Bridge Trust	We provide accommodation and support to vulnerable homeless adults in the borough. Over the winter period bills will of course increase dramatically as gas, electric and water costs will increase due to an increase in their usage. It would benefit our residents therefore if we could obtain a grant to cover their service charges over this period. The charges are £47.10 per person per calendar month, so £47.10 x 7 would be £329.70. We would like to ask for a grant to cover these costs for the coldest months of January, February and March.	£989
Total:		£52,417

1.3 Grant Awards

1.3.1 It is felt that the proposals listed above meet the requirements of the guidance, however there is duplication with Aylesford Parish Council requiring a grant for St Peter and St Pauls Church, (who have also submitted a bid). There is also concern that the Aylesford Parish Council bid did not include specific details regarding the suggested charitable donations. Without a description of how the money will be allocated, it doesn't really meet the criteria for the scheme. Officers felt that supporting an emerging food bank at Aylesford will be extremely beneficial to vulnerable residents and would recommend directing the £3,000 that is proposed by the parish council direct to the St Peter and St Paul food bank, which is more fitting with the guidance. This would therefore mean a larger grant of £4,428 going direct to the St Peter and St Paul Foodbank. We have consulted with Aylesford Parish Council regarding this approach and they are supportive of this decision.

1.3.2 Members will see that the total of the proposed awards is £52,417, leaving a balance of £5,600.55. We propose the remainder to be held in reserve to provide emergency support to foodbanks over the next few months. As we have now entered Tier 4, the foodbanks are likely to see increased demand as they did during the first peak of the pandemic in April 2020. This reserve fund will be available to help those who are in financial hardship.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 Funds to be awarded in line with Government guidance.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 Assessments of bids have been made with best value in mind. Assessment and distribution of funds has a minor financial impact.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Bids have been assessed against criteria from Government guidance. Funds will need to be returned to Kent County Council if not put to use.

1.7 Policy Considerations

1.7.1 Community

1.8 Recommendation

1.8.1 Members are asked to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that:

- 1) Awards of the Covid Winter Grant be made in accordance with the approved bids listed in 1.2 of the report, with the exception of the Aylesford Parish Council bid of £3,000 which is to be added to the bid from St Peter and St Pauls Church; and
- 2) The balance of £5,600.55 be held on reserve for use as necessary within the parameters of the scheme under direction of the Chief Executive or Director of Finance and Transformation.

The Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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