Environment & Energy Board

Date	1 March 2023
Report title	Commonwealth Games Legacy: Community Environment Fund
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Environment & Energy Board is recommended to:

(1)   Agree the purpose and remit of the WMCA Community Environment Fund.

1.   Purpose

1.1   To outline the Community Environment Fund (CEF), which will be supported through Commonwealth Games Legacy Funding. The CEF will form part of the Wellbeing and Sustainability Legacy Pillar and will build on the success, and lessons learned, of the WMCA Community Green Grants programme.

2. Background

2.1 A paper was taken to WMCA Board in January 2023 to approve the WMCA as the accountable body for the receipt of up to £70m of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund, granted by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport from 75% of the unallocated contingency funding in the Commonwealth Games budget. The funding allocation was agreed to be split across four pillars, one of which is Wellbeing and Sustainability.

3. Community Environment Fund

3.1 The proposal for the sustainability element of the Wellbeing and Sustainability pillar is to build on the already successful Community Green Grants programme (previously brought to the Environment and Energy Board on 28th September 2022) and to broaden it out into a Community Environment Fund. This would have the same underlying purpose – to enhance community health and well-being through environment projects – but would extend beyond improving access to green space to other areas of the WMCA environment programme. This would reflect the breadth of the work undertaken by the Commonwealth Games sustainability programme.

3.2 The current Community Green Grants programme has a budget of £725k to improve access to green space for communities across the West Midlands. Its overarching aims are to:

- Increase or improve green spaces close to where people live (e.g., within ten-minute walk).
- Connect people to nature, especially communities experiencing green deprivation
- Enhance the local environment (e.g., tree planting, increasing biodiversity).
- Tackle barriers to accessing green spaces, e.g., concerns around safety or the lack of awareness of local green space.

3.3 The current timeframe for the Community Green Grants programme is 2 years, with it due to conclude in its existing form in March 2024. The scheme has awarded both large (up to £100k) and small (£3k - £25k) grants to community/ environmental groups across the WMCA area. Since the Grant launched in January 2022, 13 projects have been approved totalling £343,748. This is comprised of 11 small grants (£175,040) and 2 large grants (£168,709).

Local Authority	Received 2022	Approved 2022
Birmingham	30	5
Coventry	5	2
Dudley	3 (inc.1 joint with Sandwell)	2 (inc. 1 joint with Sandwell)
Sandwell	6 (inc. 1 joint with Dudley)	1 (inc. 1 joint with Dudley)
Solihull	1	0
Walsall	6	3
Wolverhampton	6	1
Total	56	13

3.4　As a result of our experience in running the Community Green Grants programme, we have been able to hear from communities about other projects and initiatives that they would like to establish that do not fit within existing criteria. The ambition was always to extend the programme beyond its initial function, whilst retaining the valuable outcomes it has delivered. This proposed expansion responds to feedback we have had from the existing programme, as well as aligning with both the sustainability programme from the Commonwealth Games and supporting the WMCA environment programme.

3.5　The proposal for the CEF is to develop workstreams in the following areas, with projects that deliver the following outcomes:

- Natural environment – to protect, restore and enhance nature and wildlife.
- Circular economy – to reduce waste and keep resources and materials in use for as long as possible.
- Climate adaptation – to make communities more resilient and prepared for the impacts of climate change.
- Access to green space – to provide better access to and community use of green space for health and wellbeing – similar to the existing Community Green Grants programme.
- Environment awareness – to improve knowledge of environment issues and support behaviour change.

3.6　The table in Appendix A gives examples of the types of projects we might fund under each of these strands.

3.7　The award criteria will need to be developed in further detail, but we would expect each application to answer the following questions:

1. Why is this project needed?
2. How will your project have a positive impact on the local environment?
3. How many people will your project support and who are they?
4. How will your project deliver value for money?
5. What co-benefits will be delivered as part of your projects – skills and jobs, health etc.

3.8　In terms of value of grants, we would anticipate a similar breakdown to the Community Green Grants programme in terms of large and small grants – with up to £25k for small grants and up to £100k for large grants. This formula has worked well for the existing Community Green Grants programme. In terms of balance, we would imagine awarding 5 large grants across the CEF programme, with the remainder being available for small grants. The funding will be available for two years (spending must be complete by March 2025).

3.9　In addition to the grants themselves, we anticipate other costs for running the programme as follows:

- Grant administration support. We have worked with a grants administrator to support the Community Green Grants process. Working with an organisation that has expertise in both administering the grant, as well as carrying out due diligence on the applicants, has been invaluable. We would look to have similar support for the CEF.

- WMCA staff support. The current Community Green Grants Officer post has been a fundamental part of making the current programme a success, in particular reaching out to community groups and encouraging applications. This post will continue as part of the Community Green Grants programme until March 2024 and we would look to retain the post to support delivery of the CEF until March 2025. In order to manage, and grow, this bigger programme of work, we also intend to bring in a Community Environment Fund Manager to support the successful deployment of the grant, to work with a wider diversity of groups, given the expanded remit of the programme, and to build private and other support, including further funding. This would ensure continuation of the programme beyond the CWG Legacy Funding.

- WMCA administrative support – a small contribution will be made to pay for the business support function (Finance, Legal and Procurement) as part of successfully running the grant programme.

3.10 As part of the programme, we will also:

- Run a series of webinars and community outreach events to publicise the grant scheme and provide support for applicants. This has proved to be very successful with the existing programme.

- Collate data across the programme to demonstrate impact of the grant scheme in communities; this would be published in an annual CEF report.

- Retain the Grant Assessment Panel model adopted for the Community Green Grants but broaden the membership to reflect the breadth of the new programme.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 The total available from the CWG Legacy Fund for the Community Environment Fund is £1.2m revenue grant funding for 2 years (April 23 to March 25). The intended use of this is as follows:

	£
Grants for disbursement	906,000
Grant Administration	120,000
Direct Resources	150,000
Indirect Resources	24,000
Total	**1,200,000**

4.2 Of the total, £906k is available for disbursements as grants to successful applicants.

4.3 The budget associated with the end-to-end administration of the grant applications is up to £120k for 2 years. This will include post award monitoring/evaluation of each successful applicant.

4.4 Funding for a Community Environment Fund Manager post (2 year FTC) and the assimilation of the Community Green Grants Officer (from April 2024) will cost up to £150k.

4.5 Finally, the total includes an allocation of £24k to cover WMCA's Corporate Services costs (Finance, HR, Legal, Procurement, etc.).

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this paper. Any legal implications will be considered on a project-by-project basis.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 CEF will prioritise applications from projects in areas of high deprivation (IMD 10-20%). One of the aims will be to ensure that we are providing opportunities (whether these are social, economic or environmental) for communities participating in the programme. The outreach work that is being undertaken by our Community Green Grants Officer is ensuring that we make the grant accessible to as wide a range of organisations as possible who are working to achieve this.

7. Inclusive Growth Implications

7.1 This report links to a number of the WMCA's eight inclusive growth priorities, which are identified as 'a catalyst for improved and sustained outcomes for people place, co-designed with partners and beneficiaries'. The CEF will support outcomes around:

- reduction of health inequalities;
- addressing climate resilience through the promotion of nature-based solution to dealing with climate change;
- improving understanding, awareness and knowledge of environmental issues;
- supporting the principle of powerful communities through providing support to deliver change and create better places; and,
- equality (reducing the numbers of people living in deprivation, which includes lifting people out of 'green deprivation' and fuel poverty).

8. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

8.1 The CEF would cover all constituent local authorities.

9. Other Implications

9.1 None.

10. Schedule of Background Papers

10.1 None