

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 8 August 2024

Community Grants Fund Evaluation

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the outcome of the evaluation and the development areas identified in paragraph 5.1 of the report.

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Community Grants Fund Evaluation

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on an evaluation of the Community Grants Fund (CGF) and recommends next steps. The evaluation was carried out in response to a [motion](#) by Councillor Thornley approved by Committee on 7 December 2023. (See appendix 1)

3. Background

- 3.1 In December 2023, Committee requested evaluation of the current Neighbourhood Networks model and the CGF. A separate report on the evaluation of Neighbourhood Networks is included on this Committee agenda.
- 3.2 The CGF is aimed at encouraging local people to get involved in their communities by providing funds to help start or develop local projects. Apart from Leith, which uses a participatory budgeting approach to allocating funds, recommendations for awards are made by locally organised funding panels which meet throughout the year.
- 3.3 The CGF was devolved to the Neighbourhood level in 2007, with 12 funds each aligned to a Neighbourhood Partnership area and administered through six Neighbourhood teams, aimed at supporting priorities in a Local Community Plan. The administration was subsequently realigned with the creation of four localities, with management of the fund organised by locality teams.
- 3.4 In 12 of the 13 neighbourhoods, the CGF is distributed via funding panels. These panels involve local elected members, community group representatives, and representatives from partner organisations. Membership is open to any representative from a group or organisation with a clear link to the local area. In previous years, panels have typically met between once and four times a year, with the frequency having varied significantly between areas. Panels consider each eligible application individually and can recommend they are funded in full, funded in part, refused, or deferred. Deferments are usually due to insufficient funds, or requests for more information from the applicant.

- 3.5 The fund uses a set of criteria approved by Culture and Communities Committee (most recently [updated](#) on 19 June 2018), and administrative processes (as set out in Appendix 2).
- 3.6 Decision-making on the allocation of CGF funding differs in Leith, where a public vote is held as part of a participatory budgeting approach.
- 3.7 The CGF totals £405,679 across the city and is allocated to Neighbourhood areas based on population. Following the 2017 Boundary Review and associated population changes alongside ward and Neighbourhood area populations, the fund was reapportioned to levels set out in Appendix 3. The budget for the fund is not linked to inflation and changes following the 2017 Boundary review are the most recent to have occurred.
- 3.8 Following the dissolution of Neighbourhood Partnerships in 2018, engagement with the community transferred to Neighbourhood Networks (NNs) using the same boundaries, with oversight for the funds now assigned to the remit of Culture and Communities Committee. Administration and engagement is undertaken by officers through existing funding panels or NNs.
- 3.9 Appendices 4 and 5 highlight some areas of inconsistency which had been identified and addressed through guidance developed for funding panel members in 2024/25.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The approach to evaluation of the CGF involved developing a set of four criteria based on the fund criteria and models of best practice (including the Council's CGF criteria, the Council's Grant Standing Orders, and best practice developed by the Human Rights Funders Network and the National Standards for Community Engagement).
- 4.2 The criteria used in this evaluation were:
 - 4.2.1 The fund supports small scale activity that benefits local communities;
 - 4.2.2 The application and decision-making processes are equitable;
 - 4.2.3 The fund is widely promoted, and applications encouraged from a wide range of groups and applicants; and
 - 4.2.4 The end-to-end delivery of the fund is efficient and appropriately resourced.
- 4.3 Data collection involved online questionnaires, one to one interviews, and an officer focus group.
- 4.4 Details of the results are attached in Appendix 6 and are summarised below
 - 4.4.1 The fund appears to be positively received as suitable for start-up funding and feedback suggests that return on investment is often greater relative to the small amount of investment, with direct benefit to the community;

- 4.4.2 Transparency in decision making was highlighted as an area for improvement, with requests for a clear timeline and increasing diversity on the panel;
- 4.4.3 The response to the questionnaires shows consistently positive responses from applicants and funding panel members across criteria 1 – 3, albeit the balance between strongly agree, agree and neutral responses does vary;
- 4.4.4 Funding panel members were also positive about criteria 4 (end to end delivery of the fund is efficient and appropriately resourced); and
- 4.4.5 The officer focus group highlighted some of the challenges with the CGF process and made suggestions for how to improve inclusivity and equitability as well as to provide more support and to increase promotion of the available funding.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Based on the feedback received, it is proposed to develop the CGF model and enhance participatory budgeting, as follows:
 - 5.1.1 Ensure equity of allocation and transparency of process by reducing administrative inconsistencies between different areas;
 - 5.1.2 Simplifying and clarifying the process appropriately and working to ensure the CGF criteria are interpreted consistently;
 - 5.1.2 Increasing promotion of the fund and involvement in decision making, particularly focussed on underrepresented groups;
 - 5.1.3 Working with community stakeholders (such as applicants and current funding panel members) to identify clear long-term goals for the fund that consider aspects such as:
 - 5.1.3.1 Appropriate geographies;
 - 5.1.3.2 Encourage innovation;
 - 5.1.3.4 Eligible organisations;
 - 5.1.3.5 Maximum awards;
 - 5.1.3.6 How decisions align with community priorities; and
 - 5.1.3.7 The makeup of funding panels or alternative models for decision making, to ensure the best use of resources; and
 - 5.1.4 Meet with the Leith Chooses steering group to discuss their self-evaluation and consider to what degree the administration of other funds could learn from the Leith experience.
- 5.2 This report will be circulated to all community stakeholders currently involved in Community Grants Funding Panels for information.

- 5.3 If Committee agree the actions set out above, work will begin to progress them with community stakeholders, including funding panel member and applicants.
- 5.4 A work programme for the actions, including timelines, will be prepared and shared with members via Business Bulletin updates and briefings.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The CGF totals £405,679 across the city and is allocated to Neighbourhood areas based on population. A summary of the funding allocated to each Neighbourhood is included in Appendix 3.
- 6.2 There are no financial impacts relating to the development of the CGF (as set out in paragraph 5.1).

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 Any changes proposed as part of the engagement with community stakeholders (paragraph 5.1.3) will be considered to determine if an integrated impact assessment is required.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 Any changes proposed as part of the engagement with community stakeholders (paragraph 5.1.3) will be considered to determine if an integrated impact assessment is required.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 There is a risk the administrative inconsistencies between different areas means similar applications are treated differently in different places. It is hoped that this will be addressed by the proposed changes outlined in paragraph 5.1.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 None.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood Networks Motion – 7 December 2023

Appendix 2 – Community Grants Process

Appendix 3 – Community Grants Fund Overview

Appendix 4 – Funding Panel and Community Grants Inconsistencies

Appendix 5 – Community Grants Funding Panel Guidance

Appendix 6 – Community Grant Fund Evaluation Analysis

Appendix 1 – Culture and Communities Committee – 7 December 2023 – Item 9.4 Neighbourhood Networks

By Councillor Thornley - Neighbourhood Networks

Committee notes:

1. That Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee recently received a briefing note showing that only 4 of 13 Neighbourhood Networks across the city meet regularly.
2. That Neighbourhood Networks can be complicated and inaccessible bodies for many and are frequently overly dependent upon a few key people to remain operational.
3. That Neighbourhood Networks replaced the Neighbourhood Partnership model in 2019.
4. The obligations placed upon the Council by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.
5. The stated desire in the Council Business Plan 2023-27 to 'evolve Community Councils and Neighbourhood Networks to ensure they provide communities with direct input'.
6. That in some cases, Community Grants Funding is connected to Neighbourhood Networks, but not in others.
7. That no updates are currently provided on what is supported by Community Grants Funding, what criteria are required to be met to secure funding, and there for what is being achieved within communities.
8. A review of both Neighbourhood Networks and Community Grants Funding is currently ongoing.

Therefore:

9. Requests a report, within three cycles, providing an evaluation of the current situation of our Neighbourhood Networks and Community Grants Funding, including a judgement of the success of the current model, suggestions for how community engagement could be improved, barriers to that engagement removed, processes simplified to improve accessibility and how participatory budgeting can be preserved and enhanced.

Appendix 2 – Community Grants Process

Stage	Outcome
1. Fund promotion	Community groups are supported to make an application
2. Application submission	Application received and logged, and it proceeds to stage 3
3. Criteria assessment by Council officers	Application does not meet minimum criteria and applicant is informed
	Application meets minimum criteria, and it proceeds to stage 4
4. Decision-making process* (with community involvement)	Application is not recommended for an award and applicant is informed
	Application is recommended for an award, and it proceeds to stage 5
5. Recommendation considered by officers	Officers do not accept the recommendation, the applicant and those involved in making the recommendation are informed and feedback is given.
	Officers accept the recommended award and the application proceeds to stage 6.
6. Grant offer	Applicant does not accept funding agreement and no award is made
	Applicant accepts funding agreement, and it proceeds to stage 7
7. Payment	The Council makes payment of the grant award to the applicant
8. Grant monitoring	Applicant submits end of project report within 12months of receiving the award or by date of agreed extension. Council officers can ask for updates from the project as required

*The decision-making process may differ between Neighbourhoods

Appendix 3 – Community Grants Fund Overview

Locality	Ward	Current Population Estimate 2018	Population +/- Change	Allocation 2018/19 £	Neighbourhood Partnership	Allocation 2018-19 £
North West	Drumbrae/Gyle	23,512	-264	19,122	Western Edinburgh	37,565
	Corstorphine/Murrayfield	22,638	-383	18,443		
	Almond	33,938	+7,423	27,586	Almond	27,586
	Forth	30,886	-3,086	25,112	Forth	25,112
	Inverleith	30,744	-3,695	24,990	Inverleith	24,990
	North West Total	141 718				
North East	Leith	23,243	-2,514	18,903	Leith	44,624
	Leith Walk	31,649	-957	25,721		
	Craightinny/Duddingston	31,350	+4,861	25,477	Craightinny/Duddingston	25,477
	Portobello/Craigmillar	27,819	+1,766	2,2637	Portobello/ Craigmillar	22,637
	North East Total	114 061				
South East	City Centre	30,756	+8,229	25,030	City Centre	25,030
	Liberton/Gilmerton	32,546	-1,739	26,451	Liberton/Gilmerton	26,451
	Southside/Newington	36,169	+1,789	29,416	South Central	56,754
	Morningside	33,570	-1,213	27,338		
	South East Total	133 041				
South West	Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart	23,244	-295	18,904	South West	45,274
	Sighthill/Gorgie	32,438	-7,685	26,370		
	Pentland Hills	30,537	+5,989	24,836	Pentlands	44,179
	Colinton/Fairmilehead	23,771	-2,096	19,343		
	South West Total	109 990				
	Citywide Total	498,810	+6,130	405,679		405,679

Appendix 4 - Funding Panel and Community Grants Inconsistencies

Point of Inconsistency	Possible Resolution
<p>EVIDENCE OF COST Evidence required from applicants to substantiate costings - there has until recently been significant variation across the city</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus more on the need for ‘show your working’ cost breakdowns on the application form • Set minimum limits for requesting evidence of cost (e.g. larger items) • Request reasonable evidence of spend at the end of the reporting period rather than beginning
<p>SPLIT BIDS AND FUND BOUNDARIES Lack of clear protocol regarding how panels work together and reach decisions where beneficiaries are spread across more than one area, or are submitting more than one related bid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer written protocols and operational guidance for officers • Panels meet to discuss specific bids when necessary and use clear procedures • More officer support to help applicants consider the most appropriate area to apply in and how to present split or linked bids • Produce FAQ applicant guidance
<p>STAFFING COSTS ELIGIBILITY Whether and how staffing costs should be funded - invoiceable, sessional, core/non-core</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector mapping and data gathering to inform a well evidenced position on what CGF applicants require in order help them meet local need (e.g. on projects that are staffed as well as volunteer run) • Engage with key stakeholders re. overarching aims of the fund and how it can meaningfully support the small community sector • Include improved information about this within city wide guidance for all stakeholders to refer to
<p>GRANT LIMIT Maximum limit is £5k but some panels routinely tend to award partial grants or grants up to around £3k max</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide updated guidance and training for panels regarding upper limits and when to use partial grants option • Strengthen city-wide fund guidance • Ensure all application forms used across the city are the same
<p>REPEAT FUNDING Whether repeat funding is permitted and under what circumstances - approach can vary across different the city</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further consultation with CGF stakeholders, followed by clarification within the guidance
<p>COMMUNITY BENEFIT VS NEED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on addressing need as well as providing wider benefit

<p>Broad focus on community benefit versus more of a focus on need - in practice this can vary between panels and is reflected in the types of discussions that panels have as well as how they make their final recommendation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide panels with evidence about needs in their community to support local knowledge • Use different approaches towards decision making at panel e.g. scoring • Provide updated guidance with language that reflects this shift in emphasis
<p>LINK TO LIPS AND LOCAL PLANS Whether or not CGF applications need to be linked to LIPs or other local plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingent on outcome of EP Transformation and Improvement Programme • Clarify in guidance or applicant FAQ's that there is no obligation to refer to LIPs, but where applicants can provide evidence of how their proposal meets local community priorities this will strengthen the application
<p>APPLICATION LIMIT PER ORGANISATION Number of applications that can be submitted across one or more funds in one round, plus maximum total that can be requested by any applicant in each round or each financial year</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check existing history of multiple bids and gather data regarding what form these typically take and why • Clarify the guidance and promote/publicise any changes
<p>PANEL PROCEDURES Routine procedural considerations e.g. how much history of past awards is provided to panels to support their assessment of an application - expectations can vary regarding this and other related points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal team guidance for CEET officers re. exact procedures all staff should use in relation to different aspects of administering the fund • Strengthened guidance, training opportunities and support for panels • Use panel training and guidance to clarify that officers can legitimately intervene to ensure the agreed protocols are followed by all panels more consistently

Appendix 5 – Community Grants Funding Panel Guidance

City of Edinburgh Council Community Grants Fund

Guidance for Panels - May 2024

What is the purpose of the Community Grants Fund panel?

The Community Grants Fund (CGF) is a grants scheme provided by City of Edinburgh Council, which aims to encourage small scale activity that will benefit local communities. Grants of up to £5,000 are awarded to constituted voluntary and community groups across 13 separate neighbourhood areas in the city. Each area receives an allocation of funding to distribute at the start of the financial year and then makes awards via a panel, of which there are 12 across the city. In Leith, an alternative approach known as participatory budgeting is used as part of the 'Leith Chooses' initiative. This is based around a public vote.

The role of the panel is to make recommendations about which organisations should receive a grant, in line with local needs and priorities. Panels are community-led, with members including ward councillors, community council members and individuals from local community organisations. Panel members act as representatives of their group, organisation or constituents, putting the needs of the people they represent first when making recommendations about which projects to fund.

The CGF is allocated on a per capita basis across one or two electoral wards. In single ward areas the fund is smaller, whereas in double ward areas (of which there are three) the total figure for the panel to allocate is larger. Some panels only meet once a year, while others may require two or three meetings to allocate the full budget. Once all the funding has been allocated, no further panel meetings take place that year.

How are CGF panels formed?

Membership of the panel is confirmed at the beginning of the new financial year, when participants are invited to come forward for that year. Dates within a set timeframe are then agreed between panel members and the Council officer overseeing administration of the fund in that area. Provisional dates for the full year can be agreed in advance.

Each panel should have a Chair who is nominated at the start of the financial year. The CGF officer can assist the panel in deciding who will be Chair for that year. There is no set way of doing this and the approach is flexible depending on the preferences of those involved.

Panel members will be encouraged to take turns at Chairing. This will allow more people to develop the skills and experience needed convene a grants panel and community meetings more generally. Training for new Chairs will be provided by CGF officers. There will also be opportunities for panel members from across the city to meet, debrief and reflect together after panels have taken place.

What is the process for making recommendations?

Each panel will require a minimum of three participants to make recommendations about what should be funded. We are aiming for a maximum of around 15 people per panel. Recommendations are made by consensus and all panel members should have an equal say in coming to a final

agreement. Where that is not possible, the Chair will have the casting vote. However, it is unusual for this to be necessary on CGF panels.

The panel's recommendations are passed to the Head of Service for the Council's Community Empowerment and Engagement Team (CEET) for approval. It is ultimately the Council's responsibility to decide who gets funded and ensure that the CGF budget is distributed and used appropriately across the whole city. In the rare instance that the Head of Service does not approve a panel's recommendation, this will be discussed with the panel before notifying the applicant.

How are panels supported?

Each local fund is administered by a Council officer who has been allocated to the fund for that financial year. The officer ensures that all the necessary administration and due diligence work is completed before sharing redacted applications with panel members. Applications will be shared at least one week before the panel takes place.

Council officers do not participate in making recommendations because the CGF is a community-led fund. The role of the officer is to provide panels with all the information they need to make a recommendation, and to support the Chair by taking and sharing meeting minutes, or chairing meetings in their absence.

How do panel members decide on which applications to fund?

The approach taken towards assessing grant applications varies a lot within the funding sector and there is no single right way. For larger grant schemes there may be a scoring system and detailed criteria in use. For the CGF, scoring is not normally used. Panel members instead use their understanding and experience of the local area to make recommendations about which applications should be funded.

As the CGF is relatively small, not all applications can be successful. This can sometimes make it tricky for panel members to decide on what to recommend. The following questions can be used to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of an application:

- Has the applicant given a good description of the project and provided sufficient detail about the proposed activities?
- Who else is doing similar and could the project duplicate existing work that is planned or already underway? This is where local knowledge can be very useful.
- Is there enough evidence that the project would provide community benefit, either for a targeted group within the community, or for the community as a whole?
- How many people are likely to benefit and are the suggested benefits clearly illustrated, as well as being realistic?
- Is the project well organised, with evidence of a clear plan for delivery?
- Is the cost breakdown reasonable, proportionate, clearly explained and evidenced?
- Does the applicant have the capacity to deliver the project, or do they need some additional support to think things through in more detail?
- Could financial support for the project be delivered from other grant streams or through fundraising activities (e.g. by seeking donations)?

What are the responsibilities involved in being on a CGF panel?

CGF panel members are responsible for:

- Familiarising with the CGF guidance and understanding the purposes of the fund.
- Reviewing the redacted applications and completing all relevant paperwork in advance of attending panel meetings prepared with comments.
- Attending meetings either in person or via Microsoft Teams. Where this is not possible, submission of comments to the CGF officer is required at least one working day in advance of the panel. A template for this will be provided on request.
- Maintaining confidentiality about the applications that are assessed and any recommendations made during panel meetings. This applies until final decisions are shared publicly by the Council officer.
- Bringing local knowledge and expertise to bear on the process of making recommendations throughout the year, for instance through knowledge of the applicant or similar organisations/initiatives operating locally.
- Local promotion of the fund, with any enquiries being signposted to the Community Empowerment and Engagement Team (communitygrantsfund@edinburgh.gov.uk).
- Declaring an interest before any meeting at which there may be a potential conflict of interest in relation to any of the grant applications. Further information on this can be found below.
- Completion of Equalities monitoring paperwork at the start of each financial year.

The Council's CGF (CEET) team are responsible for:

- Checking that each application meets the CGF criteria.
- Carrying out due diligence on all applicants and ensuring that conflicts of interest on the panel are managed properly.
- Providing panel members with the redacted applications and meeting papers no later than one week in advance of the scheduled panel meeting.
- Ensuring that the papers include:
 - An agenda
 - All redacted applications
 - Information about previous awards to applicants
 - Details of the total fund available, awards to date, and balance remaining
- Monitoring of all grants made from the CGF via end-of-year reporting.
- Promotion of the fund in local areas as well as city wide.
- Provision of training and capacity building activities for applicants and panel members.
- Other work related to the implementation and development of the CGF.

How are conflicts of interest managed?

A conflict of interest is a situation in which an individual has competing interests or loyalties that could influence their decision making. It is to be expected that conflicts of interest will arise from time to time when working on the CGF. This is because of the locally focused nature of the fund and the fact that panel members may already have connections to projects that are applying for money.

If a panel member has any private or personal interest in an application that is due to be discussed, they must declare it in writing prior to attending. This should be done using the form supplied by the CGF officer when the redacted applications are sent out.

The panel member will be expected to fully withdraw from discussions about the application in question. Depending on the nature of the conflict, they may be asked not to attend the panel meeting at all. Alternatively, if they wish to attend, they must leave the meeting for the full duration of the discussion related to that application. This also applies to any follow-up discussions that occur when agreeing on final recommendations. The Council officer will advise on how best to manage conflicts of interest that arise and will ensure that the guidance around this is followed.

Are there any other important points to note about being a CGF panel member?

Managing competing demands for limited amounts of public money at a local level can present panel members with some difficult dilemmas. Therefore, open mindedness and a willingness to consider different viewpoints are essential for this role.

The Council is grateful to the all the volunteers who give their time to be part of the CGF and who contribute towards its implementation across the city each year. The input of local people helps to ensure that the fund is more community-led and responsive to local needs and priorities, now and in future.

Paperwork checklist for panel members	
Start of financial year (April)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact details of panel member inc. name of organisation and mobile number • Equalities monitoring form (standard CEC) • CGF guidance document • Panel guidance document
One week before the panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda • Redacted applications and information about previous awards • Local fund balances • Declaration of Interest form • Comments in Absentia form - on request
After the total is allocated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of all projects funded, and amounts given that year

Appendix 6 – Community Grants Fund Evaluation Analysis

Introduction

Following the action agreed by Culture and Communities committee in December 2023, an evaluation was conducted on the current model of community grants. Following the development of evaluation criteria, feedback was sought from a range of respondents using different data gathering techniques. This report details the data collection that was conducted to evaluate community grants and provides a summary of the findings.

Methodology

A set of evaluation criteria was developed based on the fund criteria agreed by Culture and Communities Committee, the City of Edinburgh Council's Grant Standing Orders, and best practice in the Advancing Participation in Philanthropy Tool developed through the Human Rights Funders Network, and the National Standards for Community Engagement promoted by the Scottish Government. This resulted in the following criteria:

- Criteria 1 - the fund supports small scale activity that benefits local communities.
- Criteria 2 - the application and decision-making processes are equitable.
- Criteria 3 - we promote the fund and encourage applications from a wide range of groups and applicants.
- Criteria 4 - the end-to-end delivery of the fund is efficient and appropriately resourced.

From the criteria a set of questions were developed tailored to different respondent groups.

Those groups were divided into three categories:

- Applicants to the fund Both successful and unsuccessful
- Funding Panel Members Those who sat as a Panel member in 2023/24
- Officers Council officers who have experience administering or managing the fund and Funding Panels.

Two online questionnaires were developed, one for applicants and another for Funding Panel members. These asked respondents to consider whether they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements based on the evaluation criteria. There were some slight differences in the phrasing of similar statements between those questionnaires for applicants and Funding Panel members but overall, they were broadly comparable. Only Funding Panel members however were asked to comment on the administration of Funding Panel meetings.

The statements were followed by open comment boxes that asked the following questions:

- How useful do you think the Community Grants Fund is for supporting small scale activity that benefits local projects?
- How do you think the application and decision-making process could be improved?
- Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share on the Edinburgh Community Grants Fund?

Links to these questionnaires were circulated to recent applicants to the community grants fund, and to Funding Panel Members (involved in funding panels in 2023/24). Given the differing makeup of panels in different Neighbourhoods, respondents include local elected members, community councillors, representatives from community groups, and partner organisations.

An officer focus group was arranged, involving a selection of staff involved in administering the fund and managing Funding Panels, as well as managers who have been responsible for community grants. Three interviews were conducted with senior managers responsible for community grants in the past.

An analysis of applications funded in 2022/23 was also conducted that summarised the number of beneficiaries, and projects aimed at addressing the needs of equalities groups and those experiencing poverty.

Limitations to this approach included:

- Non-applicants, or those community groups to which the fund is targeted but have not applied, were not targeted as part of the data collection.
- While the response rate for those involved in Funding Panels was good, with 38 out of 157 contacted responding, the response rate amongst applicants was low.

Both limitations should be addressed as part of any further development.

Response Rates

Respondent	Number
Online applicant questionnaire	36
Online Funding Panel member questionnaire	38
Staff focus group	6
Staff interviews	4

Applicant and Funding Panel Member Feedback

When asked about the usefulness of the fund, applicants highlighted its suitability for start-up costs, both for an organisation or for an individual project. Applicants said they often had a high return for the relatively small amount of investment, with a direct benefit to the community. Applicants however mentioned frustration with certain core costs not being eligible, and this was limiting to start-up support.

Panel members agreed it was a useful fund for small local projects and, similar to applicants, commented on its suitability for start-up costs and as a way for organisations to build experience applying for funding. However, it was also commented that the time taken to award funds often limited their usefulness.

Overall, there was positive support for the fund from those who responded, although a range of potential improvements were identified. Those applicants who indicated they didn't understand how decisions are made or did not think the decision-making process felt fair, made the following suggestions to improve the application and decision-making process (categorised):

- Clear dates and timeline
- More clarity on how the decisions are made
- Improved communication
- Improve the application form
- Reduce requirement for detailed costs
- Professionals should make the decisions

Funding Panel members likewise highlighted a clear timeline being necessary, needing more diversity on the Panels, and that more feedback should be given to the Panels on how funds are spent.

A clear majority of the Funding Panel members and applicants that responded felt the Fund has a clear purpose and is easy to understand and is a good place to start for new projects. Applicants however were less willing to agree that their experience with the fund increased their confidence applying for funding from other sources. Applicants were also less likely to agree they understood how decisions were made compared to other statements they considered. A minority of Funding Panel members agreed that the Council staff and Funding Panel members themselves adequately promote the Funds in the community.

Over three quarters of panel members agreed or strongly agreed that the Council provides appropriate support to panel members in making a recommendation, with 2 from 38 respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Officer Interviews

Overall, the officers interviewed agreed the Fund allows organisations the opportunity to innovate and try new things to see what works. The efforts made by officers to ensure fair decisions are reached was highlighted, but it was also acknowledged that decision-making processes can vary. One respondent commented that participatory budgeting provided the most equitable process, however they recognised this opinion was not universally shared. Likewise, with a wide range of projects considered it was often difficult to meaningfully compare like with like.

It was noted that in some areas the same organisations apply repeatedly, with some Neighbourhoods trying harder than others to attract new applicants. This has proven difficult with the reduction in officer capacity over time.

Overall, the areas for development included: ensuring that more people are involved in the decision-making process; developing the fund criteria – keeping it broad but making it clearer; simplifying the application process as much as possible; and increasing promotion.

2022/23 Application analysis

In 2022/23, 152 awards were made across the city. Given the wide scope of the funds, projects may range from very focused projects with a limited number of beneficiaries, to public noticeboards and minor environmental or community growing projects that benefit many thousands. As such, the table below categorises projects to better illustrate the number of beneficiaries from 2022/23.

Stated number of Beneficiaries in application	Number of Projects	Approx. total Estimated Beneficiaries	Description
1-29	11	186	Focused project with a small target group, e.g. capacity building with young people at risk of exclusion
30-99	57	3,050	Small projects, clubs, or startup costs for groups expecting to grow over time

100-499	37	7,660	Medium sized projects, such as providing additional materials for established youth clubs
500-4,999	16	28,500	Large projects, often focused on added value such as equipment for community sports clubs.
5,000+	7	321,900	Projects with a neighbourhood-wide benefit, this may include noticeboards, benches, community gardens.

NB. There were 24 successful applications where the number of beneficiaries was not stated or a comparable figure could not be determined.

The table below sets out the number of projects in 2022/23 that aimed to work with populations related to protected characteristics in the 2010 Equalities Act.

		Number of Projects	Examples
Age	Young People	62	Additional support to youth clubs, e.g. through equipment, travel, or sessional staff costs.
	Older People	24	Funding for projects that address social isolation, e.g. community cafes
Disability		22	Supporting groups with a focus on working with people living with disabilities, or adaptations to allow those with disabilities to take part.
Gender reassignment		N/A	N/A
Marriage and civil partnership		N/A	N/A
Pregnancy and maternity (inclusive of early years support)		16	Support for startup and equipment costs for groups supporting young mothers.
Race		18	Projects that aim to engage or celebrate different communities often marginalised. Also includes Ukrainian refugee projects.
Religion or belief		N/A	N/A
Sex		8	Often projects aimed at women and girls who do not engage with mainstream provision.
Sexual orientation		N/A	N/A

NB. Projects are counted if they mention working with a population listed above, some projects are therefore counted more than once.

As indicated above, many of the projects funded support youth activities and may provide support alongside other initiatives such as the Edinburgh Guarantee. In addition, one project stated an aim to support care experienced young people.

Often projects focus on reducing poverty or supporting people from deprived backgrounds. In 2022/23, 46 successful applications specified one of their aims was to reduce poverty or to support people experiencing poverty. It should be stressed however that applicants are under no obligation to address poverty and inequalities in their application, and a range of projects were delivered in areas recognised through measures such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), but that did not state poverty evaluation as an objective.

Questionnaire Response Data

Please Note:

- The tables give the number of responses in each case, **not percentages**, this is to avoid implying a higher response rate.
- The highest two values (or more when equal) are highlighted for each statement – deeper colours indicate the most common value.

Criteria 1 - the fund supports small scale activity that benefits local communities

Applicants

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The purpose of the fund is clear and easy to understand	17	18	1	0	0	0
It is clear the fund is aimed at supporting local projects	22	13	0	1	0	0
The fund is suitable for small scale local project	20	15	1	0	0	0
The fund is good place to start for new local projects	15	11	8	2	0	0
After applying for a community grant I felt more confident applying for funding from other sources	6	10	14	3	3	0

Funding Panel Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The purpose of the fund is clear and easy to understand	10	25	1	2	0	0
It is clear the fund is aimed at supporting local projects	15	20	2	1	0	0
The fund is suitable for small scale local project	19	18	1	0	0	0
The fund is good place to start for new local projects	11	20	6	0	0	1
The community grant fund can help new organisations build confidence before applying for funding from other sources	5	26	3	2	1	1

Criteria 2 - the application and decision-making processes are equitable

Applicants

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The application process is easy to understand	13	17	3	2	1	
The application guidance is easy to understand	11	18	3	3		
The application form is easy to complete	13	18	3	1	1	
I understand how decisions are made	9	10	10	5	1	1
The decision-making process feels fair	11	11	10	1	1	2

Funding Panel Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I understand my role on the Funding Panel	19	18	1			
I understand the application process	18	17	2	1		
The application form asks the questions I need to make a recommendation	10	21	5	1	1	
The Funding Panel use appropriate local knowledge to help make a recommendation	14	14	6	3	1	
Recommendations from the Funding Panel reflect the needs of the local community	9	16	7	3	2	1
The Funding Panel considers each application in a consistent manner	10	14	7	2	3	2
Every member of the Panel has the opportunity to express their views	20	14	3	1	0	0
Where there is a potential conflict of interest, this is declared by the Panel member and they leave the discussion	20	7	4	2	1	4
The decision-making process feels fair	14	13	6	1	1	1

Criteria 3 - we promote the fund and encourage applications from a wide range of groups

Applicants

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I feel the community grants fund is adequately promoted	5	11	13	4	2	1
I was able to find all the information I needed online	9	21	3	3		
I was aware of the opportunity to speak to Council staff about my application	11	14	3	6	1	1
Council staff communicated with me clearly about the progress of my application	9	14	4	5	3	0

Funding Panel Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I feel the community grants fund is adequately promoted by Council staff	3	15	9	5	3	3
I feel the community grants fund is adequately promoted by panel members	5	9	13	6	1	3
The fund receives applications from a wide variety of organisations	6	17	7	5	2	1
There should be more applications from groups representing minority or disadvantaged communities	5	13	16	3	1	0

Criteria 4 - the end-to-end delivery of the fund is efficient and appropriately resourced

Funding Panel Members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Council staff provide appropriate information ahead of panel meetings	15	15	4	1	3	0
Council staff communicate clearly the funding panel role with funding panel members	16	13	4	1	3	0
Council staff provide appropriate support to panel members in making a recommendation	16	14	6	1	1	0

Officer Focus Group – 13 May 2024

The focus group was made up of council officers with current and previous working knowledge of the Community Grants Fund. Participants were asked 9 questions relating to the evaluation criteria and provided feedback in 3 ways:

- individual feedback on sticky notes without discussion (for questions 1 and 9).
- series of unfacilitated small group discussions with key thoughts summarised/captured on sticky notes (for questions 3-8).
- facilitated whole group discussions with notes taken by the facilitator (for questions 1-8).

Table 1. Feedback summarised according to evaluation criteria.

Evaluation criteria	Summary of feedback
<p>The extent to which...</p> <p>...the fund meets its aim of supporting small scale activity that benefits local communities.</p>	<p>Lack of good quality data to support impact evaluation makes it difficult to determine how well the fund meets this aim.</p> <p>The aim doesn't adequately describe the purposes of the fund which are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support geographically focussed community-led activity • involve communities in decision-making • support new projects that benefit communities by addressing evidence-based local priorities (i.e. Locality Improvement Plan priorities) • provide flexible seed funding for small community-led projects • offer capacity building support to empower and upskill community groups, increasing their confidence to apply for further funding and further develop their projects. <p>Activity isn't always community-led - the fund is often accessed by larger third-sector organisations rather than the smaller community groups. However, the maximum grant amount limits the scale of project that can be delivered.</p> <p>Clearly defined indicators of community benefit are needed to support panels to make better-informed decisions more consistently.</p> <p>Funding panels may not be the most effective vehicle for community involvement – alternative options should be explored.</p> <p>The fund isn't consistently used to support new projects and ideas - funding is often granted to repeat applicants for the same projects each year.</p> <p>We should consider moving from a geographical distribution to distributing the fund by communities of interest or by areas of greatest need to better address identified needs/priorities.</p> <p>Admin required to manage the fund prevents officers from providing adequate capacity-building support.</p>

<p>...the application and decision-making processes are equitable.</p>	<p>Both processes need to be more inclusive and equitable. Panels are not representative of their wider communities. We should consider unconscious bias training for panel members and involve individuals with lived experience and should explore creative participatory budgeting approaches to improve equity, diversity and inclusion in the decision-making process and balancing this approach with the resource available. Alternative models should consider resource available and potential links with other council services if appropriate.</p> <p>The application form and guidance could be more accessible and available in different formats/languages. Promotion should be targeted, expanded and more accessible to reach potential/'missing' applicants. There is no process or structure for ensuring equitable access to support from officers and the support that is available is severely constrained by resourcing.</p>
<p>...we promote the fund and encourage applications from a wide range of groups.</p>	<p>Promotion has improved but still relies heavily on word of mouth which is inconsistent and unreliable.</p> <p>The fund supports a wide range of projects from different types of community groups and third sector organisations – variety of groups could be expanded through targeted outreach.</p> <p>Some fund areas attract new applicants each year but there are several applicants that have come to expect a grant every year for the same project – this should be discouraged. In some areas funds are quickly used up by repeat applicants before potential new applicants have a chance to apply – having a set application deadline for all funds that could be promoted city-wide could increase the range and number of applications.</p>
<p>...the end-to-end delivery of the fund is efficient and appropriately resourced.</p>	<p>Staff resource has reduced significantly since the fund was first devolved. Management of the fund is admin heavy, leaving little time for officers to provide capacity-building support to community groups. Additional support with admin tasks would enable staff to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting community groups to develop project ideas and produce higher quality applications and impact reports. • improving impact monitoring • increasing reach and doing targeted outreach • supporting community involvement