

From: Roger Gough, Leader
Zena Cooke, Corporate Director for Finance

To: Cabinet

Date: 28 October 2021

Subject: Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) support to residents and businesses

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway: N/A

Future Pathway: N/A

Summary

This report provides an overview of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) which is emergency funding provided to KCC to fund activities that contribute towards the prevention or containment of COVID-19 outbreaks. Some of the funding has been used to support residents and businesses that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The report details how a proportion of the COMF has been utilised to provide support to residents and businesses in Kent. This has been achieved through digital support to help individuals remain connected, additional support for carers, additional support for private rented tenants at risk of eviction, additional community wardens, free COVID-19 safe training and funding schemes focused on catch up initiatives that will impact individuals and families. Funding has also been allocated to districts where districts have utilised the grant to support, amongst other things, foodbanks, homeless individuals and families.

Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to **NOTE** the information contained within this report and to **ENDORSE** the proposed future use of the remaining grant.

1. Context & Overview

- 1.1. In November 2020 Kent County Council (KCC) took the decision to agree to accept the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) grant provided by government as part of a national funding package aimed at preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19 as well as to support vulnerable groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- 1.2. Funding levels were assigned to the tiering system in place at the time, in which local authorities would receive a payment of up to £1 to £8 per head of the population, dependent on the Local COVID-19 Alert Level in place. In line

with the national lock down announced on 31st October 2020, KCC were allocated funding of £12,652,440, equalling the maximum allowance (i.e. £8 per head).

- 1.3. Further monthly payments of £6,326,222 were received each month up until March 2021 together with a single payment of £8,350,186 for the 2021/22 year to continue efforts to prevent outbreaks and help those affected by COVID-19. This took the total funding received under COMF to £48,114,998.
- 1.4. As part of the key decision to accept the COMF grant, KCC established a robust funding framework, a director level group (named the COVID-19 Finance Monitoring Group (CFMG)) to oversee and approve the allocations, and allocated staff from Public Health Commissioning and Finance to administer, monitor and report on the fund (COMF Team).
- 1.5. The COMF team has received 667 requests for funding from KCC directorates, Kent districts and external organisations for initiatives that will help to prevent or contain outbreaks of COVID-19 and/or help those that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- 1.6. £40m of funding from COMF has been approved covering 306 separate funding requests. Of this total, approximately £28.3m is providing support to vulnerable groups and targeted community interventions as well as support to those self-isolating. The balance of the funding is supporting prevention and management activity (£4.3m), compliance and enforcement (£3m) as well as other areas such as support to Parish and Town councils (£0.8m). Requests for funding are still being received, assessed and reviewed by the COMF team to ensure there is continued support and that funding reacts to where the need is greatest.
- 1.7. This paper outlines the activity supported to date under the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to provide additional support to the residents and businesses of Kent that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

2. Providing Support to Households

- 2.1. At the onset of the pandemic, a primary focus of utilising the COMF money was to help support individuals to isolate safely, and to feel supported to do so. As it quickly became evident the pandemic would last many months, COMF money was also utilised to help vulnerable individuals disproportionately affected by the pandemic to adapt, adjust, and recover.
- 2.2. Funding to support individuals to isolate has been wide ranging. £2.5m has been allocated to the Helping Hands project to help support individuals to become web-enabled to ensure they remain connected at times when they may have needed to isolate. Further funding was provided to deliver assistive technology to vulnerable individuals living in their own homes. The assistive technology helped them to continue to connect with the world enabling them to interact with medical services and friends and family, therefore enabling them to feel connected while self-isolating.

- 2.3. Additional digital bundles were also provided to remote learners to help minimise the impact missing school had on their education. Additional direct payment funding was also provided to eligible Kent families to address the support that would have usually been provided by schools and day centres but could not be due to their closures.
- 2.4. Carers that were isolated at home with the person they care for will have found the absence of their usual support networks difficult. Additional funding has been awarded to organisations, such as those that provide care and support for those living with dementia, to rebuild those support networks and ensure carers are given, and feel safe to take, a break from caring. Furthermore, additional funding was provided to foster carers during the February half term to support the purchase of additional activities for the children they care for.
- 2.5. Many individuals have found themselves under increasing financial pressure as a result of the pandemic and may even be at risk of eviction due to rent arrears. KCC is working with the Kent Housing Group to distribute £2.5m of funding across all 12 districts to support private rented tenants that are at risk of becoming homeless. In addition to directly supporting the tenants, the funding will also cover an educational package for private landlords to educate them on the range of options available to support tenants that may have fallen into rent arrears.
- 2.6. The pandemic has left a considerable legacy where additional catch-up support will be required. COMF money is being utilised to provide support to households to address this. £2.5m has been allocated to KCC's Reconnect Programme, helping to provide additional opportunities for children and young adults and their families. One example of activity delivered under Reconnect delivered over 82,000 online learning opportunities. Furthermore, £2.65m has been awarded to over 900 early years settings in Kent to fund additional catch-up support for children and additional opportunities for families to come together. Additionally, the COMF team established a COVID-19 grant scheme which provided funding to voluntary and community sector organisations. The grants were awarded through a number of rounds with values ranging between £5k-£10k and to date over 100 grants have been awarded. Two grant rounds that will benefit households in Kent are 'Reintegration activities for families with young children and expectant parents' and 'Supporting individuals and communities to self-isolate'

3. Providing Support to Businesses

- 3.1. In addition to providing support to residents, the COMF has been utilised to provide additional support to Kent businesses outside of the support packages provided by central government. In addition to direct support, the COMF has been utilised by KCC Communications to promote awareness of central government support packages for businesses to increase uptake.
- 3.2. To help support businesses to protect their organisation, staff and customers, KCC launched a COVID-19 safe training scheme which was free to access

for small and micro businesses in Kent. The training provided an overview of good infection control and updates on the latest government guidance. The training will build the skills of businesses in being able to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and any future pandemics.

3.3. KCC Arts and Culture have also launched a grant scheme, providing funding of up to £5k to support the cultural, creative and voluntary sector to adapt their delivery models in a way that promotes the safe engagement of communities while reducing the barriers to the organisation to invest in these changes.

3.4. VisitEngland created the 'We're Good to Go' COVID-19 industry standard and consumer mark as a way for businesses to reassure customers that the business adheres to Government and Public Health guidance. Funding was provided from the COMF to VisitKent to promote uptake of this mark to encourage customers back into businesses in Kent.

4. Working in Partnership with Districts

4.1. KCC has worked in partnership with all twelve districts throughout the pandemic and these partnership arrangements have been really valuable and effective. To date, £6m has been distributed across districts from the COMF grant. Allocations to districts were calculated based on population data, levels of deprivation and the COVID-19 rates at the time of allocation.

4.2. Funding to the districts has enabled each district to respond to local needs and provide support to their households in need. The district allocations enabled funding to be directed to local foodbanks to ensure they had the supplies to support their local communities. The district COMF allocations were also utilised by districts to house their homeless communities to not only ensure they were safe, warm and dry, but also had access to up-to-date COVID-19 information and guidance and Personal Protective Equipment.

5. Future Support

5.1. The initiatives directly supported by KCC and through the districts will fund activity until the 31st March 2022 which is in line with the COMF grant criteria. KCC will continue to monitor and respond to the changing needs over winter, implementing additional interventions and packages of funding where necessary. This will ensure there is continued funding over the winter period to support individuals most impacted by the pandemic.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to **NOTE** the information contained within this report and to **ENDORSE** the proposed future use of the remaining grant.

7. Background Documents

None

8. Contact details

Report Authors

- Matthew Wellard – COVID-19 Grants Project Manager (Public Health)
- 03000 413221
- Matthew.Wellard@kent.gov.uk