

**Kent County Council
Equality Analysis/ Impact Assessment (EqIA)**

Directorate/ Service:

Name of decision, policy, procedure, project or service: COVID Emergency Grant Funding the Helping Hand Support scheme for Residents and Businesses

Responsible Owner/ Senior Officer: Zena Cooke, Corporate Director Finance

Version: V1.0

Author: Lucy Alesbrook, Senior Project Officer

Pathway of Equality Analysis:

Summary and recommendations of equality analysis/impact assessment.

Context

The Government has provided significant grant funding to Kent County Council to support the local response to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The Council has worked with a range of partners to allocate funding to respond to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's services, to meet its public health obligations and to support those residents, families and businesses most in need of support since the start of the pandemic. In addition to a number of specific grants, a total of £95m Covid-19 Emergency Grant Funding has been received since March 2020.

As a result of the latest national lockdown and the new variant of the virus, additional and on-going needs have been identified that the Council, working with partners is keen to respond to, ensuring the continued support for residents and businesses in Kent. It is proposed that these areas of support utilise an initial £10m of the currently unallocated Covid-19 Emergency Grant Funding.

Aims and Objectives

Building on the support provided to date, the main aims of the funding are as follows:

- To ensure those who most need help receive it, with a focus on equality of access, and consistency of approach to assessing eligibility across the county;
- To provide guidance and advice that supports those seeking help to improve their situation and avoid future dependency;
- To use this opportunity to improve the system for addressing financial hardship across the county, and preparing for what lies ahead
- To support local businesses and the self-employed that have been significantly impacted by the pandemic.
- To ensure that the funding is used for time limited activity with a clear exit strategy in recognition that it is one-off funding

In order to be able to respond to the changing environment, it is proposed to have a flexible approach to the deployment of the grant funding, to allow for it to be used dynamically where it will be most effective. In order to ensure appropriate use of the grant funding, the support provided will take an evidence-based approach.

As there is already strong partnership working in place across the county and a wide range of effective support measures that have already been implemented, it is proposed to build on those arrangements and utilise the grant to respond to the latest national lockdown and the impact of the new variant. The four categories of spend and the proposed allocations are as follows:

- a) £4m to support low income households and households in financial distress, including through council services such as the Kent Support and Assistance Service, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, such as Kent Community Foundation and utility companies such as South East Water.
- b) £3m to provide a range of support for businesses and the self-employed not in receipt of government funding, including through council services, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, and business support organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce.
- c) £2.5m to tackle digital poverty, working with schools and colleges, district and borough councils and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- d) £500k to match-fund crowdfunded community projects and initiatives that support local communities in responding to and recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

Support for low income households and those in financial distress– £4 million

It is proposed to allocate £4m to support low income households and those in financial distress. This will include providing support to families and individuals in food and fuel poverty and with other essentials through the Council's Kent Support and Assistance Service, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, such as Kent Community Foundation and utility companies such as South East Water. The funding will also be used to provide financial advice and support to address debt and financial hardship and capability issues. Funding will also be made available to voluntary and community sector organisations to support them to be more sustainable. Part of the funding will be allocated to enhance existing services, including mental health, suicide prevention, domestic abuse drug and alcohol misuse services and support for both young and old experiencing social isolation, all of which have seen significant increases in need due to the impact of the pandemic.

Support for micro businesses and the self employed – £3 million

Evidence from the Business Help-Line that has been providing advice and guidance to businesses since the start of the pandemic highlights the significant impact on businesses and personal liquidity.

The Council has already provided loans totalling £4.3m to help businesses in the county. In response to Covid-19, the Kent and Medway Growth Hub, which is supported by the Council has set up a helpline that has received over 14,000 calls since March 2020, of which 49% were regarding the Business Rates Relief Grant.

It is proposed to use part of the allocation to support micro businesses (i.e. with nine or fewer employees) and the self-employed to establish a small capital grants scheme. This will include contributing to the costs of making business premises 'Covid secure', purchasing hardware and software to enable online trading, and funding capital improvements that will enable businesses to respond to changing demand.

Businesses accessing the small capital grants scheme will be offered business advice alongside their grant support. This will be procured from a third party provider by the Council. It will enable businesses to access up to 6 hours' business advice (depending on need) in business planning, development, diversification, digital adoption, and so on, and signposting to other services as appropriate. This responds to evidence that business advice increases firm resilience and can enable businesses to access further specialist support in the future.

To deliver the small capital grants scheme, the Council will work closely with district and borough councils and the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, building on the excellent joint working that has taken place throughout the pandemic.

Evidence from a major study by NESTA and SAGE in 2018, highlighted that business productivity depended on access to digital infrastructure but more importantly on digital skills. 38% of small businesses still lack digital skills, so part of the funding will aim to address these issues.

Tackling digital poverty – £2.5 million

National research has shown that a significant proportion of the population is digitally excluded because they don't have the:

- Digital devices to use online services (e.g. no/limited access to computer or smartphone)
- Access to the internet to use online services (e.g. no broadband at home or limited data)
- Digital skills required to access online services (including language barriers)

Building on the significant activity already undertaken by the Council in this area, and working with partner organisations, including schools and colleges, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, it is proposed to allocate £2.5m to help tackle digital poverty. This will include a focus on digital connectivity and removing the barriers to accessing digital services and will also enable expansion of a Kent and Medway pilot scheme which includes short term loans and a digital skills champion programme.

Match fund crowdfunded community projects and initiatives – £500k

Updated 08/02/2021

3

The council's draft Civil Society strategy committed £100k to developing crowdfunding as one of a range of ways to support local grass roots voluntary and community sector organisations. As part of the response to the impact of covid it is proposed that £500k be allocated to enable local groups to come forward with crowdfunding projects and initiatives that will support local communities impacted by Covid-19 and build towards the recovery from the pandemic.

This EQIA Screening has been completed and found that there is a limited negative impact on protected characteristics. To ensure that any potential adverse equality impacts are limited, the following will apply across projects funded by the grant:

- 1) A good proportion of the fund will be allocated according to clear eligibility criteria related to income, such as entitlement to specific benefits or benefits-related entitlements such as Free School Meals and Free Prescriptions, as whilst these in themselves are not a perfect proxy for poverty, they are the best available, and reduce the risk of arbitrary decisions and subjectivity.
- 2) Efforts will be made to target specific groups who are vulnerable, either by raising their awareness of the opportunities provided by the funding to ensure they do not miss out, or by direct provision of support.
- 3) Evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on protected characteristics will be sought and used to influence decision making.
- 4) Any document made available to the public to support accessing funds will also be made available in accessible formats as appropriate.
- 5) An EQIA screening will be completed by the appropriate organisation for all initiatives using this funding.

Summary of equality impact

This EQIA Screening has been completed and found that there is a limited negative impact on protected characteristics.

Adverse Equality Impact Rating **Low**

Attestation

I have read and paid due regard to the Equality Analysis/Impact Assessment concerning **the Helping Hand Support scheme for Residents and Businesses**. I agree with risk rating and the actions to mitigate any adverse impact(s) that has /have been identified.

Head of Service

Signed:

Name: Zena Cooke

Job Title: Corporate Director of Finance

Date: 08/02/2021

DMT Member

Signed:

Name:

Updated 08/02/2021

4

Job Title: _____ Date: _____

Part 1 Screening

Could this policy, procedure, project or service, or any proposed changes to it, affect any Protected Group (listed below) less favourably (negatively) than others in Kent?

Could this policy, procedure, project or service promote equal opportunities for this group?

Protected Group	Please provide a <u>brief</u> commentary on your findings. Fuller analysis should be undertaken in Part 2.			
	High negative impact EqIA	Medium negative impact Screen	Low negative impact Evidence	High/Medium/Low Positive Impact Evidence
Age				<p>Part of the funding will be allocated to enhance existing services, including mental health, suicide prevention, domestic abuse drug and alcohol misuse services and support for both young and old experiencing social isolation, all of which have seen significant increases in need due to the impact of the pandemic.</p> <p>A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted in detail when these initiatives are scoped to ensure that the young and old are benefiting from this initiative, as they have been significantly affected</p>

				<p>by social isolation as a result of Covid.</p> <p>In addition, a dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.</p>
Disability				<p>A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.</p>
Sex				<p>A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.</p>
Gender identity/ Transgender				<p>A dedicated EQIA screening will be</p>

				conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.
Race				A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.
Religion and Belief				A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.
Sexual Orientation				A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision

				making.
Pregnancy and Maternity				A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.
Marriage and Civil Partnerships			Not applicable	
Carer's Responsibilities				A dedicated EQIA screening will be conducted for each initiative to ensure that this protected characteristic is considered for decision making.

Equality Impact Analysis/Assessment Action Plan

Protected Characteristic	Issues identified	Action to be taken	Expected outcomes	Owner	Timescale	Cost implications
All	Groups may not be aware of support being offered through this funding.	Efforts will be made to target specific groups who are vulnerable, either by raising their awareness of the opportunities provided by the funding to ensure they do not miss out, or by direct provision of support.				
Disability	People with disabilities may not be able to access or understand the documents made publicly available on the different initiatives.	Any document made available to the public to support accessing funds will also be made available in accessible formats as appropriate.				
	Understanding	An EQIA				

Updated 08/02/2021

<p>All</p>	<p>fully the equalities impact of each initiative as it is developed.</p>	<p>screening will be completed by the appropriate organisation for all initiatives using this funding.</p>				
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Have the actions been included in your business/service plan?

Yes

Appendix

Please include relevant data sets

Please forward a final signed electronic copy and Word version to the Equality Team by emailing diversityinfo@kent.gov.uk

If the activity will be subject to a Cabinet decision, the EqIA must be submitted to committee services along with the relevant Cabinet report. Your EqIA should also be published .

The original signed hard copy and electronic copy should be kept with your team for audit purposes.

