

**From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services**

**Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate**

**To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee - 16 May 2023**

**Subject: Kent County Council Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme Report**

**Classification: Unrestricted**

**Past Pathway of report: N/A**

**Future Pathway of report: N/A**

**Electoral Division: All**

**Summary:** This report provides an update on grants made by Kent County Council's Village Halls and Community Centres grant scheme since April 2021. A similar report reflecting on the previous two years' performance was last made to this committee in July 2021.

18 new projects have been supported by the scheme. KCC has approved grants to the total value of £243,193 against a total project value of £4,618,559. Match funding is secured from a range of sources, for example the National Lottery, central government, other local authorities including parish councils, and from private and/or voluntary sector organisations. As of 2021 KCC's contribution amounts to approximately 5.3% of the total project value which equates to a leverage rate of £18 for every £1 KCC gives to village halls. The total project value over a 10-year period is 9.77% which equates to a leverage rate of £9 for every £1 of grant.

**Recommendation:** The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report and make any recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 In the 25 years since Kent County Council's Village Halls and Community Centres grant scheme was established, over 190 community halls throughout Kent have received £4.25 million of capital funding from Kent County Council. The scheme continues to provide grants of up to £30k for improvements to community facilities throughout Kent.

## **2. Background**

2.1 Village halls and community buildings are important components in sustaining inclusive and active communities, particularly in rural areas where there are fewer venues and services. They offer communities a hub for social interaction

and increasingly have adopted a multi-purpose role, often serving as a social centre, arts centre, sports centre and, in some cases, providing a physical space for education, health and retail services.

- 2.2 Village and community halls are also important contributors to Kent's economy, supporting jobs, both directly (e.g., cleaners, caretakers, grounds maintenance) and indirectly (pre-school staff, shop and post-office staff, fitness instructors, caterers). Local building firms, electricians and other local services are always involved.
- 2.3 There are over 300 village and community halls in Kent and many more community sports and recreation centres, social clubs, and church halls. Most community buildings are small charities run by local volunteer trustees and are heavily reliant on fundraising.
- 2.4 Many Community Hall management committees look to Kent County Council's Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme. The Scheme offers capital grants of up to £30,000 from an annual allocation of £75,000, to support a wide range of projects including, internal reconfigurations and extension works, re-roofing, installation of new heating systems, toilets and kitchens, replacement windows, insulation, new flooring, improved access for people with disabilities, and energy efficiency works. The Scheme will not fund fees, general repairs or maintenance, projects which have already started or improvements to car parks.

### **3. Process**

- 3.1 To ensure eligibility the following are requested from applicants:
  - Governing documents setting out the village hall trusts and the constitutional structure, i.e., the basis on which the land and property is to be held and managed.
  - Specification / schedule of works
  - Three like-for-like quotations, based upon the design details and specification.
  - Evidence of the partnership funding
  - Business plan (for new halls or halls building large extensions)
  - Planning approval (if applicable)
  - Evidence of need support (surveys, letters, feasibility studies)
- 3.2 The scheme operates on an annual basis. Applications are reviewed by KCC officers and (until recently) with advisory support from the Village Halls Advisor for Action for Rural Communities in Kent (ARCK).
- 3.3 A recommendation is then made to Mr Mike Hill (Cabinet Member Community and Regulatory Services) to decide whether a project should be Approved or Rejected and what conditions should be set if funding is approved.
- 3.4 Grants are available on a match funding basis. KCC can fund up to 50% of project costs (to a maximum of £30,000). Match funding can come from a wide variety of sources, for example government funds, local authorities, parish councils, private or voluntary sector contributions.

- 3.5 To minimise risk to KCC, approved funds are paid in arrears by the Council, subject to the submission of appropriate invoices and progress reports. A proportion of the grant is paid against a supplied invoice. For example, if the Council grant represents 50% of the total project cost, and an invoice of £10,000 is submitted, the Council will pay 50% (£5,000). To receive the full grant the grantee must submit all project invoices.
- 3.6 Recipients of grants are required to complete and submit an evaluation form as part of their grant agreement with the County Council. The purpose of this is to evaluate the outcome of the grants against short-term and long-term benefits to the community it serves, and whether the outcomes were achieved in line with the grant conditions. Evaluations are usually expected within 12 months after the project completion date.
- 3.7 Applications that are rejected by the scheme are usually offered alternative support from KCC in the form of funding and project development advice if required.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The current annual capital allocation is £75,000. Administration of the scheme is covered from the annual revenue base budget (estimated at £16,377 in 2022/23 excluding overheads). The capital allocation has gradually been reduced over the last 10 years due to financial pressures within the organisation. In 2013/14 the annual allocation £200,000, reduced to £150,000 in 2016/17, £100,000 in 2018/19 and then to £75,000 in 2019/20. The current budget is under annual review.
- 4.2 Since April 2021, 18 new projects have been supported by the scheme of which seven are new projects, ten have completed and one withdrawn. KCC has approved grants to a total value of £243,193 against a total project value of £4,618,559.
- 4.3 In terms of financial leverage, KCC's contribution to community halls is viewed very positively by other funders, particularly by National Lottery, and KCC's support is often a significant factor in helping to secure additional funding. Since 2001 KCC's contribution amounts to approximately 5.3% of the total project value, and this equates to a leverage rate of £18 for every £1 KCC gives to village halls. Over a ten-year period KCC approved grants to a total value of £1,323,300 against a total project value of £13,543,954. The total project value over a 10-year period is 9.77% which equates to a leverage rate of £9 for every £1 of KCC grant awarded.
- 4.4 There continues to be a strong demand for grant funding for improvements to community centres. ACRE's survey of halls nationwide in 2020 confirmed the need for funding support. Of the 52 Kent halls that responded to the survey, 31 identified buildings that need improving (an estimated total cost of £1.35 million). Scaled-up to the whole county the funding need is estimated to be over £15 million.
- 4.5 The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis (rising energy and building costs) has had a negative impact on the voluntary sector over the last two years,

reducing sector confidence in taking on costly large-scale projects. As a result, we have seen a slight falloff in applications for larger schemes over the last few two years. It is also in part due to the comparatively low-key level promotion of the scheme than in previous years. This is driven by the smaller overall available budget and the increased risk of the scheme being heavily over-subscribed.

4.6 The table below shows schemes allocated grant funding since 2021/22.

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>Grant Offered</b>
Burham Village Hall (Tonbridge and Malling)	Refurbishment of the roof	£90,000	10,000
Knockholt Village Centre (Sevenoaks)	Hall Refurbishment	£400,000	15,000
Matfield Village Hall (Tunbridge Wells)	New ceiling with insulation	£21,197	10,000
Platt Memorial Hall (Tonbridge and Malling)	Extension	£54,779	10,000
St Faith's Centre (Maidstone)	New community centre	£1,605,000	20,000
Frittenden Memorial Hall (Tunbridge Wells)	Remodelling of hall	£240,000	25,000
Biddenden Village Hall (Maidstone)	Replacement of windows	£32,000	£16,000
Rolvenden Village Hall (Ashford)	Replacement of boilers	£18,267	£6,000
East Peckham Village Hall (Tonbridge and Malling))	Replacement of external doors/windows	£32,436	£16,218
Burham Village Hall (Tonbridge and Malling)	Replacement of emergency doors	£7,800	£3,900
Boughton Village Hall (Swale)	Installation of solar panels	£30,954	£15,479
Whitfield Village Hall (Dover)	Replacement of toilets	£17,096.00	£17,096.00
Otham Village Hall (Maidstone)	Replacement of toilets	£18,000.00	£9,000.00
Dymchurch Village Hall (Folkestone & Hythe)	Toilet Refurbishment	£34,950	£5,000
West Faversham Community Centre (Swale)	Toilet Refurbishment	£19,000	£9,500
Cliffsend Village Hall Foundation (Thanet)	New Roof	£30,080	£15,000
Eynsford Village Hall (Sevenoaks)	New build (replacement hall)	£1,947,000	£30,000
Hunton Parish Hall (Maidstone)	Replacement windows	£20,000	£10,000

	<b>Total</b>	<b>£4,618,559</b>	<b>£243,193</b>
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## 5. Legal implications

5.1 KCC acts as the managing authority for the scheme. KCC undertakes eligibility and due diligence checks on all applications before being examined by the Cabinet Member. KCC Approve or Reject the applications and decide on what conditions should be set if funding is approved and monitor all projects in receipt of funding support. KCC Internal Audit will oversee the procedures and processes and advice on other matters related to the use of the funds.

## 6. Equalities implications

6.1 Equalities implications: an EqIA was published in 2023, with low/no negative impact on Protected Groups, and no potential for negative discrimination. The assessment also identifies positive impacts for Protected Groups.

## 7. Other corporate implications

7.1. None

## 8. Governance

8.1 The Director of Growth and Communities will inherit the main delegations via the Officer Scheme of Delegation

## 9. Conclusions

There continues to be a strong demand for grant funding towards improvements to community centres and Kent County Council's Village Halls and Community Centres grant scheme gives much needed financial support to community facilities throughout Kent, helping to ensure that these important buildings are future proof, flexible, safe, accessible, energy efficient, warm and welcoming.

## 10. Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report and make any recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

## 11. Background Documents

11.1 Photograph Gallery

## 12. Contact details

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