

From: **Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Community and Regulatory Services**
Simon Jones, Interim Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 1 July 2021**

Subject: **Kent County Council Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme Performance Report – 2020/21**

Relevant Districts: **All**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: This report provides an update on grants made by the Kent County Council's Village Halls and Community Centres grant scheme since April 2020.

11 new projects have been supported by the scheme, of which five are completed and three have submitted evaluations. KCC has approved grants to the total value of £177,657 against a total project value of £3,225,270. 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. KCC's contribution amounts to approximately 5.5% of the total project value.

Recommendation: The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

1 Background

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 There are over 300 village and community halls in 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.
- 1.4 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 (recently reduced from £50,000) 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 carparks.

1.5 In the 22 years since the scheme was established, over 170 community halls throughout Kent have received £4 million of capital funding from Kent County Council.

2 Process

2.1 To ensure eligibility the following documents 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)

2.2 The scheme operates on an annual basis. Applications are reviewed by KCC officers and by the Village Halls Advisor for Action for Rural Communities in Kent (ARCK). 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.

2.3 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.

2.4 The scheme has in the past has been able to secure small amounts of developer contributions (via Building Community Capacity contributions administered by KCC) to supplement the budget.

2.5 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.

2.6 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 three months after the project completion date. To date three evaluations have been received for projects funded in 2020/21; two further evaluations are expected in June/July.

- 2.7 The Scheme was reviewed by Internal Audit in February/March 2020. The review assessed the effectiveness of controls for identifying and tracking the fulfilment of grant conditions, reporting outcomes and oversight of the village hall and community centre grant scheme. Internal control, Governance and management of risk was considered adequate overall.

3 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Village and Community Halls

- 3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on local community infrastructure, which is reliant on income from activities which have not been possible during lockdown. With all village halls and community centres across the country (over 300 in Kent) having to close in March 2020, the loss of income for many community buildings across the country has placed pressure on management committees to ensure that their buildings can survive. As lockdown restrictions eased, halls prepared to reopen. Since April 2021, a limited number of activities are now allowed, including supervised activities for children, weddings, and wakes for up to 15 people and indoor markets and from 17th May a greater range of activities have been permitted subject to the 'rule of 6'. The Government's Road Map indicates that it will not be until 21st June at the earliest that all activities will be permitted.
- 3.2 Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) – a charitable organisation and VCS infrastructure body - is currently surveying all halls in the county to identify the impacts from the pandemic – the results of which should be available in June 2021
- 3.3 ACRK's national umbrella organisation Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) is conducting a nationwide survey of the impacts from the pandemic on community halls and will be a follow up to their survey report published in 2020 which provides a baseline for the follow up Covid impact survey.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The current annual capital allocation is £75,000. The capital entry for the scheme in the KCC Budget Book (2021-22) Section 5 - Capital Investment Plans By Directorate 2021-22 To 2023-24 Growth, Environment & Transport (GET) page 54, Row Ref 4. Administration of the scheme is covered from the annual base budget.
- 4.2 The budget has gradually been reduced over the last 5-6 years. 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.
- 4.3 The reduction in the grant limit from £50,000 to £30,000 in 2020/21 was in response to pressures from the reduced capital allocation. The lower grant limit enables KCC to allocate funding to more projects. The scheme continues to be oversubscribed

and eligible projects are usually offered a smaller grant or may be rejected on the basis that there is not enough grant to go around. In 2020/21 all but one of the applications submitted (a total grant value of £223k) were eligible in terms of the project purpose/proposed outcome.

- 4.4 Since April 2020, 11 new projects have been supported by the scheme of which 5 have completed. Schemes can take up to 2 years to complete and hence the other 6 projects are ongoing at the time of writing the report. KCC has approved grants to a total value of £177,657 against a total project value of £3,225,270. KCC's contribution between 2020/21 and 2021/22 amounts to approximately 5.5% of the total project value. KCC's contribution since 2013/14 amounts to an estimated 9.25%.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 There continues to be a strong demand for grant funding for improvements to community centres. ACRK'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.
- 4.7 We have seen a fall-off in applications in the last two years, but this is 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 being heavily over-subscribed.
- 4.8 The table below shows schemes allocated grant funding in 2020/21. Nine bids were received (a total of £278,399 in grant requested) of which six were approved for funding.

	Total Project Cost	KCC Grant
VH109 Hougham Village Hall	£41,211.00	£14,000.00
VH111 Great Mongeham Parish Hall	£24,426.00	£10,000.00
VH113 Chichester Memorial Hall	£22,155.00	£10,000.00
VH114 Newenden Village Hall	£260,358.00	£23,657.00
VH115 Upchurch Village Hall	£56,144.00	£20,000.00
VH116 Painters Forstal Community Hall	£500,000.00	£20,000.00
	£904,294.00	£97,657.00

5 Data Protection Implications

- 5.1 Some data is collected by Kent County Council as part of the application process. Applicants are asked to provide consent as part of the application process for KCC to hold their data for the purposes of administering the grant scheme. KCC has prepared a privacy notice (2018) which explains what personal information we hold about the applicant, how we collect it, how we use it and how we might share information.

6 Equality Implications

- 6.1 A full and approved Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was prepared in 2018. An updated version will be prepared in 2022.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 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 what conditions should be set if funding is approved and monitor all projects 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.

8 Recommendation

Recommendation:

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

9 Contact details

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