

## **Divisions Affected – All**

# **CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE DELIVERY & ENVIRONMENT**

**18 APRIL 2023**

## **COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS GRANT FUNDING**

**Report by Bill Cotton**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**1. The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to**

Approve the proposal to enter into a 3-year grant funding arrangement with the Community Action Group Project Oxfordshire Limited

### **Executive Summary**

2. The Community Action Group (CAG) project is a network of over 100 grassroots community groups working on waste, energy, transport, biodiversity and food. They hold over 5,000 events and activities a year, with over 38,000 attendees, and brought almost £1,600,000 in funding and income to the county in 20/21, as well as all the unmeasurable social benefits of thriving, connected communities.
3. OCC has fully funded this network since 2001, firstly through a contract with Resource Futures (RF; a consultancy), and then, after a dedicated Community Interest Company was established, directly with Community Action Groups Project (Oxfordshire) Limited (CAGPOL). The contract is for 'support services' to the network and includes insurance support and practical resources to help groups as well as 2 FTE staff members to advise, signpost, provide training and communications and help groups apply for funding.
4. To help us meet our climate aspirations, in the agreed 2022/23 budget papers OCC committed to increasing support for the CAG network. The funding was increased from £91,800 to £183,800. A contract variation was agreed with CAGPOL to enable increased delivery to start immediately while a longer-term funding mechanism was determined
5. Following advice from OCC legal services and then external legal advisors, it has been determined that funding via a grant is appropriate, and a 3-year arrangement is proposed.

## Background

6. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) benefits from the CAG project in several ways; groups carry out a wide range of activities in their local area, improving their local environment and increasing community cohesiveness. Activities and awareness raising on topics such as waste reduction and recycling, energy, climate change, biodiversity and flooding link with OCC policies and strategies on similar topics and groups have won several local and national awards and feature regularly in local and national media.
7. In April 2019 Oxfordshire County Council acknowledged a 'Climate Emergency' and pledged to make OCC carbon neutral by 2030 and work with partners across the county and region to deliver the new goal. Continuing to support the CAG network is embedded within OCCs action plan and provides a direct link to residents committed to making a difference to the environment in their local community, and beyond, helping us to rise to the climate challenges we face as a council, a county, and a country.
8. The CAG project is an important part of OCCs link with local communities on environmental topics. While difficult to quantify, their work on waste reduction and recycling will have helped OCC to have one of the highest recycling rates in England, and one of the lowest waste arisings/head. Groups have been involved in local energy generation, home insulation and retrofit and sustainable transport for many years and supporting them to continue this is an important part of OCCs Climate Action Framework 2020.
9. Ready established and active groups also help the community respond to challenges. When COVID - 19 curtailed usual activities, groups rapidly adapted; fixing and providing bikes (1433) and laptops (over 100) for key workers and children being home-schooled, delivering food and prescriptions to those shielding, redistributing food that would have otherwise gone to waste as activities stopped and providing growing kits and seedlings to those interested in growing local food. In the first 10 weeks of Lockdown 1 in March – June 2020, over 234 volunteers were involved in covid related activity.

## Grant agreement

10. The proposed grant agreement will continue the current work carried out by CAGPOL aiming to sustainably grow the network groups, activities and influence. CAGPOL will continue to provide 1:1 support to groups, training opportunities, assistance with funding applications and small grants. Communication and networking opportunities will increase and there will be an increased focus on work in communities that are not currently engaged in climate action conversations, or disproportionately affected by the consequences of a changing climate.
11. In addition, CAGPOL will focus on three key areas:
  - (a) Circular economy – developing implementation plans and pilot schemes for CE initiatives

- (b) Community wealth building – supporting grassroots environmentally focused organisations and enterprises to thrive, building skills in communities.
  - (c) Connecting communities and nature - supporting communities experiencing health inequalities in Oxfordshire to connect with the outdoors, green spaces and nature.
12. A proportion of the funding is being left unallocated in the budget to give flexibility to respond to mutually agreed priorities each year. These will be agreed in conjunction with OCC on a yearly basis.
13. We are also taking the opportunity to integrate the work on Love Food Hate Waste (LFHW) and home composting into the grant agreement. This work is highly focused in communities already and there are several synergies that can be realised through combining the projects, including greater presence in communities and more opportunities to develop skills and influence behaviour change.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

14. The CAG project supports several OCCs strategic priorities including
- (a) putting the climate emergency at the heart of our work,
  - (b) tackling inequalities,
  - (c) prioritising the health and wellbeing of our residents,
  - (d) preserving and improving access to nature and green spaces, and
  - (e) working with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.
15. The CAG network is referenced in the Climate Action Framework and activities help to support work happening the waste, active travel, biodiversity, public health, trees, flooding and climate teams. All of these service areas have regular contact with CAGPOL staff members to identify opportunities for joint working and enhancing/promoting existing activities.

## **Financial Implications**

16. The grant will total £626,100 over 3 years (£208,700/year). Increased support for the CAG project was allocated and agreed as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process, and funds for LFHW and home composting work will continue.
17. The proposal to enter into a grant agreement is within existing revenue budgets - there are no additional budgetary implications.

Comments checked by: Danny Doherty, Finance Business Partner (interim)  
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## **Legal Implications**

18. External legal advice was sought in respect of the application of the subsidy control legislation to the proposed grant. The grant will constitute a subsidy and be subject to the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Officers are satisfied that the proposed grant is compliant with the subsidy control principles having undertaken an initial assessment against the subsidy control principles. The subsidy will need to be published on the government's subsidy control database once awarded.

Comments checked by: Jayne Pringle, Interim Principal Solicitor Contracts & Conveyancing [Jayne.pringle@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jayne.pringle@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

19. There are no new staffing implications. Staff time to manage the current contractual arrangement will continue to be used to manage the new grant arrangement.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

20. Impacts resulting from climate change often disproportionately impact deprived and marginalised communities. Continuing to support the CAG network and their efforts to address the challenges posed by climate change will help to reduce the impact on these communities.
21. In addition to this, specific activities such as community wealth building will build skills in deprived areas of the county, keeping money in local communities. Work on local food growing, LFHW and cooking skills, along with the support for community fridges and larders will help to address food poverty. Improving biodiversity, active travel work and access to nature will help public health objectives as well as climate ones, and circular economy objectives will keep things in circulation for longer, reducing the need to buy new, and increasing the availability of good quality second hand goods available.
22. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached in Annex 1

## **Sustainability Implications**

23. The CAGPOL grant proposal was specifically designed to help us address the climate emergency with local communities and residents. It aims to demonstrate that small actions can make a difference and inspire communities to take action in their local area.

24. A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached in Annex 2.

## **Risk Management**

25. OCC are the principal funder for CAGPOL and this grant agreement will enable them to continue with their planned activities under a new funding arrangement. Regular updates will be provided by CAGPOL detailing their progress against their proposed activities and outputs.
26. CAGPOL hold and maintain a risk register for the project. The main risks linked to lack of delivery relate to an inability to staff the project, or groups not being interested in being part of the network anymore.
- (a) CAGPOL is committed to paying the Oxford living wage as a minimum and has allowed for staff salaries within their budget which should mitigate this risk.
  - (b) Currently group interest is at an all time high, the increasing number of climate events that are occurring around the world together with rising awareness of issues such as energy and food poverty have meant more residents are interested in what local action can be taken to address these and CAGPOL is well positioned to help. National changes such as the Environment Act, together with local climate based initiatives mean this level of interest should continue into the future.
27. Under the terms of the grant agreement if CAGPOL cannot deliver on their proposal then they are able to exit the agreement without any contractual penalty. However, the council will have the usual rights contained in grant funding agreements regarding withholding funding, clawback and termination in the event that satisfactory progress is not made. If this were to happen then it would impact OCCs community based climate change work, and therefore regular update meetings will take place, and where OCC can support with any difficulties we will endeavour to do so.

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Corporate Director – Environment and Place

Annexes

Annex 1 – EIA

Annex 2 – Sustainability appraisal

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