

Divisions Affected – N/A

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

19 JUNE 2026

COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP PROJECT OXFORDSHIRE LIMITED (CAGPOL) GRANT AWARD

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to

- a) **Approve the proposal to enter a 1-year grant funding arrangement with the Community Action Group Project Oxfordshire Limited (CAGPOL).**

Executive Summary

1. The Community Action Group (CAG) project is a network of over 117 grassroots community groups working on waste, energy, transport, biodiversity and food. They hold over 8,000 events and activities a year, with over 120,000 attendees, and brought almost £6 million in funding and income to the county in 24/25, as well as all the unmeasurable social benefits of thriving, connected communities.
2. Oxfordshire County Council (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 was 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.
3. 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. Following advice from OCC legal services and then external legal advisors, it has been determined that funding via a grant is appropriate. A three-year grant ran from 2023-2026, and a new one-year (1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027) term is now proposed while OCC considers how the CAG project can better integrate with our other voluntary and community sector offerings.

Background

4. OCC benefits from the CAG project in several ways; they are a direct link from the council to local communities - 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.
5. 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 goal. Continuing to support the CAG network is embedded within OCC's 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.
6. The CAG project is also an important part of OCC's 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.
7. The CAG project also helps develop stronger, less isolated communities, linking in with several public health priorities for the council. 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

8. 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.
9. In addition, CAGPOL will focus on four key areas:

- (a) Circular economy – developing implementation plans and pilot schemes for CE initiatives in line with OCCs Circular Economy Plan 2025.
 - (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.
 - (d) Reducing household food waste and increasing home composting – delivering support, events, workshops and communications to communities across the county.
10. The council are also taking the opportunity to incorporate within this grant a community garden project established by Public Health. Following a very successful pilot project in 2025, under this grant CAGPOL propose to expand support for community gardens in deprived areas of the county, helping to address public health inequalities, upskill community growers, open up new career pathways for people who otherwise do not feel welcome in the environment sector, serve as a means for climate adaptation, and reduce social isolation. Funding for this extra element is being provided by the Public Health team.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

11. The CAG project supports several of OCC's strategic priorities under the 'Greener, Fairer, Healthier' agenda, including:
- (a) Work on mitigation and adaptation activities relating to the climate emergency,
 - (b) Tackling inequities and inequalities,
 - (c) prioritising the health and wellbeing of our residents,
 - (d) preserving and improving access to nature and green spaces,
 - (e) promoting and supporting active travel options and
 - (f) working with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.
12. The CAG network is referenced in the Climate Action Framework, the Circular Economy Plan, the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and activities help to support work happening the waste, active travel, biodiversity, public health, trees, flooding and climate teams. All these service areas have regular contact with CAGPOL staff members to identify opportunities for joint working and enhancing/promoting existing activities.

Financial Implications

13. The grant will total £306,200. This includes funding from Waste Management and Public Health budgets.

14. The proposal to enter into a grant agreement is within existing revenue budgets - there are no additional budgetary implications.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

15. The Grant Funding Agreement will be prepared by Legal Services.
16. External legal advice was sought in respect of the application of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (the Act) to the proposed grant. The grant to CAGPOL will not constitute a subsidy under the Act, but subsidies could arise in respect of funding passed on to any CAGs who are involved in economic activity. The Grant Funding Agreement will be drafted to ensure compliance with the Act, and it is expected that any funding provided to CAGs engaged in economic activity will be on the basis of Minimal Financial Assistance.
17. As set out in the report, CAGPOL and the CAG projects support the Council's strategic priorities which flow down from its statutory responsibilities (such as prioritising the health and wellbeing of its residents under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, managing the disposal of municipal waste across Oxfordshire as a waste disposal authority under the Environmental Protection Act 1990).
18. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to do anything (including awarding grants) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to, the discharge of its statutory functions. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 allows the Council to do anything individuals may do (including making grants).

Jayne Pringle, Principal Solicitor – Contracts
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Staff Implications

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

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, Love Food Hate Waste 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 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 OCC's 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.

Paul Fermer
Director of Environment and Highways

Annex 1: Equalities Impact Assessment
Annex 2: Climate Impact Assessment

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