

# People Helping People Fund

## Staffordshire County Council People Helping People Fund – Annual Report and next steps 2019/20



## **Introduction – County Councillor Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

Staffordshire County Councillors play a key role at the front line of what the county council does. They work to make things happen across Staffordshire, bringing together the most active people, facilitating partnerships and developing a complete understanding of their local area.

As leaders in their communities, the county councillors have for some years been equipped with a small grant fund, called the Local Community Fund, which they have used to invest in the things that matter most in their divisions.

In 2019, as the county council drew up its budget for the coming year, we faced some hard decisions. With the county council spending more of its resources on supporting the most vulnerable, we need to ensure that ‘prevention’ work – keeping people independent and safe long before they end up needing council support – can be delivered in a different way, which is why Communities is a key strategic principle to the way we work. The People Helping People Fund was created so that County Councillors can play a key part in this, using it in a more targeted way than ever before.

We asked councillors to use their funding as an investment, in the kind of prevention that will make a difference for people all across Staffordshire. We wanted projects that could show that they would make an impact on keeping people supported within their own communities. We also looked for projects that were a joint investment with the local community, where local people brought their own resources and energy to the table. Lastly, we sought projects that were about developing this energy further, expanding what was already out there to ensure that more Staffordshire residents could take advantage of the opportunities these groups and activities could offer.

This report gives a snapshot of some of the activity we saw, and some of the local examples of those who stepped up with exactly the kind of community-led prevention we were hoping to support. With this funding, councillors have made a real difference to Staffordshire’s communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected our planned next steps for the fund this year, and this report tells some of that story, but also looks at how we can return to this ambition afresh next year, with our councillors at the heart of what we do.

## Background

The People Helping People Fund saw £2500 allocated to each County Councillor, to invest in projects about keeping people independent, healthy and supported within the places they live. Councillors were able to use as much or as little of this £2500 as they wanted to support projects which needed it, or even to work together with other councillors and jointly support bigger projects.

The rules of the Fund were designed to ensure that projects would make a tangible difference, were things that mattered to the local community, and were about building on the success and energy that already exists across Staffordshire, or helping to create it where it didn't exist already.

This is why all successful projects had to meet the following criteria:

- The activity had to relate to children and families, or health and care. The County Council delivers lots of services in these two areas, and this fund was designed to support community projects which help us to do it – by supporting people early on.
- Funding bids had to be matched locally, in cash or in kind (for example in volunteer hours or use of a local room/facility).
- Funding had to support new activity (groups themselves didn't have to be new, but this Fund was about filling gaps by supporting new activity and projects). Funding could also support the purchase of new equipment, or even improvements to buildings – but applicants always had to demonstrate how the funding would help to unlock new provision.

## Success of the Fund

Using councillor funding in this very targeted way was a new approach in Staffordshire, and came at a time when some other local authorities in England have removed Member funds altogether.

Some of the activity which funding was due to support had been planned to take place into the 2020/21 financial year, and unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting national lockdown have impacted on this. The totals below reflect this, showing the final totals for activity which could go ahead, supported by the County Councillors. County Councillors drove this effort and have made a huge difference with the funding.

- Final total grant awarded of £86,127 (out of £155,000 total budget)
- This raised a total match value of £276,035 which in terms of a return on investment is more than £3 for every £1 spent through the Fund. This is made up of £193,845 in 'cash' value brought to the table by applicants (either through their own resources, grants awarded to them by other donors, or fundraising efforts taking place to support the project), and £82,190 in 'in-kind' value (for example the value of voluntary hours associated with a project, or the value of room use).
- This has all supported the delivery of projects (or parts of projects) worth a total of £362,162 – and it has helped to support the next steps for some projects which were much bigger than this total even on their own.

Projects which were supported have made a real difference for Staffordshire people, and kept them supported and independent in the places where they live. Some examples of this are:

- Brand new and expanded befriending services and dementia and carers support, such as the expansion into Rugeley of MHA Lichfield & District Live at Home Scheme's **Befriending Service** and **Dementia Singing Friends** in South Staffordshire
- Several one-to-one support courses for specific cohorts of children, such as **Fireworks** in Cannock Chase which supported families at the crucial primary-to-high school transition by helping them to connect to the new school, and **Me b4 Media**, which worked with children in East Staffordshire around maintaining self-esteem and positive mental health in the world of social media.



- Intergenerational work, making links between young and older groups who are both at risk of isolation, such as the **Generations Lounge** project in Stafford
- Community events which helped to develop the connections between residents and key agencies further than ever before, some of which directly helped Staffordshire County Council services to go further and have greater impact. **Amington Fete** and **Bradwell Health Event** are examples, along with the **Community Hub Fun Days** in Stafford. In this project the Children's Centre and Family Action teamed up with agencies like Stafford and Rural Homes, Adult and Community Learning and the Department for Work and Pensions, and community organisations like Penkside Community Champions, to run fun days in the local community that helped to identify how people in the area got their information, and left them better connected to the support available.



- Huge new sporting investments, such as helping to set up the **Beacon Parkrun** in Lichfield, and a range of smaller projects aimed at getting people more active
- Large scale community improvements and investments unlocked (including supporting a part of **Wyrley Juniors FC's** £764k move to a new venue)
- Helping schools and agencies to commission support for young people, such as the Staffordshire University Academy commissioning a **Mental Health Support Service** for its young people
- Helping new groups to establish and grow, such as helping **Butt Lane Youth Club** to get established in its first year



- Making improvements to community buildings to allow expanded activity, for example **Red Lion House Community Centre in Burton**, where funding helped to further the project of turning a disused

public house into a community and church centre, by supporting the kitchens' development

- Supporting part of the costs of a new community café, as an extension of social inclusion activities with **E.L.I.T.E Community Café** in Chesterton
- Making improvements to education and community assets for the benefit of those who use them, for example providing funding for the last piece of the **Log Cabin Therapy Garden** at Werrington Community Library and Wellbeing Centre
- Helping care settings to provide new activities for residents, such as **Pickwood Close Residents Centre** setting up its new weekly film club
- Supporting major expansions to programmes like **Places of Welcome** across East Staffordshire, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire, which create a network of local venues which open weekly, provide friendship and hospitality and a warm welcome to everyone who attends.
- Cookery and healthy living support programmes, such as the **Family Cookery** programme at Haregate Community Centre, which worked with families and their support networks across 5 sessions around nutrition and how to make healthy eating affordable
- Several projects using the summer holidays and Christmas in 2019 as a springboard to finding new ways to engage with families, such as in **Newcastle South** and **Kidsgrove**



These are just some of the examples, and the rest can be viewed on the Staffordshire County Council website at <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Your-council-and-democracy/People-Helping-People-Fund/People-Helping-People-fund-overview.aspx>.

## Next steps

As a first step towards Members spending their funding in a new, more targeted way, the People Helping People Fund was a success, and planning had taken place to continue the approach for the 2020/21 financial year.

However, global events overtook this, and Staffordshire County Council moved quickly to refocus its Member funding around support to communities around the issues caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the lockdown which followed.

Following an announcement by the Leader of the Council at the 19 March meeting of the County Council, the Covid-19 Support Fund was launched on 30 March 2020. It used the existing budget of £2500 per County Councillor to focus on Staffordshire's response to the coronavirus, and groups were able to apply for either:

- funding to help support vulnerable people locally to get through the crisis, through the local response we saw across Staffordshire in neighbourhood-level support organisations, many of which were brand new and created by local people who wanted to help
- funding to cover an existing group's overheads in situations where they have lost normal income due to the crisis, to protect the vibrant voluntary and community sector which Staffordshire possesses, and ensure it still exists after the pandemic is over.

On July 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, the County Council put further investment into the fund, giving each County Councillor another £2000, and broadening the scope of the fund in recognition of the fact that with Covid-19 cases reducing nationally, some community activity was looking to restart. The Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund could still be spent on the initial two priorities, but with a third option of supporting the costs of adaptations to community activity so that it could restart.

These two tranches of funding are an ongoing success in helping Staffordshire's communities to respond to an unprecedented situation, seeing a combined total of £152,180 being released so far, against a total Member allocation so far of £181,935 (as at 23 September 2020).

The Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund has so far helped a wide variety of organisations, from a wave of the new neighbourhood-level support organisations, to a range of community hubs and venues across the county which needed support to keep going. We also saw groups who had received funding under the People Helping People Fund continuing the conversation with their County Councillors, about how the Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund might be able to help them adapt and build on the success of projects in the previous year.

We recognise that activity is starting back up where it is possible and appropriate. The Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund is being treated as emergency funding for the financial year 2020/21, and at this stage it is of course too soon to say what the situation will be in June 2021 when any new Member fund would launch. However, one clear opportunity if conditions allow, is to build on the success of the People Helping People Fund with a further focus on the kind of impact it made. A full report on the successes and learning of the Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund will

therefore be brought to County Council in 2021, at which point the situation should be clearer for understanding the next steps of the County Councillors' funding.

## **Conclusion**

As a new way of working, the People Helping People Fund in 2019/20 has been a successful shift, and forms a great foundation to build on. Though the coronavirus pandemic meant that Staffordshire County Council naturally refocused its resources to help with the crisis, it is hoped that by next year the timing will be right to move the County Councillors' fund back towards a targeted approach aimed at making a real and lasting difference – building on the success so far and taking it further.

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