
ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

26 NOVEMBER 2020

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES FUND REVIEW

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to allow members to consider changes to the council's Supporting Communities Fund to improve the process for communities. Proposals include clearer criteria for applicants and an extension to the period of time awarded funds are able to be used by groups.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES FUND REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 A review of the council's Supporting Communities Fund (SCF) has considered ways to improve outcomes for communities and improve the delivery of the fund.
- 2.2 This review into the Supporting Communities Fund (SCF) is to ensure that public money is being spent in the most appropriate and efficient way and that it continues to serve the communities of Argyll and Bute, particularly communities that are vulnerable, improving lives and places across the Council area.
- 2.3 The council's SCF invites applications from the third sector, Community Councils and Parent Councils. The total amount available is £90,000, this is split equally across the 4 administrative areas giving a total of £22,500 per area each year to be awarded. It offers funding up to a maximum award of £2,500, the average award is £1,764.
- 2.4 The fund receives an average of 100 applications per year. Demand to the fund is high, and the availability of funds has reduced through council budget savings from £140,000 in 2015 to £90,000 in 2020. Last year 51 projects were awarded funding, out of 111 applications.
- 2.5 The fund is managed by the Community Development team, with assessments undertaken by Community Development Officers, who prepare recommendations for local Area Committee Committees for final approval. This process has received a high internal audit scoring for its management of public finances.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council approve the proposed improvements to the fund detailed in section 4 of the report. These are:

- 3.1 Agree the four main criteria for applications, as set out in 4.2 of the report, are:
 - Fairer Communities – tackling poverty by sharing opportunities.
 - Resilient Communities – rebuilding and repairing from a pandemic; noting that this is only in the case of the group being unable to access other specific funds for this, e.g. Scottish Government funding.
 - Greener, cleaner communities – climate change mitigation
 - Creative Communities - Creativity for Health and Wellbeing
- 3.2 Agree that all applicants awarded funding have 18 months to complete their project.
- 3.3 Agree that all applicants awarded funding are to display the Council logo in communications and promotions of their funded project.
- 3.4 Agree that improvements are made to the application and end of monitoring report to support the evaluation of the fund's impact on reducing inequalities.
- 3.5 Agree a fast track application process, as outlined in 4.6, be explored for financial year 2022-23.
- 3.6 Agree that the fund for 2021/22 opens for applications on 11 January 2021 and closes on 20 March 2021.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 A review of the Supporting Communities Fund was undertaken in October 2020. This included a survey of 196 former applicants and a 32% response rate informed the recommendations of this report, it found:
 - The fund is highly valued by the sector locally, receiving a score of 4.7 out of 5.
 - When asked if their project could have gone ahead without the SCF the majority said that it couldn't, and of those who thought it could, it was said that the fund improved the outcomes, the quality or the sustainability. Quotes from respondents included: "*The SCF funds are vital for small local projects benefiting the wider community*" and "*Would have been more difficult. A&B grant gave it impetus and credibility It had proved too important to our community not to keep it going*"

- The fund is cost-effective: it was found that for every £1 of SCF funding disbursed, £5.49 of charitable activity was delivered on average, in the 4 years to date.
- With approximately 100 applications received every year the assessment process gave opportunities to the Community Development team to build relationships and understand local needs and issues alongside providing community development support to groups this has also created best value for example:
 - Opportunities for thorough engagement with traditionally hard to reach groups for the Place Standard Engagement conducted in 2019.
 - Opportunities for fast relationship building with assembling the Care for People response to Covid-19 with community resilience groups in March 2020. E.g. in OLI, 60% of the local groups providing a direct community response received an SCF award within the last 5 years. The figures for H&L are 69%.
- Quotes appreciating the support from the council include:
 - *“We received very helpful and practical information and pointers from Community Development Officer”*
 - *“Very helpful and useful support from the team at all times”*
 - *“It was great to be able to discuss our project with someone local who knew of our community work”.*
 - *“When unsuccessful we have been pointed in the direction of alternative funding which was greatly appreciated”.*
- Improvements requested were to have a longer time to deliver projects and proportionate levels of paperwork to complete.

4.2 Four criteria for future applications to the fund are proposed below. These are aligned to the community’s needs, following a review of previous applications, questions to previous applications and consideration of the current policy environment. The clarity of the criteria enables clear decision making in terms of applications to the fund.

The proposed new criteria are below.

1. Fairer Communities – tackling poverty by sharing opportunities.

Projects funded under this criteria would remove financial barriers for people in communities, particularly children and young people, to opportunities for learning, sports, activities, or employment. For example this may include funding of transport costs, sports equipment, musical instruments.

2. Resilient Communities – rebuilding and repairing from a pandemic.

Projects funded under this criteria would tackle the effects of the pandemic on both individuals and groups, such as tackling loneliness and isolation; digital exclusion, building skills and confidence in getting online in order to meet safely; as well as supporting our smaller organisations to recover and re-build stronger and adapt to the changed circumstances. This will be awarded only in cases where groups cannot access funds from the Scottish Government for this purpose.

It would also include more general resilience in the sense of community-led, inclusive economic development and therefore costs of Community Actions Plans and feasibility studies as well as the many ways communities want to upskill and increase their capacity to improve their places.

3. Greener, cleaner communities – climate change mitigation

Projects funded under this criteria would be concerned with a range of activities to improve impact on the environment including: energy efficiency measures for both organisations and community members; enhancement and restoration of the natural environment, making the countryside more accessible; decarbonisation activities –e.g. walking projects, sharing of facilities, and resource efficiency initiatives, such as community transport.

4. Creative Communities - Creativity for Health and Wellbeing

Projects funded under this criteria would deliver activities related to music, art, theatre, Gaelic, history and heritage and in particular where participation in creative projects improves health and wellbeing.

Currently the fund has the following criteria, and the above 4 capture these and provide a specific thematic focus relevant to the needs of Argyll and Bute in 2021 and beyond.

- Social inclusion
- Rural isolation
- Capacity of the Community to develop
- Quality of life for residents
- Increase in Visitors to the area
- Increase in Health and wellbeing
- The local environment
- Opportunity to develop new skills
- Employment

4.3 It is also proposed that applicants be awarded funding for a period of 18 months, an increase from 12 months, to allow time for projects to be completed. This follows feedback from community groups in a recent survey.

- 4.4 It is proposed that groups awarded funding will be requested to use the Council's logo alongside their project communications and promotion.
- 4.5 To better evaluate the impact of the fund on reducing inequalities, it is proposed to:
- Ensure application form and end of project monitoring form are aligned to identify and report on impact on people with protected characteristics (age, gender etc.)
 - Report headline figures to the Council's Equalities Forum to increase awareness of good practice in the community.
- 4.6 It is proposed that a fast track application process be explored for financial year 2022-23.
- This meets the regular request from applicants for a more proportionate approach to paperwork submission. This has to be balanced with our requirement to carry out basic due diligence finance checks, as well as mitigate against the risk of investing in unsound projects.
 - We propose that below the sum of £1,000 that applicants will be required to answer fewer questions and provide less supporting documentation.
 - Time will be needed to ensure that a fair and consistent assessment approach applies whether receiving more or less information. It will take some time to create a robust assessment process that doesn't discriminate against the size of the project, and it is unlikely it could be managed this year, before applications go live at the start of 2021, due to the work of the team in the continued Covid-19 response
- 4.7 Due to the impact of Covid-19 it is proposed that the SCF for 2021/22 opens for applications in January 2021, with a closing date end March and decisions made in June Area Committees. If the recommendations here are agreed groups would then have until December 2022 to spend the funds.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Changes in the delivery of the fund are based on a survey with previous applicants.
- 5.2 Changes in the criteria will make the fund more focused on identified needs and more closely aligned to the needs of the community and priorities of the Council.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy: Consideration has been made to the current policy context. The funded projects are to positively impact on policy areas such as climate change mitigation, child poverty, covid-19 impact.

- 6.2 Financial: Managed within budget of Community Planning and Development
- 6.3 Legal: Eligibility checks are made to ensure organisations in receipt of funds are valid.
- 6.4 HR: Uses existing resources within Community Planning and Development.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: n/a
- 6.5.1 Equalities - Improves monitoring and impact of grant outcomes to inequality groups
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty: The SCF supports organisations in their community impact.
- 6.5.3 Islands: Community organisations based on islands have benefitted from the council's SCF and have had opportunity to contribute to the survey.
- 6.6. Risk: N/A
- 6.7 Customer Service: Paper application forms available for those who are digitally excluded

Pippa Milne, Executive Director

Policy Lead Cllr Mary Jean Devon

03 November 2020

For further information contact:

Rona Gold

Community Planning Manager

Community Planning and Community Development

Chief Executive's Unit

01436 658 862

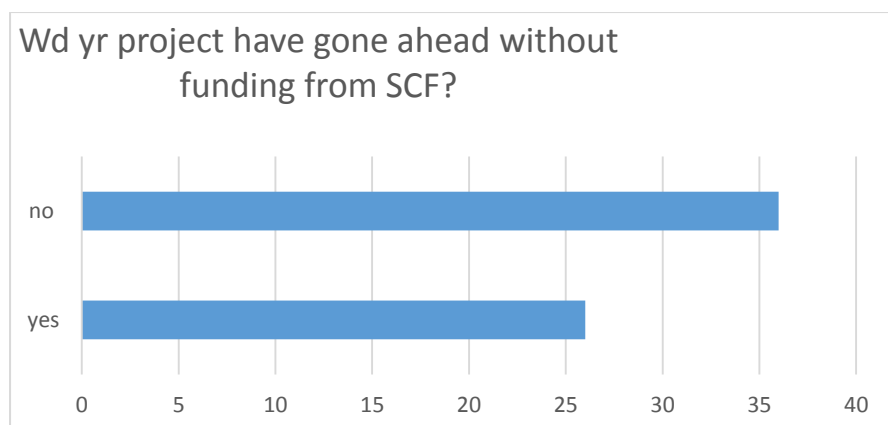
rona.gold@argyll-bute.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Results of Survey of former applicants of Supporting Communities Fund October 2020

Appendix 1.

SCF survey responses: collated 13th October, survey closed to responses.

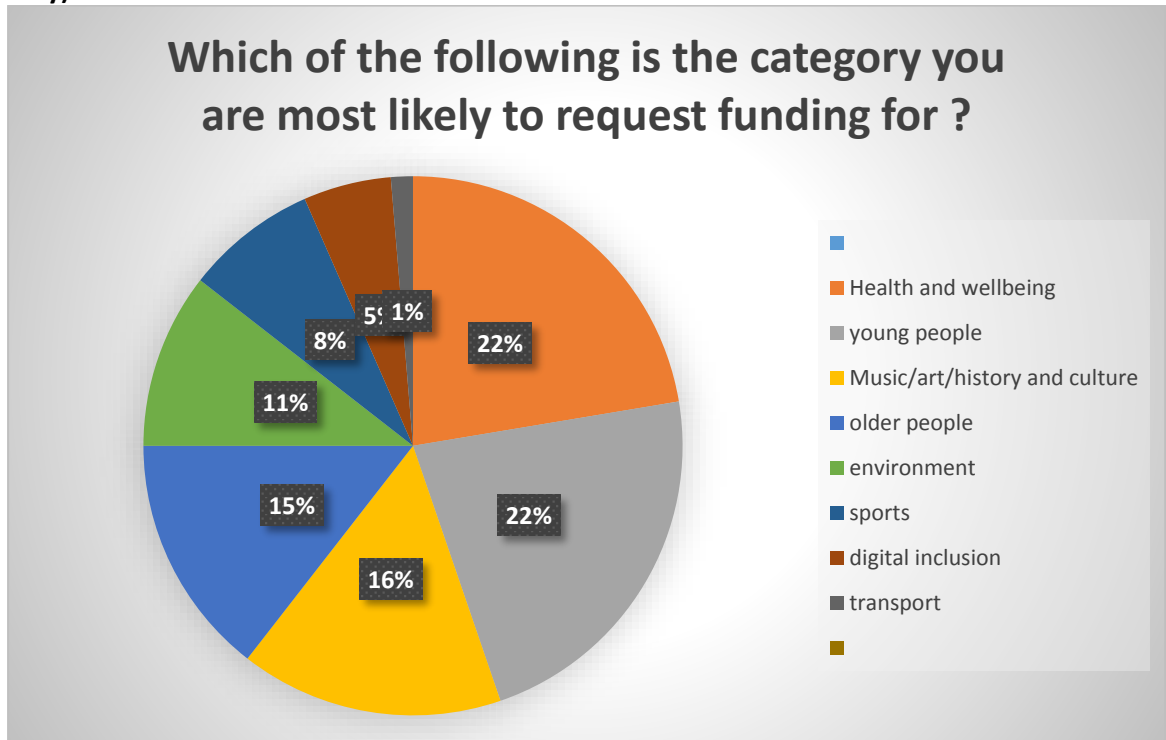


1. Would your project have gone ahead without funding from Argyll & Bute Council's Supporting Communities Fund?

- Supporting Communities is only part of a cocktail of funding, useful, but if it is a good project, it is not a decider about whether something goes ahead or not
- The full project, no. The SCF funds are vital for small local projects benefiting the wider community. Thank you.
- we wouldn't have had enough to keep going
- We would have continued with our shopping clients but would be unable to take on the new clients which more than doubled because of covid
- Our organisation normally just meets all our costs each year and no more. The Fund has allowed us to invest in new equipment.
- It would have gone ahead at a reduced scale
- However, it would have meant putting a considerable additional strain on our funds.
- We
- It would have been more difficult to provide a Covid compliant Foodbank service without the additional funding.
- As a community council in a rural area we have limited income so opportunities to make positive improvements to our environment are limited without grant funding.
- what the grant was able to do was enhance the services delivered to better accommodate the wishes of the members
- Not as quickly as has been the case.
- Local funding support is really helpful
- We would have held 3 or 4 events rather than the 10 we managed with funding.
- As we were unable to complete within the defined time period, we elected to return the award. However, we did also continue with the Vision for Helensburgh project.
- Will be a better project with the extra funding.
- we need funding to contribute to costs of start up and marketing
- It would have continued at a reduced level
- Due to COVID we have had to defer our project and it will now proceed as soon as circumstances permit.
- The project would probably gone ahead but we would have had to asked parents for most of the cost.
- Would have been more difficult. A&B grant gave it impetus and credibility
- It would have taken much longer to achieve our goal without help from the fund.
- It had proved too important to our community not keep it going

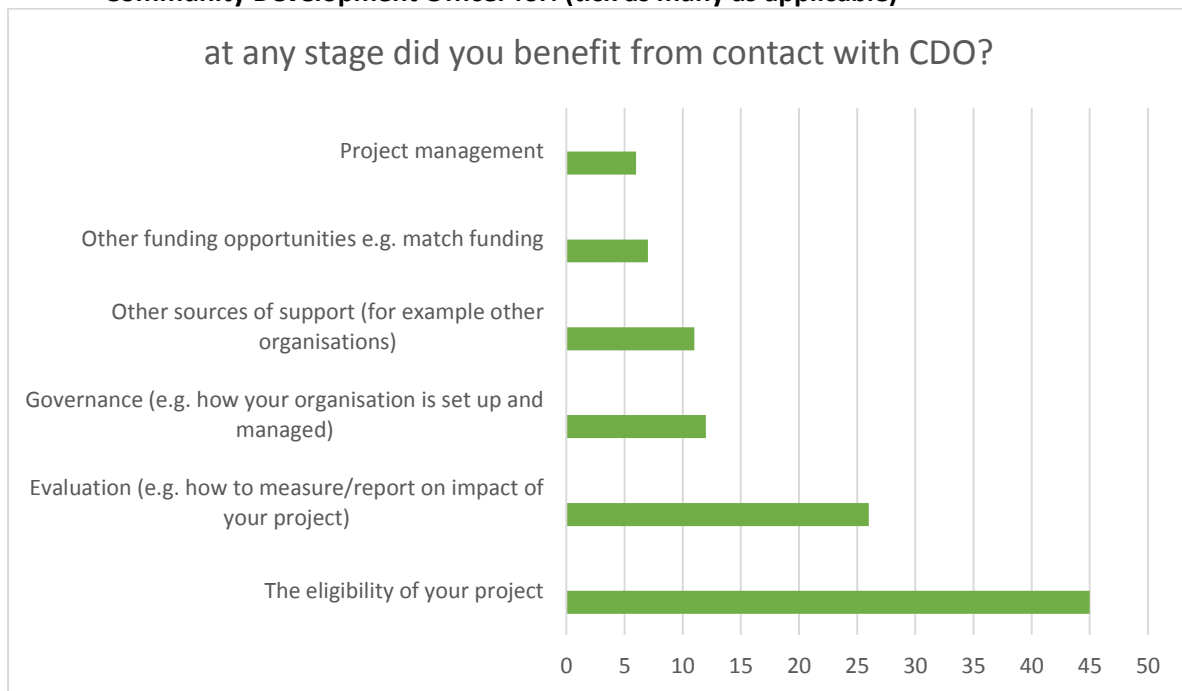
- If it gone ahead it would have been in curtailed version
- The funding was for events - we could have done some of the events on a smaller scale but certainly not all, especially where we bought in external experts
- We may have to have charged participants

2. Which of the following is the category you are most likely to request funding for? (tick one only)



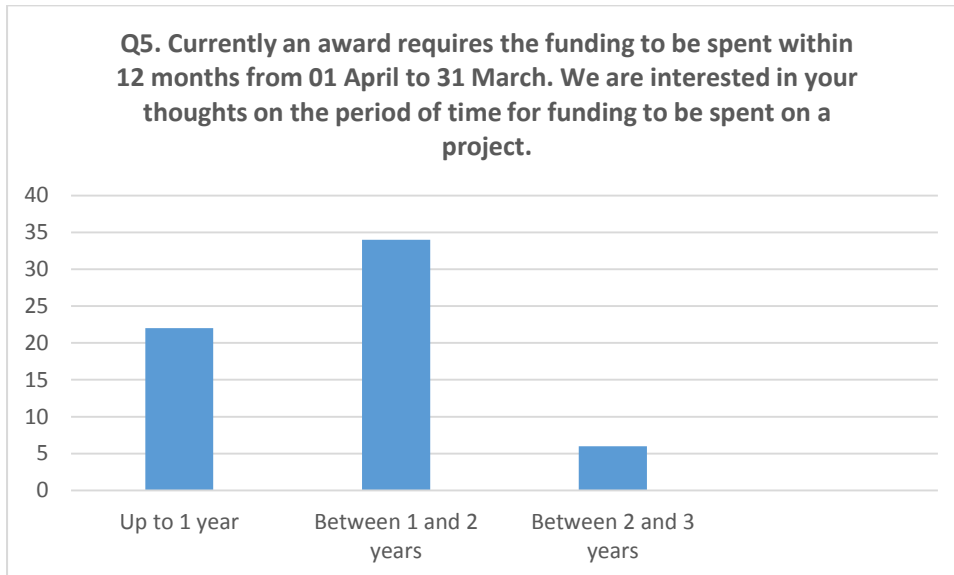
- Mix of environment and health and well-being as linked with our projects
- Education
- Community health and wellbeing.
- Our work with young people encompasses the areas of health and wellbeing, art ,history, culture environment.
- Food Insecurity
- We provide services to veterans ,their families and the wider community
- School visits
- various events which will benefit the whole community
- Tourism/information through Digital screens in rural areas
- Development of Community Coherence
- Health and Wellbeing
- homeless people getting their first tenancy
- Education
- Community, not group specific, our project benefits the wider community
- We are the Community Forest - so everything has an environment theme - but issues such as events for young people, transport to the Forest are of huge benefit

3. At any stage of the application did you benefit from contact with Argyll & Bute Council's Community Development Officer for: (tick as many as applicable)



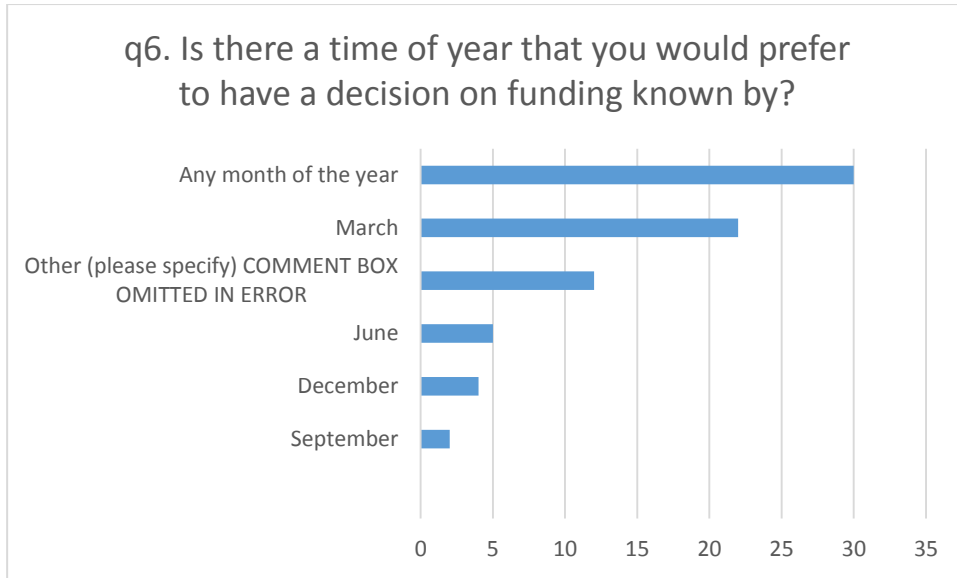
- Very good support from Kirsty Moyes
- no contact
- Invaluable support in all aspects
- No
- Antonia is great to work with!
- n/a
- It was great to be able to discuss our project with someone local who knew of our community work
- When unsuccessful we have been pointed in the direction of alternative funding which was greatly appreciated
- A most useful source of information and useful for discussion on way forward for voluntary organisations
- Supportive Advice
- Always very helpful
- Discussing receiving a partial grant due to many people requesting support
- always available and helpful with advice
- Questions about the local situation which the officer had great knowledge of
- Encouragement: discussion of the methodologies, potential timeframes and outcomes.
- really useful support received from Kirsty talking through the bid
- We received very helpful and practical information and pointers from Community Development Officer
- Guidance in making the application
- Contact and assistance was most helpful.
- Very helpful and useful support from the team at all times
- We had some contact but not of it turned in to direct benefit
- Generally supportive and helpful

Q 5 Currently an award requires the funding to be spent within 12 months from 01 April to 31 March. We are interested in your thoughts on the period of time for funding to be spent on a project.

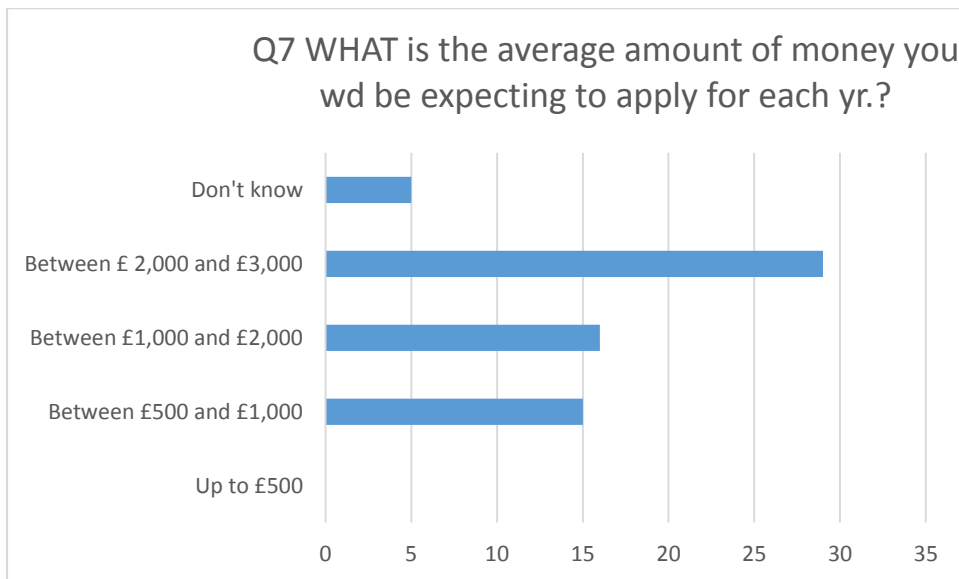


- Due to the impact of coronavirus our project had been unable to go ahead and we do not know when we will be able to take our project forward
- The grant is not received until about June, or later, so a full year is not available for the project. 1-2 years much better
- Depends on the project but perhaps for those which do not fit the financial year but could still run for 12 months / allow for unforeseen circumstances
- For larger projects it is difficult to complete the ordering, installation and completion process within a year.
- People wouldn't panic buy cause of covid
- Continual funding applications decrease the time spent on the coal face of the project. A three year grant gives time to imbed the work being done and makes recruitment of staff much easier.
- This would allow projects to bed in and the benefits seen over the longer term
- Obviously things have been different this year because of Covid 19 and extra time will be required
- Usually a year is long enough but with COVID we may need longer to do what we wanted.
- Work being carried out is seasonal and may need to be continued into other season
- I think that community groups should be in a position to use the funds within one year. although there may be special circumstances where an extension may have to be sought.
- Normally 1 year is sufficient, but given unexpected delays due to the pandemic additional time is beneficial
- It would allow us to apply earlier and know we hand funding well in advance. If not we would adjust how we run the project
- For an organisation like our which only runs for a limited part of the year rather than all year round, the time available to fit in the events for which the finding is designed can be a bit tight to manage

- Able to gradually proceed with a project if we need more time to get funding completed
- Would give some flexibility as implementation cannot begin until the fund is in the Bank.
- Allows for any overrun, projects don't always run to the predicted timescale. This year has been a good example i.e. the disruption caused to projects due to the Covid outbreak.
- Ability to plan ahead (2-3 years selected)
- No problem with a 12 month period
- From our perspective as the awards are not for a lot of money, one year would be sufficient
- Circumstances can change, eg current Covid hiatus. More flexibility on spending of grant funds would be welcome
- However this year is the exception as delivery of face to face services is very difficult
- For it to be longer than one year, I would be anticipating the grant size to be greater
- For small amounts it makes sense for a shorter time period
- this timescale is suitable for us as we always need to spend all the money received
- It would allow groups to extend their reach outwith the present restriction. Rarely does a project fit neatly within 13 months even in times when things are not affected by pandemics
- Better-founded research leading to the potential for longer term solutions
- if there was an increased budget as well as a longer time to spend we could plan to increase the impact made over a longer period of time
- Think this is fine except in Covid times for which you have already made allowances
- Our events have launch costs, cost of operation [which we cover] and then settlement of accounts can go on for three months
- Up to 2 years would allow time to develop a project to achieve maximum benefit from the funding
- We use the money (when successful) to travel to the Mid Argyll Music Festival in Lochgilphead. Because we live on an island we need overnight accommodation for 2 nights, ferry travel, mini bus hire, fuel and meals.
- Projects take longer to complete and 1 year limits your application
- WE have spent it but his project requires a lot more funding and fund raising activities have been curtailed due to CV19
- It's not always possible to spend within 1 year for an organisation such as ours.
- The uncertainty of the covid situation has a bearing on the attendance of the project
- For revenue support like the Supporting Community Fund - 1 year is basically OK - over 2 years would enable a slightly longer period to run the events programme over
- If it was more than 12 months perhaps the level of grant may need to be higher



Q7 There is a set amount of funding available to distribute in each of the four administrative areas in the Council each year. In 2019/20 the funding available was £22,500 in each area. The maximum award is currently £2,500. We are interested to know in applying to the fund what is the average amount of money you would be expecting to apply for each year?



- We have been awarded in this amount area for our current project given the uncertainty around being able to deliver our project within the extended period we are unable to say whether we will be applying for further funding for any further grants
- It could be any of the above depending on the project
- depends on the individual projects - could be >500 or < 1000
- This will depend on the newly elected committee to decide on how best to progress the group.
- Living on an island it depends on whether we wish to offer opportunities off-island as that greatly increases costs

- depending if funding had been obtained elsewhere
- This amount seems to tally well with the scale of project we tend to apply for and the contribution we are able to make from our own funds. (between £500 and £1000 selected)
- Small projects are often more achievable than large contentious ones and often make a difference out of all proportion to the size of the grant (2-3,000 selected)
- In a normal year this would be for visit to other veterans projects and administration (between £1,000 and £2,000 selected)
- Due to the time required to complete the application form, we would be applying for projects to receive the maximum award.
- It is difficult to achieve outcomes with much less unless a project is match funded (£2-3,000 selected).
- The amount of funding applied for would surely be related to the nature of the project in hand?
- Would vary on type of project
- We would aim to match fund
- The money we spend depends on the amount of children that take part in the Mid Argyll Music Festival, on our last trip we had less attending so we returned the surplus cash.
- It would really depend on the individual project. There's no point in spending money needlessly.
- to ensure continuation of project
- The Community Forest event programme can be tailored to the funding available - around £1000 per annum would be ideal

Q.8 How would you rate the importance of the Supporting Communities Fund to community groups in Argyll & Bute? (1 star not very important - 5 stars very important) Average rating =4.7