

Vale of White Horse District Council and Community First Oxfordshire: Partnership Grant

2020/21 to 2021/22 - 2 Year Partnership Fund

Project summary

Community infrastructure service for Vale communities recovering from Covid-19

Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) will work with VWHDC and other partners to encourage and support communities in the Vale to identify strengths and challenges that affect them and to build on existing or new community-led solutions. Attention will be paid specifically to current Covid-19 actions and assessing and acting on the longer term impacts. We will work in partnership with Oxfordshire All In (Covid-19 mapping and support platform) and the VCS Alliance (a new forum for the VCSE sector) to work on mapping needs and seeking collaborative and innovative ways to support existing community activities and new Covid-19 volunteers/activities.

CFO will continue to advice and support activities that make a significant contribution to the building of (and recovery of) thriving communities: community hall support, community action through community planning and community learning, linking in with Neighbourhood Plan projects and community shops support. Many of these community activities have been impacted by Covid-19 (e.g. halls have lost income and are looking at ways to support the communities, community shops are offering take away services and other support services, good neighbours schemes and other support groups are seeking advice on how to support shielded people in the next few months). There will be a focus on supporting new Covid-19 action groups and how best to sustain these new activities and volunteers into existing community groups when Covid-19 finally subsides. As mentioned before, this activity must be done in collaboration with Oxfordshire All In.

We will use the findings from the 2020 Rural Services Survey, the open source data provided by the newly Oxfordshire All In and partnership feedback through the VCS Alliance as a means to target the right support to specific communities most affected by covid-19 in the short and long term.

The 2019/20 targets, in our view, remain appropriate for 2020/21, however there is a need for a degree of flexibility in the targets, particularly under community action to enable CFO to adapt focus and activity once the longer term impacts of the pandemic on community life in the Vale are better known.

**Grant requested: £8,000 in 2020/21 and £8,000 in 2021/22
(funds remain the same level as 2019/20)**

Suggested performance target	Target 2020/21	Target 2021/22
Connecting with Vale communities offering CFO and partner support (main focus is covid-19 advice and next steps through targeted newsletters/mailshots, community learning online support and engagement events)	100	review
Vale based community building support (non-council owned) , including in-depth direct advice/support as halls recover from covid-19 impacts (small	25	review

business grants, diversify business, linking in with OSEP and mentoring programmes, facilitating a peer-to-peer support Facebook page.		
Community action support with communities on specific projects required post-Covid (excluding any specific work paid for by other organisations /departments of the council)	6	review
Community action webinars and socially distance happy events community learning, training and information events focused on the district where beneficial (excluding any specific events funded by third parties)	2	review
Provide an annual work report (including frequent updates with lead officer)	1	1

Current CFO Covid-19 support and activities

As a direct response to the current situation, CFO has ramped up our online support, which now includes an easy to navigate digest of information and guidance on a range of themes related to Covid-19: national and local sources of advice and information, and specific advice for communities and charities, community halls, and retail, business and employers. We are promoting this information to all our members and community contacts.

We continue to be busy with offering key advice for CFO's main support services on Covid-19 enquiries and what next scenarios. The main services we support are: community halls and shops, community transport, and strategies for community action and support for existing volunteers who are now involved in Covid-19 activities.

CFO's community halls and community shops support services are very well-used at the best of times. However, demand has recently surged. Individuals and communities are asking us not only about the usual day-to-day challenges of managing their services but are seeking advice on topics directed related to COVID-19, such as business rate reliefs, sources of grant funding, reserves policies, health and safety assessments and furloughing staff

We are adapting and trialling all community learning materials, starting with 'Listening In, Listening Out' to be web-based and drop-in ready. We are anticipating a surge in interest for community learning materials.

So many communities have proved that social activism doesn't need to stop because of social distancing. We want to support this activism and plan for a strong recovery.

Emily Lewis-Edwards

Joint-Chief Executive, Community First Oxfordshire