

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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To: Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

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Climate Action Fund

Recommendation(s)

(a) That the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) review the Climate Action Fund policy and guidelines and recommend to Cabinet their approval

(b) That CEAC endorse the launch of the Fund and the Head of Policy and Programmes making final award decisions, in consultation with the relevant cabinet members

(c) That CEAC members promote the fund within their communities to help ensure a wide reach of applicants

Purpose of Report

1. To advise CEAC on the proposed policy, guidelines and desired outcomes for Vale of White Horse District Council's Climate Action Fund (CAF) and describe its position within the wider context of the Council's climate emergency work.
2. To detail the proposed decision-making process and the approval pathway for applications and outline the timeline for the CAF launch and subsequent stages of evaluation, decision making and awarding.

Strategic Objectives

3. The CAF invites applications for projects which will inspire and deliver action to address climate change through community cohesion and partnership working. The guidelines state that projects should contribute to the achievement of the

council's Corporate Plan priorities (2020-24): tackling the Climate Emergency, building healthy communities and working in partnership.

4. As laid out in the Corporate Plan 2020-24, a draft Climate Action Plan (CAP) has been developed, which sets out actions that will help the Council achieve carbon neutrality through direct initiatives using our statutory powers, strategic policymaking, or by enabling behaviours and working with others. The CAP and CAF projects are therefore closely intertwined and it is intended to promote the CAF alongside the CAP launch. As well as closely follow projects funded by the CAF, to create case studies that can be used in our ongoing strategic communications plan.

Background

5. A climate emergency was declared by the Vale of White Horse District Council at Full Council on 13 February 2019. The motion outlined the intention for the Council to consider adopting an early carbon neutral target. At Cabinet on 6 December 2020 the following climate action targets were agreed:
 - For Vale of White Horse District Council to be carbon neutral within our own operations by 2030, with an aim for a 75 per cent reduction in carbon emissions in our own operations by 2025
 - For Vale of White Horse to be a carbon neutral district by 2045, with an aim for a 75 per cent reduction in carbon emissions in the district by 2030.
6. At Full Council on 12 February 2020, whereby Council approved its budget for 2020/21, a revenue budget 'Community Climate Initiatives' bid was approved, for support for community initiatives to help tackle climate change, for the one-off sum of £50,000.
7. During 2020/21 many officers were refocused to support the council's Covid-19 response. This led to a temporary pause of this work.

Proposed Policy and Guidelines

8. The proposed CAF policy is attached at **Appendix A**
9. One of the central threads of the CAF is for it to invite applications from residents and groups at the beginning of their climate journey and encourage those who have not undertaken projects with this focus before, to do so. The intention is to provide an extremely accessible, inclusive fund. For example, the criteria do not require applicants to outline a project's proposed carbon emission savings, in order to avoid any barriers to application. For more established groups, the guidelines ask they support and encourage potential new members.
10. Key to this fund is the desired outcome for residents and communities to have an increased awareness and knowledge of the climate emergency through and after implementation of a project. For example, if a project application was received for the building of a community wildflower garden, the project should include signage in the local area which explains the importance of wildflowers and biodiversity to the environment.

11. The fund rules and eligibility requirements are based on the template of South Oxfordshire District Council's Councillor Community Grant Scheme, as a successful scheme which Council officers have working experience and knowledge of. Officers propose that this will help ensure the fund application and evaluation stages run as smoothly as possible.

Decision-Making Process and Approval Pathway

12. A simple scoring matrix has been created by officers in order to fairly assess applications; each criterion within the application will be marked on a scale of 0 to 2, as to how well the application meets the criteria for the fund (0 – Not at all, 1 – Satisfactory, 2 – Good). As this is a new fund and application interest is unknown, a third point will be used and awarded for 'very good/excellent' if we receive a significant number of applications and need an extra element to help decision making. The proposed scoring matrix is attached at **Appendix B**.

13. The Community Enablement team will check eligibility of the applications and if eligible, Insight and Policy officers will prepare a short summary of the application, including key information from the application, concerns and recommended scoring to the Insight and Policy Manager and Head of Policy and Programmes. The Head of Policy and Programmes will then make award decisions in consultation with the relevant cabinet members for Climate and Community Enablement, Cllr. Catherine Webber and Cllr. Bethia Thomas.

14. A timeline for the CAF launch and subsequent stages of evaluation, decision-making and awarding is attached at **Appendix C**. Officers propose the scheme to open in March 2022.

Climate and ecological impact implications

15. This fund addresses the climate emergency by seeking to fund projects which actively tackle climate change and/or enhance biodiversity across the Vale. The fund will support the Council to achieve their climate emergency targets and aspirations set out in the Corporate Plan 2020-24

Financial Implications

16. At Full Council on 12 February 2020, whereby Council approved its budget for 2020/21, a revenue budget 'Community Climate Initiatives' bid was approved, for support for community initiatives to help tackle climate change, for the one-off sum of £50,000.

17. As confirmed at Council 12 February 2020, this is a one-off fund and it will be open for one round, closing six weeks later. Any CAF budget not awarded will return to the council's general reserves.

Legal Implications

18. None

Risks

19. None

Other Implications

20. None

Conclusion

21. Launch of a CAF highlights to Vale residents the Council's commitment to our climate emergency targets and recognises the importance of a shared responsibility to protect the planet.
22. It is envisaged that the CAF will inspire and enable groups across the Vale to take climate action and demonstrates the Council's resolution to building lasting partnerships and networks to meet the climate challenge.
23. The approach taken by officers when scoping and creating the policy and guidelines for this fund, was one of accessibility and inclusivity, in order to capture a wide range of applications from across the Vale, regardless of where groups and residents are currently at on their climate action journey.

Appendices

- Climate Action Fund Policy and Guidelines – Appendix A
- Climate Action Fund – Scoring Matrix – Appendix B
- Timeline – Climate Action Fund – Appendix C