

**COMMUNITY, SAFETY AND WELLBEING / FINANCE AND CORPORATE PORTFOLIO
HOLDERS DECISION – 27 OCTOBER 2023**

CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND (COMF)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to utilise the remaining Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), allocated to the Council by the Government during the Covid pandemic. The sum that the Council is holding is £213,916.
- 1.2 The Government has written to all Councils confirming that they are able to utilise unspent grant on a wide number of public health actions, including community projects/ interventions to tackle health inequalities which have been caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. There is an expectation that the Director of Public Health (Hampshire County Council) will be made aware of and be satisfied with any proposals that come forward.
- 1.3 The Director of Public Health has been appraised of the proposals the subject of this report and has confirmed his support for them.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 During the Pandemic, all local authorities were awarded grant funding by the Government, to assist with test, trace and contain activity. The funding was put in place to support local health initiatives associated with public health and outbreak management in tackling Covid 19, especially for the most vulnerable. New Forest District Council spent £169,000 of allocated grant on the following: -
- resources to support and advise food businesses and workplaces, to enable them to remain open and continue operating in a safe manner.
 - additional resources to assess compliance with, and where necessary, enforcement of restrictions and guidance to protect our communities and provide public reassurance.
 - for additional contact tracing and advice to the public on infection control.
- 2.2 In December 2022, the UK Health Security Agency (UK HSA) issued a letter to upper tier authorities (counties and unitaries) explaining a change in the criteria for the use of any remaining unspent monies.
- 2.3 Hampshire County Council has recently issued guidance and reminders to lower tier authorities, such as the District Council, on the criteria for spending the remaining funds, including the deadline of September 2024, in which to do so.
- 2.4 The criteria set out for spending any unused funds includes the following: -
- Public health actions addressing the impact of COVID on health outcomes and health inequalities.
 - Public health projects aimed at addressing health inequalities arising out of pandemic.

- Public health prevention projects to prevent or mitigate health inequalities, including interventions to address specific needs in the local community.

2.5 The pandemic has exacerbated health inequalities and has had a disproportionate impact on those from the most deprived communities. It has particularly affected certain groups more than others such as:

- older population,
- deprived communities,
- people with disabilities
- people from various BAEM communities

According to the British Medical Association (BMA), the mental health impact of the pandemic was most acutely felt among:

- young people,
- disabled people and
- people living in more deprived areas.

One of the key recommendations by the BMA is that efforts to recover from the impact of the pandemic should explicitly consider groups disproportionately affected by reduced access to care.

[The impact of the pandemic on population health and health inequalities \(bma.org.uk\)](https://www.bma.org.uk)

3. PROPOSAL FOR THE SPENDING OF THE REMAINING COMF FUNDS

- 3.1 Officers of the Council have been in discussion with the Director of Public Health to consider how best to utilise the remaining funds in line with the UK HSA criteria and the permitted timescales for projects to be delivered.
- 3.2 Due to the particular isolation and challenges experienced by those living in Calshot, the discussions between HCC and NFDC officers have centred around the use of these funds for the benefit of that community, with particular emphasis on the improvement of St George's Hall, which is a much-valued community asset.
- 3.3 Calshot is one of our most isolated communities with higher than average levels of deprivation. The village has no shop or other facilities. The only community asset in the village is St George's Hall. This is a basic community hall with very limited facilities. There is no footpath, cycle path or streetlights along the 2 miles of road from Calshot to the nearest shop, post office, hairdressers, local council office and primary school at Fawley. The nearest secondary school, GP and food bank is 3.5 miles away. Although there is a bus that runs once an hour, the last bus arrives at 7pm (departing Southampton at 5.45) limiting the opportunity to access evening services or support networks.
- 3.4 Calshot, which has 194 residential properties, has a much higher level of ethnic diversity than the population of the District. The military houses are home to several families from commonwealth communities. Due to the specialist skills required at the local military base, postings typically exceed the usual duration. This allows families to settle locally. Serving personnel can transfer their driving license for a UK one but this does not extend to partners, leaving families potentially further isolated with 14% of the local community not having access to a car.

- 3.5 Calshot has a higher proportion of council housing than other areas within the District with over 21% of the properties still owned by the council. The number of households which contain 4 or more people is higher than the national average. 15% of the population work part time, with 9% looking after family and 9% being long term sick. The number of people reported to be in poor health is higher than the national average.
- 3.6 A 1/3rd of the population is under 16, a group which are highlighted as being at greatest risk of the pandemic impacting on their mental health. There are two play areas for young children but nothing for older young people in the community. There are no floodlit facilities in the community to support them staying active in the dark evenings.
- 3.7 The Community Hub Food Larder, led by Citizen's Advice, provides regular support for up to 30 households, with Council Officers providing 'wrap around' advice on more complex issues. This is made possible through the use of St George's Hall.

4. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR ST. GEORGES HALL

- 4.1 St George's Hall is a community asset, which is greatly valued locally. Work between the District Council, Fawley Parish Council and the MOD Army Welfare Team has seen the facility being increasingly utilised for the benefit of the community. This has resulted in the community becoming more connected helping to reduce the sense of isolation in this remote area.
- 4.2 The Hall was built in 1913, with the surrounding area playing a major role in both World Wars. The Hall consists of a larger room with a number of smaller rooms, including a kitchen, 2 toilets and 2 small storage areas. It has a separate but connected small unconsecrated Chaplain's Room, which has the character of a small chapel. The Chaplain's Room has not been under utilised for many years.
- 4.3 The Hall's current layout, whilst functional, does not facilitate greater use beyond a few established, yet much needed uses, including the provision of a weekly food larder (which operates from the exterior of the property) and a weekly Youth Club for 8-16 year olds organised by Fawley Parish Council. The Youth Club booking requires equipment and material to be physically transported to the site from Fawley as there is limited storage area within the Hall itself. The main room is particularly compromised by its layout and the Chaplain's Room is largely unused, due to it being distinctly separated from the remainder of the building and is seen as an area where access is not encouraged.
- 4.4 Much greater use could be made of the Hall if its layout was altered, and the building upgraded. The Council receives many enquiries about potential greater use of the Hall, which unfortunately have to be turned down as its current layout and lack of facilities does not lend itself to greater use.
- 4.5 There is scope for significant improvements to be made to the Hall which could be transformative for the local community if a vibrant and inviting hub is created, providing a facility for all the community to enjoy, with significantly greater use than that which currently exists.
- 4.6 The community would like to see the Hall improved and for its use to be maximised. The Hall has a small garden attached to it and the community have expressed an interest in using this for nature projects and grow and eat projects. The open space in front of the Hall is currently unused and often attracts fly tipping. The community have

expressed an interest in improving the space to increase opportunities for both older and young people to be more active. The internal facilities, including an upgraded kitchen, could see 'cooking on a budget' classes and greater community events taking place.

- 4.7 Utilising the remaining COMF funds towards this project could see the layout of the hall significantly improved, with a reconfiguration of the main room and upgraded kitchen and DDA accessible toilets. The Chaplain's Room could be significantly improved to become a much more accessible location for greater support services to be provided to the local community which often rely on a private place being available for discussions to take place. Depending on the extent of the overall available finances, there may be scope for some outside works to be considered as part of the overall improvement works, especially for the benefit for older children to engage in play/sport. Appendix 1 sets out the potential different phases of the project. Phases could only be undertaken if and when funding streams allow, including whether other bids (for wider funding) are successful (see further Financial Implications Section below).
- 4.8 Without the availability of potential funds to bring about improvements, the status quo for this community is likely to remain for the foreseeable future. The scope to utilise remaining COMF funding to contribute to this project has brought about an opportunity to significantly improve the lives of the community of Calshot and narrow the health inequalities that are so prevalent in this location. The Director of Public Health at Hampshire County Council has given his support for the use of the remaining Covid funds for the benefit of Calshot. He is keen to ensure that the upgrades to St George's Hall include measures to control infections through improved toilet facilities, and for greater use of the building for community clinics, for example.
- 4.9 Subject to the approval of the Portfolio Holders, there is a need to move quickly on the project to ensure that any remaining Covid funds are spent within the next year. Officers consider this is achievable but does require significant momentum over the coming months to deliver this project, albeit it will be done in phases taking into account available funds (see Section 5 below).

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council currently holds £213,916 of remaining Covid grant funds originally allocated by the Government during the Pandemic.
- 5.2 Initial costings for a project of this nature exceeds the available Covid funds (set out in this report), The estimated cost of the works in respect of Phase 1 alone is £250,000 plus VAT, with fees and on-costs of £25k. It is proposed therefore, in addition to the use of the Covid funds, that additional contributory funds be pursued as set out in paragraph 5.3 below to enable as much as possible of Phase 1 and 2 to be done. Price estimates for Phase 2 are awaited but that need not hold up a decision in respect of the principle of utilising the remaining Covid funds towards this project. Phases will only be undertaken if funding is available.
- 5.3 For some time now, there has been an expectation that an application for funds to assist with improving the Hall and immediate environment would be made to the New Forest Rural England Prosperity Fund Community Infrastructure Grant (the Rural Fund) and this will still be advancing in time for the deadline of 31 October 2023. That fund, however, is limited in size (the total available in the Rural Fund pot for community projects, stands at £216K) and there are likely to be a number of other

applications that will be submitted for that particular fund. Even if the St George's Hall application to the Rural Fund is successful, it will be necessary to combine this with the Covid funds, in order to carry out the works outlined in this report. As stated above, Phases will only be advanced if and when funding is confirmed.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Using the remaining Covid funds towards a project for the benefit of Calshot, along with the possibility of obtaining further funding from the New Forest Rural England Prosperity Fund Community Infrastructure Grant, to support the proposals outlined in this report, brings about a once in a generation opportunity to make a transformative difference to the local community who live in this isolated part of the District.
- 6.2 There are strict criteria that apply to the spending of the remaining Covid funds and a short deadline for this to happen. In line with the Government's expectation, the proposals set out in this report have the support of the Director of Public Health.
- 6.3 Engagement work that has been on-going with the Community for some time has revealed a great desire on their part to see improvements being made to St George's Hall and its surrounding area. There is a particular wish to see use of the Hall being maximised for the benefit of the community, bringing a greater sense of cohesion and togetherness for a community that continues to experience high levels of deprivation and associated challenges.

7. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE PROJECT

- 7.1 A dedicated multi-disciplinary Officer Group has been set up, led by the Strategic Director of Housing, Communities and Governance, to consider funding opportunities and to coordinate and deliver this project, if approved.
- 7.2 It is also proposed to set up a Member Board to include the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing and the Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder, the local ward Members and a member representative of Fawley Parish Council. It is proposed that this Member Board will meet bi-monthly (i.e. every 2 months) to ensure the necessary progress is made and that the project is delivered in line with the community's expectations.
- 7.3 As the projects gets underway, there will be continuing engagement with the local community to ensure that their needs and views are taken on board.

8. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The proposals set out in this report will have a positive impact on crime and disorder issues in the locality. There will be a renewed focus on the benefits that come with having a fully utilised community hall, which the whole community can enjoy and look after. There will be more activities for the community to do, including sports, which will have a positive impact.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Hall has special local status as an asset of interest by the NPA, who are keen to work with the District and the community to improve the environment in this part of the District. The proposed works will contribute significantly to this aim.

10. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There will be significant positive equality and diversity implications if the proposals, the subject of this report, are approved. This is a community which has higher than average levels of deprivation, health and other inequalities; these being set on within the report.
- 10.2 The proposals, if implemented, will result in greater use of this important community asset by the local community. Children of all ages will have somewhere to play and do sports, hold their youth clubs, along with a greater number of community events taking place in this important facility.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That the Portfolio Holders approve the allocation of remaining COMF Covid funds for the project set out in the report.

12. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' ENDORSEMENT

We agree to the recommendation in this report.

Sign: CLLR DAN POOLE

Date: 27 October 2023

CLLR JEREMY HERON

Date: 26 October 2023

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Background Papers:

[BMA Report](#)
[Published documents](#)

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 27 October 2023
Last date for Call-In – 3 November 2023