

Essex County Council VCS COVID Response Fund Guidance Notes

1.0 Introduction

Essex County Council (ECC) has received funding from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to support costs associated with ongoing public health and outbreak management costs of tackling COVID.

The COVID pandemic has continued to provide challenges to Essex communities and statutory services. The emergence of a new COVID variant in late 2020, which transmits up to 70% faster than the original strain, means that in recent months Essex communities have seen some of the highest levels of COVID infection in the country. This has led to increased demand on voluntary and community sector services and on health services.

Throughout the pandemic local communities have stepped up to provide support that has ensured communities have stayed connected, been able to self-isolate as required and provided first line, self-organised community support to those in need.

Funding is therefore allocated from COMF to provide the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) with financial support to help respond to and contain the further spread of COVID.

This fund will make available £1,000,000 to support medium-sized and above VCS organisations and statutory services delivering frontline services contributing to the reduction in the R number in Essex that have been impacted by COVID-19.

2.0 Fund Administration

The fund is administered by Essex County Council.

Enquiries about this funding can be directed to:

Officer Name: Matthew Welsh, Lead for Strengthening Communities

Email: comf.grants@essex.gov.uk

3.0 Eligibility of Funding

The purpose of this funding is to support medium-sized and above VCS organisations delivering frontline services that have been impacted by COVID-19 to help in their efforts to deliver services that reduce the R number in Essex. This includes those experiencing increased demand for support, those adapting their existing services and those that have lost traded income as a result of the ongoing COVID 19 Pandemic.

Applications are also welcome from statutory organisations delivering frontline health and wellbeing related services impacted by COVID-19.

Grants of up to £50,000 are available to support activities that are essential to delivering frontline services in response to COVID-19. Funding can be used for (but are not limited to):

- Continuing to deliver or enhancing activity responding to the immediate challenges our communities are facing due to COVID-19
- Delivering new activity that responds to community needs as a result of COVID-19. Though these activities should not cause further dependencies in the system.
- Delivering activity to support people to stay safe and isolate to suppress the virus (i.e. Delivery of essentials for those in self-isolation)
- Community Transport
- Activities to enable/encourage greater access to vaccinations
- Activities that reduces inequalities accessing vaccinations
- Community-based support for those disproportionately impacted (such as the BAME population)
- Enhanced communication and marketing (e.g. towards hard-to-reach groups and other localised messaging).
- Community resilience activities

Eligible Spend:

- Staff costs
- Revenue costs
- Capital costs (if it can be evidenced that they are required within the context of your COVID response)
- Volunteering costs

Outcomes:

All applications must demonstrate how they can contribute to the reduction of the R number in Essex by meeting one or more of these outcomes:

- Reducing transmission of the virus
- Enabling people to be safe and isolate
- Reducing barriers to vaccinations

3.1 Who is funded?

Applications are invited from medium-sized and above VCS bodies which are within the administrative area of Essex County Council (excluding Southend and Thurrock). For the purpose of this grants programme, medium-sized organisations are defined as one that has an income of £200,000 and above per annum.

Statutory organisations delivering frontline health and wellbeing related services impacted by COVID-19 are also eligible to apply for funding.

Please note that should you not meet these requirements, there are other funding programmes currently open to support smaller VCS organisations with COVID response activities:

The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) Small grants programme for Mutual aid and community groups:

- Grants of up to £5,000 to support mutual aid groups and community groups to deliver COVID response activities
- More information is available at: <http://www.ealc.gov.uk/>

The Essex Community Foundation (ECF) COVID Response grants programme:

- Grants of up to £20,000 to support voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises that are experiencing increased demand or adapting their existing services as a result of the ongoing COVID 19 Pandemic
- More information is available at: <https://www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk/>

Eligible bodies include:

- Registered charities
- Social Enterprises
- CIC's
- Statutory organisations delivering frontline health and wellbeing activities

4.0 Grant Awards

- Grants of up to £50,000 are available and can support both capital and revenue costs.
- Larger grants may be considered in exceptional circumstances if a demonstratable case can be put forward of the impact that this will have on your COVID-19 response on the frontline.
- This is a rolling programme. The fund will close on 30 June 2021 or when all funds are allocated – whichever comes first.
- Awards will be made on a rolling basis with a Funding Panel sitting weekly to make decisions. Successful applicants will be notified, and grants awarded as quickly as possible.
- Applications will be considered on how well they can evidence the demand for the services on the frontline to support communities through the COVID-19 crisis and how activities meet the outcomes of the programme.
- The Funding Panel will reserve the right to use their sole discretion when assessing any grant applications for acceptance. Applications may be rejected, or grants awarded at a lesser level than applied for.

4.1 Validity of Funding

Funding should be spent by the end of the 2021/22 financial year. However, we are seeking to fund projects and activity that responds to urgent needs in communities and as such would expect activities to begin ASAP or already be in delivery.

If for any reason the project does not come to fruition or funds cannot be spent, the Funding Officer should be notified, and funds returned to Essex County Council.

Essex County Council will reserve the right to claw back all or partial funding owing to the performance of the project delivery and benefits realisation.

5.0 Fund Administration

5.1 Demonstration of Need

Applicants must:

- Demonstrate evidence of how their activity provides frontline support to communities in response to the COVID crisis
- Demonstrate clear evidence of demand for their support/services that their activities meet local need in response to the COVID crisis
- Demonstrate how their activities meet one or more of the programme outcomes

5.2 Financials

Applicants must:

- Declare if you are receiving any other financial contributions from other public bodies in relation to COVID (for example CEV funding from your local district council to support clinically extremely vulnerable residents to shield)
- Declare if you have any match funding or in-kind support for your activity/project
- Demonstrate financial viability and whole life costs / on-going revenue costs.
- Be transparent in their amount of unrestricted reserves, and such reserves should be fully justified in formally ratified reserves policy.
- Be fully transparent on the total project costs and where funding will be allocated.
- Applicants must submit latest accounts, including the balance sheet and reserves.

5.3 Project monitoring

To ensure that grant funding is being spent due diligently, ECC will seek monthly project monitoring reports which is required to be submitted to the Funding Officer.

ECC will work with the grant holder to agree reporting metrics.

ECC may request a full audit of the projects accounts and gain financial assurance.

5.4 Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010 states that public authorities must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and for them to consider how their policies or decisions affect people who have protected characteristics under The Act.

These protected characteristics are:

- Age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief, and marriage and civil partnership.

Essex County Council is committed to the positive advancement of equality, fostering good relations between different groups and tackling unlawful discrimination.

When considering applications organisations should consider that their projects and activities will help advance the following of the Public Sector Equality Duty and The Act, the aims being:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation i.e. projects that seek to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Advancing equality of opportunity i.e. projects that provide opportunities to those with protected characteristics
- Fostering good relations i.e. projects that encourage those with protected characteristics to participate in public life, bringing communities together to share commonalities and promote community cohesion and inclusion.

5.5 Timescales and Application Process

This is a rolling programme and applications can be submitted at any time prior to the deadline of 23.59 on 30 June 2021.

The Funding Panel will meet weekly during this period to make decisions on applications submitted during the week prior.

Successful applicants will be notified by email as soon as a decision is made by the panel and will be required to agree to terms and conditions set out in a grant agreement set by ECC.

ECC reserves the right to change timescales if circumstances change. Late Applications will not be accepted.

Supporting Documentation:

Please note that you will need to provide the following:

- Copy of your latest accounts, including the balance sheet and reserves.
- Copy of your safeguarding policy
- Copy of your volunteering policy
- Copy of insurance policy

PLEASE NOTE: Failure to fully complete applications or supply required documentation may make your application null and void.

Completed applications are to be returned to Essex County Council. Applications should be emailed to the Funding Officer using the details on **page 1** of this document.

5.6 Award Process

The following principles apply in terms of reviewing applications and awarding grants:

- The Funding Officer ensures all applications meet the criteria and all necessary documents are submitted with the application and a summary sheet is prepared for weekly Award Panels.
- The Funding Officer will check bank details, charity/organisational status with relevant body or constitution
- Applications are presented to the Funding Panel Members categorised in four geographic areas of Essex.
- The Funding Panel is chaired by the Head of Strengthening Communities and consists of the Funding Officer, Commissioners from Adult Social Care and Children and Families and a Finance representative. The Panel's remit will be to ensure that applications are reviewed, and funding meets the criteria set by ECC. All recommendations by the panel will be approved by the Director of Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities
- The decision of the Award Panel is final.
- All grants are endeavoured to be awarded within one month of a decision