

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 20 November 2023

Report Title

Covid Recovery Fund

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report proposes further use of the Council's Covid Recovery Fund reserve. At present, taking into account approved use for 2023/24 to support the Council's revenue investments, the reserve has a remaining balance of £0.8m. This report proposes two further uses of the fund, to provide support with a local charity and to fund the provision of financial support to assist residents impacted by Storm Babet.

The first proposal is for an allocation of monies from the Covid Recovery Fund to support the local charity, Rotherham Abuse and Counselling Services (RothACS) following an unsuccessful bid for continued funding from the Ministry of Justice.

The funding application sought to secure continued funding for the remainder of the current financial year and the 2024/25 financial year, with a total value of £210k. Following the unsuccessful bid, RothACS has been able to secure funding for this financial year of around £40k, leaving an in-year shortfall of £40k for the current financial year and circa £130k for the 2024/25 financial year.

The RothACS service provides free specialist counselling to anyone over the age of 13 who has experienced trauma and abuse, including domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation or child sexual abuse. The loss of funding to the

service will result in a direct impact for service users, with a loss of 36 counselling sessions per week.

Following the flooding event within the borough on the 21st October 2023 (Storm Babet) and its significant impact on a number of households, the Council is providing some immediate financial support to those residents most impacted. This is in the form of a £350 flood support payment for properties flooded or where the property was unliveable for a period of time as a result of this flood incident.

In addition, the Council will also be making a £20k contribution to the South Yorkshire Community Foundation Appeal that has been set up to provide support to residents across the region that have been impacted by Storm Babet.

Recommendations

That Cabinet agree that:

1. A funding allocation of £170k is provided from the Covid Recovery Fund, via a grant agreement, to support RothACS for the remainder of the 2023-2024 financial year and the full 2024-2025 financial year.
2. A funding allocation of up to £120k is provided from the Covid Recovery Fund to support the Council's £350 flood support payments along with a £20k contribution to the South Yorkshire Community Foundation (SYCF) Appeal.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Equality Impact Screening
Appendix 2 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Covid Recovery Grant

1. Background

- 1.1 Rotherham Abuse and Counselling Service (RothACS) is a charity and has been providing free specialist counselling to survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, CSE and CSA since 2005. Originally a women's only service, the service today provides support to anyone aged 13 and above who has suffered domestic or sexual abuse. Over the last 12 months RothACS has had contact with a total of 1,203 Rotherham residents. This could be any contact from signposts to services, assessments, pre-counselling support or counselling and group work. A total of 860 assessments and 2,787 counselling sessions were attended during this period. Of those clients 80% reported an increase in their mental health and wellbeing and a total of 77% reported an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence.
- 1.2 RothACS currently have 378 adults and children waiting for counselling. Of those, 110 are waiting to be assessed and 268 have been assessed and are waiting for counselling. The Service had been able to provide approximately 100 sessions per week through both contracted and bank counsellors however, following the reduction in funding for this current financial year, this has reduced to 65. The additional funding from the Council for the remainder of this financial year will therefore provide for a further 35 sessions per week.
- 1.3 On the 21 October 2023 Storm Babet caused significant flooding across a number of properties within the borough, leaving a large number of properties unliveable for a period of time. As a result of this the Council has developed a package of financial assistance to these households, in the form of a grant payment and a contribution towards the South Yorkshire Community Foundation (SYCF) Appeal.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 **Rotherham Abuse and Counselling Service**
RothACS has been funded by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Rape and Sexual Assault Support fund since 2019. However, in the most recent round of funding, RothACS was the only South Yorkshire bidder not to receive funding from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The bid value was £210k and would have taken effect from the 1 August 2023 to 31 March 2025. This represents 30% of the funding for RothACS and equated to £80k for the remainder of 2023/24 and £130k for the financial year 2024-25. Despite approaches to the MoJ, local organisations were unable to influence the outcome of the funding awards. The impact of the loss of this funding stream translated to the loss of 40 contracted staff counselling hours and 14 bank staff per week, which equates to 36 counselling sessions per week. In addition, 6 administration and management hours were lost.
- 2.2 In response to the loss of funding, RothACS has had to reduce the amount of counselling sessions available, and this has led to increases in waiting times. The RothACS service has been working with local funding streams in order

to plug the gap. To date RothACS has been successful in securing £30k for the current financial year linked to the Serious Violence Duty funding held by the Police and Crime Commissioner and in addition has a further bid in with the Police and Crime Commissioner for £10k. This leaves a potential total remaining shortfall of £170k, which equates to a £40k for the current financial year and a further £130k for the next financial year.

2.3 RothACS is in receipt of Council funding for specific contracted services both in relation to support for Child in Need cases, which equates to £10k per annum and support for victims of Child Sexual Exploitation, which equates to £45k per annum. In addition, the service provides for Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs) however this is not funded by the Council directly.

2.4 **Flood Support Payments and Council Tax Relief**

Following the flooding event within the borough on the 21 October 2023 and its significant impact on a number of households, the Council is providing some immediate financial support to those residents most impacted. The Council's financial support to help residents impacted by Storm Babet will include;

- a £350 grant direct to each flooded household;
- a promise that those households do not have to pay any council tax for the period from 21 October until at least the end of March 2024.

2.5 The Council holds a list of properties that it is aware were flooded or where the property was unliveable for a period of time as a result of this flood incident. For these properties, where the Council holds the residents banking details through Council Tax Direct Debits, payments will be made automatically. If the Council does not hold banking details then residents are asked to register their details to allow payment to be made via a secure online form. At present it is expected that around 189 properties will be provided with this financial assistance based on the criteria outlined above, however, this is subject to change as further information becomes available. Based on these numbers the grant support will cost the Council an estimated £66,150 and this will be funded from the Covid Recovery Fund reserve. In order to ensure that there is sufficient cover within the fund for new properties to be identified, an allocation of £100k is sought. The cost of the Council Tax Relief will be factored into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy once confirmed, it will take longer to calculate as each property and residents' case needs to be worked through in detail.

2.6 At the time of this Cabinet report being finalised the Council had paid 116 of the 189 properties that are currently expected to receive the support. These have been able to be processed at pace as the Council held banking details for these residents. A further 22 properties have submitted their banking information via the Council's online form and will have their payments processed. The Council will work to ensure that the remaining properties and any that are newly identified received this financial support.

- 2.7 The Council will also be making a £20k contribution to the South Yorkshire Community Foundation (SYCF) Appeal that has been set up to provide support to residents across the region that have been impacted by Storm Babet, via a Just Giving account. This contribution will be funded from the Council's Covid Recovery Fund and by doing this the SYCF will match the Council's contribution into the appeal fund. It is for the SYCF to decide how the fund will be used in its entirety; however, it has already been agreed that part of the fund will be used to top up the Council's grant payments of £350 by a further £150. So, residents in properties supported by the Council's scheme will receive a total payment of £500.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 For the proposed support to RothACS, as detailed above, alternative funding options have been considered locally. This has led to a successful bid for a further £30k with a further £10k bid placed. The option not to provide further funding has been considered however as highlighted within the body of this report that will lead to a loss of 35 counselling sessions per week and a corresponding increase in waiting times. Accepting the vital nature of these services, this is not the recommended option. However, should this option be selected, the Council would endeavour to support RothACS in securing alternative funding. RothACS have however already conducted extensive work to seek additional funding and even if sources were identified, there would be an inevitable delay as well as risks in terms of achieving a positive outcome which will inevitably impact victims and survivors.
- 3.2 The option to provide funding is the preferred option. Sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse remain key priorities across the range of partnerships including the Safer Rotherham Partnership, the Safeguarding Childrens Partnership and the Safeguarding Adults Board which further supports the need to support this key local service. As noted elsewhere within the report the funding will buy an additional 35 counselling session per week for the remainder of the current financial year, rising to 100 per week in the next financial year which will ensure waiting times are managed effectively and the provision of timely support to those who need it. Included within this option is a commitment to work with RothACS to identify sustainable funding solution to ensure sustainability over the long term.
- 3.3 Regarding the financial support package for properties impacted by the flooding caused by Storm Babet, the Council is already taking active steps to deliver this package of support. Given the scale of the flooding, the Council needed to take action ahead of any Cabinet report.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 For the proposed support to RothACS. Consultation has taken place with the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner, the provider and relevant Council Officers.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 For the proposed support to RothACS, subject to approval, implementation will be immediate and will be overseen by the Assistant Director for Community Safety and Street Scene.
- 5.2 As noted within the body of the report, the Council will continue to work with RothACS during this year and next in order to identify opportunities to support the long term sustainability of the service.
- 5.3 Regarding the financial assistance for those impacted by Storm Babet the package of support is already being implemented and will be delivered at pace to ensure support is provided as quickly as possible to those in need.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The recommendations detailed in this report proposed to allocate the monies via a grant agreement. Grants fall outside the scope of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended), and therefore there are no direct procurement implications.
- 6.2 The payment to RothACS will be funded by the Covid Recovery Fund and be paid as a grant. A grant agreement will be required to ensure funding is used as proposed.
- 6.3 The grant payments as part of the financial assistance to support those impacted by Storm Babet, £100k allocated for the £350 grant payments and £20k for the South Yorkshire Community Foundation (SYCF) Appeal, will be funded by the Covid Recovery Fund. If these proposed allocations are used in full it will leave a remaining balance in the Covid Recovery Fund reserve of £0.5m.
- 6.4 There are no procurement implications in the provision of grants to the public as these fall outside the scope of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 In respect of the grant to RothACS, taking into account the nature of the services provided, as set out in the body of the report, and as a Charity, they are not considered to be an enterprise engaged in economic activity. Further the grant does not confer any economic advantage on the recipient, therefore, this grant is not considered a subsidy in terms of subsidy control. The grant agreement will ensure that the funding is ring fenced to the activities described in the report.
- 7.2 In respect of the grant funding to individuals affected by Storm Babet and the South Yorkshire Community Fund, the Council has the ability to provide support for people in need through various provisions including S. 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (c. 20) (Local authority's general power of competence); S. 17 of the Children Act 1989 (c. 41) (Provision of services for children in need, their families and others) among other provisions.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The service is specifically designed to support those impacted by sexual or domestic violence and will therefore have a direct impact on young people and vulnerable adults. The service provides counselling support sessions which are trauma informed and seek to improve a range of outcomes for individual service users.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 As this decision relates to the provision of grant funding, it will be for the provider to ensure delivery is delivered appropriately and in line with maximising equalities.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 No direct impacts have been identified as this decision relates to the provision of grant funding.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 As the recommended option is to fund the provision of service which would otherwise be lost, this will ensure partners and those individuals they are working with are able to continue to access vital support which will provide positive benefits to a range of partner organisations. As noted within the body of this report, the service is aligned with key areas of local priority and therefore there is a recognised need for this provision, and it is aligned to the strategic intent set by the various partnerships.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 There are risks associated with the delivery, primarily issues such as the ability to provide staffing provision and to ensure fairness in access to services. These risks will be identified and mitigated through the subsequent grant agreement to be developed.

14. Accountable Officers

Sam Barstow, Assistant Director Community Safety and Street Scene
Rob Mahon, Assistant Director Financial Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	06/11/23
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	2/11/23
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	31/10/23

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