

HITCHIN COMMITTEE
March 1st - 2022

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

REPORT OF: THE POLICY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COUNCIL OBJECTIVES: BUILD THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To advise the Members on the current expenditure and balances of the Committee Grant budgets.
- 1.2 To bring to the Members' attention recent requests received for Committee grant funding, made by community groups and local organisations.
- 1.3 To advise of the activities and schemes with which the Community Engagement officers have been involved in.
- 1.4 To bring to the Members' attention some important community-based activities that will take place during the next few months.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee be recommended to consider allocating funding from their discretionary community budget towards the projects below.
- 2.2 **£2,000** to Goslings Playgroup for improving their outside play area as outlined in paragraph 8.1.1 of the officer's report.
- 2.3 **£1,115** to Imagination Dance for supporting their classes for children and young people with additional needs as outlined in paragraph 8.1.2 of the officer's report.
- 2.4 **£2,480** to Red Media Love for supporting the organising of a visual and audio exhibition around the second generation of south Asians who grew up in Hitchin and Letchworth as outlined in paragraph 8.1.3 of the officer's report.
- 2.5 **£1,100** to Strathmore Fun Club for purchasing additional toys, equipment, and materials to cover the cost of a programme of events and activities as outlined in paragraph 8.1.4 of the officer's report.

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| 2.6 | £580 to Third Hitchin Scouts for the purchase of six kitchen tents used to prepare meals by the young people at camps and day activities as outlined in paragraph 8.1.5 of the officer's report. |
| 2.7 | That the Committee be recommended to endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin. |

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.
- 3.2 This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of budgets. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no alternative options being proposed other than those detailed within the text of this report. However, in the course of debate at committee, Members may wish to comment and offer additional views on any of the items included within this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Consultation with Members has occurred in connection with the allocation of funds for Community Projects.
- 5.2 Consultation with the respective officers and external bodies/groups has taken place regarding funding proposals for Committee Funds.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 With reference to the Council's Constitution, Section 9.3 Area Committees will include budgets for the purpose of providing grants and discretionary budgets that may be used within the area of the Committee for economic, social and environmental well-being. Under the current grant criteria there is no upper limit outlined for the amount of grant funding to be allocated which can be decided at the Committee's discretion.
- 7.2 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix A - Hitchin Area Committee budget sheet 2021-22, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for 2021/22. The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial years, including balances and past expenditure.

8. **RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS** - Councillors are at liberty to consider any amount requested in a grant application as long as the Hitchin area committee has sufficient funds in the 2021/2022 budget.

8.1 **Grant Applications**

8.1.1

Applicant	Goslings Playgroup
Project	Improving their outside play area
Sum requested	£2,000
Total project cost	£2,000
Previous support	None
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities

Goslings Playgroup would spend the grant on improving their outside play area. They would like to purchase a wooden playhouse that would be used by children who wish to be outside but who wish to have quiet time reading or sitting and watching their peers play. It will help around 50 children who are predominantly residents of Hitchin, every year. They will advertise to existing parents and to the wider community to raise awareness of the improvements made. They have looked at various wooden playhouses available and have sourced one that would be appropriate for their young users.

During the pandemic they have learnt how important it is to be able to spend time outdoors. Covid-19 does not spread as well in the open air and schools and nurseries have aimed to spend as much time outdoors as possible. Children naturally enjoy being outside so giving them a richer experience in the outdoor play area will only improve and extend the time they are playing outside which in the current climate is the safest environment for them and the wider community.

Goslings have been making an operational loss year on year. They are finding that numbers interested in the Playgroup are steadily decreasing year on year. They are currently working with a media trust volunteer to create a new user-friendly reactive website to clearly communicate what the playgroup can offer. They are also creating a marketing subcommittee to plan ways to engage their audience and generate more awareness of Goslings throughout the local community.

Fundraising has been tough due to Covid and not being able to run their usual in person events. They have formed a subcommittee also for fundraising and are looking at effective ways to do this digitally and also via in person as restrictions are now easing.

8.1.2

Applicant	Imagination Dance CIC
Project	Classes for children and young people with additional needs.
Sum requested	£1,115

Total project cost	£1,505
Match funding	£350 Christmas Raffle
Previous support	None
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities

They intend to spend the funding on financially supporting their classes for children and young people with additional needs. The funding will be used for venue hire of Westmill Community Centre, as well as covering the costs of their teaching staff. Their class numbers have dropped due to COVID-19, and this funding will help the classes to continue in the Summer Term without the fear of stopping or an increase in price for participants. They are demonstrating value for money as they are asking for a grant total to cover the overheads of the classes, rather than asking for extensive funds. Their classes are extremely important to their participants and their families – one of their parents stated that the classes have led to an increase in their daughter’s “physical skills, fitness, levels of anxiety, acceptance of herself”. Having to stop the classes due to funds after the global pandemic would be detrimental to their participants physical and mental wellbeing, as well as leaving them with the potential to become isolated and feeling excluded in society.

As previously mentioned, their classes are for children and young people with suspected or diagnosed additional needs. This is the main group who will benefit from their activity; however, their families and carers will also benefit through a time of respite whilst their child is at the class. Parents/carers can also form connections with other parents/carers in similar positions, forming a support group and encouraging them to become less isolated. Their classes will not only improve their physical health by raising levels of endurance and improving balance; co-ordination and flexibility, but the classes will also improve mental wellbeing by improving self-confidence; creativity; social skills and self-acceptance. The greater community in North Hertfordshire will also benefit from this activity as it will raise levels of inclusion in the community.

They will look to raise the number to at least 8-10 participants in both their classes, which will total the participants benefiting to approximately sixteen. If they assume that each participant has a minimum of one parent present in their lives, this adds another sixteen people benefiting. With good advertising and marketing, they look to benefit a conservative estimate of thirty-two people. These families would most likely be based in the district of Hitchin but may also travel from the Letchworth and Baldock & Districts.

They will advertise their classes through social media – on Facebook pages, using hashtags and ‘tagging’ certain North Hertfordshire pages. They will also print some hard-copy flyers and posters to display at Westmill Community Centre and around Hitchin and surrounding areas. To reach a more targeted audience, they will contact local disability and additional needs groups and ask if they are happy to share their classes amongst their families. They also have links with local magazines where they can display printed advertisements. In addition to this, they also have a link with the local school sports’ co-ordinator who is happy to share their work with all the primary, secondary and SEND schools in the area. Their contacts with the Healthy Hub will also allow them to spread the word of their classes to a further reach.

They strive to make sure that everyone, no matter their age; disability or background, has the opportunity to take part in dance and movement. Their classes are open to all

those with additional needs – with or without a diagnosis, which raises the Council’s profile as a welcoming and inclusive Council.

Their project also helps to build thriving and resilient communities, as without their classes helping to improve the confidence and self-belief of young people with additional needs, they may feel they cannot strive to achieve more in life and may sit in the background as that is what an un-inclusive environment encourages them to do. By attending their classes, young people with additional needs can look to thrive in society – physically, socially, and creatively.

Their project also fulfils two of the key priority areas of North Hertfordshire Council Vision and Priorities 2022-2027. The first is ‘people first’ – which their project meets by improving the lives of people who may not have been offered the chance to take part in activities previously. The other key priority they meet is ‘a brighter future together’.

8.1.3

Applicant Project	Red Media Love CIC Visual and audio exhibition around the second generation of south Asians who grew up in Hitchin and Letchworth.
Sum requested	£2,480
Total project cost	£2,980
Match funding	£500 Fund raising
Previous support	None
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities

Mandeep Kaur Nijjer, the Director of Red Media Love CIC, is planning to organise a visual and audio exhibition around the second generation of south Asians who grew up in Hitchin and Letchworth.

Mandeep is so grateful to have been born and brought up in Hitchin, but it doesn’t mean to say the south Asian community was not short of issues. Growing up in Punjabi/Sikh home was very confusing. They were conscious of not wanting to let their strict immigrant parents down whilst navigating through their western surroundings.

Mandeep would love to explore these stories through this exhibition. This is also a great way to build an archive so the wider community can educate themselves about the struggles. Being able to ‘join the dots’ by creating awareness of a communities struggles can lead to empathy and acceptance. This is what she is hoping for with her exhibition – bringing the town together to celebrate community spirit and diversity.

The south Asian community across North Herts equates to approximately 5,000+ people who have been settled in this area for over fifty years. To be able to showcase a big part of their history to the wider community would be very much valued and appreciated and will encourage footfall.

Based on her preliminary discussions with North Hertfordshire Museum, they are excited about the idea and the value it brings to the town. Therefore, they have kindly agreed to offer space in the Museum to host the exhibition from August 1st – 28th. This

is now confirmed with the team at the Museum. She is keen to hold the exhibition in August 2022 to coincide with South Asian Heritage month.

Mandeep has very strong links and connections with the south Asian community in Hitchin which will allow her to create an organic outreach campaign. To add to this, professionally she works in PR & marketing and has over twenty years of experience in running 360 marketing campaigns for global brands. She has plans to create engaging content to generate interest amongst the wider community and increase footfall to the exhibition.

Raising awareness, educating, and creating an archive of historical stories of south Asian communities in the area will benefit the forthcoming generations of young south Asian diaspora immensely as it allows them to piece together a huge puzzle of how their ancestors arrived in the UK, the struggles they faced and how they overcame this to, ultimately, provide a better life for their future families. This creates a strong sense of awareness and an empathy and acceptance towards their upbringing.

This is also a great way to focus on the second and third (millennials and Gen Z). Whilst the first generation struggled with language barriers, racism all whilst trying to uphold their religious cultural values, the generation born in the UK had their own struggles. Torn between eastern and western culture, where religion and values are a strong part of their upbringing. They rebelled, they fought, some won the battles, others didn't. Either way, the notion of being 'free' is still very much considered a western value – not south Asian. Documenting these stories will create a safe place for people to come together and share similar stories and learn.

8.1.4

Applicant	Strathmore Fun Club
Project	Purchasing additional toys, equipment, and materials to cover the cost of a programme of events and activities
Sum requested	£1,100
Total project cost	£1,300
Match funding	£200 from Membership fees
Previous support	£1,000 in 2020
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities

Strathmore Fun Club is an after school childcare facility based at Strathmore School. The club provides a safe, caring environment for children to play, explore, learn, and engage in many different activities. Their club is run for ages 4-12 years and activities are suitable for all age ranges and children's interests.

They operate from a spacious setting at Strathmore School, which has a large outside area and hall for physical play. A dining area for food and activities including Lego, art and craft, junk modelling, role play, games, etc. Together with a smaller, relaxing zone for reading and watching films.

They would like funding to help cover the cost of purchasing additional toys, equipment, and materials to cover the cost of a programme of events and activities

they have designed to keep the children engaged, fit, healthy and happy whilst attending Strathmore Fun Club.

Toys/equipment to be purchased includes a selection of outdoor toys, in particular new “wobble cars”, trikes and scooters. Outdoor toys are a real favourite with the children but consistently need replacing due to high use, wear, and tear. New sports equipment such as bats, balls and mats will be purchased for their sports month in May.

They would also like to hire some equipment such as a bouncy castle during summer term. And additional food, craft items, prizes, rewards and party items will need to be purchased for Easter celebrations, summer beach party and leavers disco.

In line with Government guidelines, to prevent the spread of Covid, protective measures will still be in place throughout the year and as a result they will need to also invest in the additional cleaning products required to practice good hygiene.

Local children and families in the North Herts area benefit from Strathmore Fun Club. As a not-for-profit club they are run purely for the benefit of the children and fees are kept low to make the club accessible for all working parents.

The club currently services forty-five local families (approx. seventy children), taking in children from Strathmore, Wilshere Dacre, Our Lady's and Samuel Lucas schools. Strathmore Fun Club setting is based at Strathmore School, Old Hale Way, Hitchin. Strathmore Fun Club is open daily during school terms between 3.15pm-6.30pm.

They have a good reputation within the local area and many enquiries come via parent referrals/recommendations. The after-school club is also advertised within the school grounds and on the school website. All details and a waiting list form can be found on Strathmore Fun Club website.

The Club project meets the Council's objective by providing childcare to the local community of Hitchin. It is a committee run, not for profit organisation, run purely for the benefit of the children and fees are kept low to make the club accessible for all working parents. It has been supported by local families for twenty-four years, has a great reputation within the local area and is Ofsted rated “Good” in all areas. Strathmore Fun Club was able to rise to the challenge of continuing to support local families during difficult times last year because of Covid. Income was affected as child numbers and hours required were lower due to more families working from home whilst at the same time costs increased with food prices, rent and insurance going up considerably. Strathmore Fun Club adapted, and in line with Government guidelines protective measures were put in place and then amended as guidelines changed. It invested in additional cleaning products, PPE and equipment required to practice good hygiene. Together with any equipment needed to help implement social distancing measures.

Strathmore Fun Club staff are well trained and have been employed at the club for several years so there is a stable team which helps the children to feel safe and secure. More than ever, it is vitally important that the children feel safe and secure in an environment which is both welcoming and fun. With extra funding Strathmore Fun Club can continue to run successfully for many more years to come. Ensuring continued work for their local staff members and providing quality, low-cost care for their local children.

8.1.5

Applicant	Third Hitchin Scouts
Project	Purchasing six kitchen tents.
Sum requested	£580
Total project cost	£1,080
Match funding	£500 Membership Fees
Previous support	2007
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities Respond to challenges to the environment

The Third Hitchin Scout group wishes to purchase six kitchen tents. These are three, meter square, single skin tents used to prepare meals by the young people at camps and day activities. Young people are shown how to erect, use, and store tents as part of their regular programme. The well-known supplier has a reputation for good quality at economic prices.

The tents will benefit all the scouts and cubs in their group. There is also potential for other scout groups to borrow these items for the same purpose. The majority of their members live in Highbury, Bearton and Walsworth Wards. They currently have sixty-eight young people in cubs and scouts.

There are five hundred cubs and scouts in the thirteen Hitchin groups. They currently have two camps booked for 2022. The first at Bromham is a district wide weekend camp for all beaver cubs and scouts in Hitchin. This is held bi-annually (Covid permitting.) The second camp for scouts is in Charmouth, Dorset. Their scouts will be camping in a farmer's field where a water supply is the only facility. Cubs usually have a weekend camp during September.

Members of their group are informed of any and all events through "Online Scout Manager" a package for parents to access information. More widely they post tweets on "Twitter" about the activities their group is involved in. They have a website available to be seen by the public.

To actively engage and support young people in their personal development they help provide young people with skills for life through camping, woodcraft, first aid, cooking, hiking, backpacking, and sports. They encourage leadership, teamwork & problem solving.

The purchase of these tents enables young Hitchin residents to experience simple living in a greenfield camp situation, but showing that life can be comfortable, healthy, fun, and in tune with nature and the environment. This is perhaps in direct contrast to modern 21st century life. Scouts believe that by preparing young people with the skills and knowledge to become valuable members of society that they will form the basis of thriving and resilient communities.

8.2 Community Team Engagement Update

8.2.1 The team have been continuing to engage and network with local community groups and initiatives. This involved:

- Supporting various local and district wide Network Groups such as Youth Action, Food Provision, Arts and Culture and Westmill.
- Assisting in the organisation of the Westmill Road Safety Event due to be held at the Westmill Community Centre on the 12th of March.
- Assisting in renewing Hitchin Town's Fairtrade status.
- Continuing to share and disseminate information on social media and to mailing lists, keeping in touch with the community, voluntary, statutory and non-statutory agencies.
- Facilitating the NHC Hitchin Councillors' Community Surgeries. January's meeting was held on Zoom, but we were able to return to Market Place for February's Community Surgery.
- Facilitating virtual meeting about The Dell at Woodside, Hitchin.
- Helping to explore the idea of a potential new Town Twinning.
- Talking with Groups to see how NHC can fit in with the upcoming Hitchin Eco Day due to take place on 14th of May.
- Working with groups to help them secure funding from the new Health Protection Board Covid Recovery Fund.
- Sharing information and assisting groups with events planned for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend.
- Assisting in the organisation of the Chair's Volunteer Awards, National Democracy/Parliament Week and holding this year's Holocaust Memorial Day Event.

8.2.2 Update on Previous Grants Awarded

- Hitchin Allotment Association
North Herts Council (NHC) awarded £800 to support the Hitchin Allotment Association with a tool loan scheme following a meeting of its Hitchin Area Committee on October 12th. An update on the tool loan scheme – 'We are buying the tools in the next month or so, so we can launch it in the early spring.' – Paul Dee – Hitchin Allotments Association.
- Ravidassia Community Centre – update from Suraj Kamal
Work is nearing completion and the Engagement team have been invited to see the site on February 25th.
- Quaker Meeting House – update from Chris Kell
An update on the Unity Sculpture project – 'Thanks to the Committee's grant, work has started on digging the foundation concrete slab for the sculpture. Here are some pictures attached. This part of the work will soon be complete and then the concrete needs time to set before installing the sculpture towards the end of February. Will keep you posted on exact timings.' - Chris Kell - North Herts Interfaith Forum (NHIFF).



8.3 Highways Matters

8.3.1 This section is included within the community update report for each committee cycle to facilitate debate and enable appropriate feedback on any of the proposed or listed Highways related schemes.

8.3.2 Any new proposals or revised schemes will be forwarded to the respective Herts County Councillor for consideration who will in turn report back and advise the Committee accordingly.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Sections 9.8.1 (a) and 9.8.1 (b) of the Council's Constitution in respect of the Area Committees' Terms of Reference, notes the following: - To allocate discretionary budgets within the terms determined by the Council and to allocate devolved budgets and activities within the terms determined by the Council. This is outlined in the current Grant Policy agreed by Cabinet in January 2020. Section 9.8.2 (h) of the Constitution in respect of Area Committees' Terms of Reference notes that they may: - Establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations operating specifically with the area including, where appropriate, the provision of discretionary grant aid/financial support etc. but excluding grants for district-wide activities.

9.2 Chapter 1, s1-8 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a General Power of Competence which gives local authorities the powers to do anything provided that it is not specifically prohibited in legislation.

9.3 Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides specific authority for the Council to incur expenditure on anything which is in the interests of and will bring direct benefit to its area. This includes a charity or other body operating for public service

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 As outlined in Appendix A - Hitchin Area Committee budget sheet 2021-22

10.2 The current 2021/22 base budget was £11,000 and £2,950 has been spent. This leaves a budget available of **£8,050**.

10.3 The grant applications for this meeting total **£7,275** and if the Members agree the grants outlined in this report this will leave a balance of **£775**.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no relevant risk entries that have been recorded on Pentana Risk, the Council's performance and risk system. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues. Whenever a request for grant funding for equipment is received, the recipient of the funding will be advised to obtain insurance for the item to avoid a repeat request for funding in the event of the equipment being stolen or damaged. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with any items within this report.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Area Committee funding is awarded to community groups that clearly demonstrate positive impact on the community and wider environment. The projects outlined in this report seek to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

- 12.2. Several of the projects proposed within this report are targeted specifically towards protected characteristic groups and will therefore directly and positively impact individuals with protected characteristics. This includes Disability - Imagination Dance CIC will be providing support for young people with additional needs; Race - Red Media Love CIC will be running a project focussed on raising awareness and celebrating the local South Asian community; and Age - Gosling Play Group, Imagination Dance CIC, Strathmore Fun Club and Third Hitchin Scouts are all running projects which will positively impact children and young people specifically.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 It is noted that the wooden playhouse selected for purchase by the Gosling Playgroup (section 8.1.1) is constructed with wood that has been approved by the Forest Stewardship Council, ensuring that the materials for this product have been sourced sustainably. This can therefore be considered a positive environmental implication.
- 14.2 Outdoor toys required by Strathmore Fun Club (section 8.1.4) consistently need replacing due to high use, wear and tear. It is recognised that this is likely to increase consumption of materials and waste production where these products are not long-lasting. Whilst this is a negative environmental implication, a more sustainable option is not presently applicable as the wear and tear is primarily caused by high usage.
- 14.3 The grant application for Third Hitchin Scout group (section 8.1.5) has the potential to create positive environmental implications by allowing young residents to experience simple living in a greenfield camp situation showing that life can be comfortable, healthy, fun, and in tune with nature and the environment. This in turn has the potential to encourage more sustainable living practices going forward and an ongoing consideration for nature and the environment.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no pertinent Human Resource implications associated with any items within this report.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A - Hitchin Area Committee budget sheet 2021-22

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.
- 18.2 Review of Grant Policy Cabinet January 2020.