



SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024 - 2025

Directorate: Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning

Service Area: Project Development and Funding Unit

Accountable Manager : Paul Hinder

Purpose and Vision

To provide an efficient and effective Project Management and Funding Unit, one that is of fundamental importance to citizens and local Groups wishing to access Grant schemes and acquire funding.

The Unit manages Renewable Energy Funds, is an integral part of the SSIP Team and its expertise extends towards project management of in- house schemes from inception to completion.

The Unit is the Grant Management Organisation and Administrator of a raft of Community Benefit Funds associated with the out- turn from Wind, Biomass, Solar and mineral deposits. These Grants are readily accessible to the public.

The Unit is called upon to assist Corporate Grant schemes such as the Third Sector Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

In the performance of the above duties the Unit regularly attracts over £1 million/annum for its customers. This money is sought from external grant aid and extra voluntary contributions. The Unit is also associated with building capacity, social capital and expertise in the voluntary sector.

The Unit contributes to the Council's vision by assisting schools to secure grant aid for their pupils giving 'children the best start in life'.

The Unit works across the entire County serving its 34 Wards. Grants are sourced and invested to build resilience and to ensure that 'communities are thriving and sustainable'.

Groups that benefit from the grant aid that the Unit routinely attracts have their roots in sport, art, education, biodiversity, conservation and community development hence the Unit contributes to the Council's aim of protecting 'our local environment, culture and industrial heritage for future generations'.

Values

The Unit prides itself on being:-

- *Citizen centred
- *Fair and equitable
- *Developmental
- *Innovative and problem solving
- *Accurate and efficient
- *Supportive and inventive

In so doing the Unit is responsive, collaborative (working with citizens and partners), will achieve more with less and add value. Does the right things, well.

Budget, Resource Management and Organisational Development

The Unit has an 'in year' operational budget of £5,000 and this is used to facilitate and pump prime or 'top and tail' grant Applications. The Unit also receives a 3% Administration Fee from Renewable Energy providers and this budget is also used to add value and plug funding gaps on priority projects that the Unit is asked to develop. The Unit funds and manages 100+ projects per annum and there is no additional revenue impact on the NPTCBC.

This budget is sufficient in the short term.

In the medium term there will be a need for more employees. A 'Spend To Save' initiative could involve the appointment of more staff working on the basis that 2FTEs generate £1million- to £1.5 million per annum, a third member of staff could significantly add to the Multiplier Effect.

Staffing resilience, service continuity, employee training and development will be an issue and there is a need for more resources. The Unit currently has suitably skilled and qualified employees but that will not remain the case in the medium (2 years) to long term. There will be a need for another Project Development and Funding Officer to fill the void left from the impending retirement of the Manager.

There is insufficient capacity for research and development at this time but much depends on the future workload which is largely governed by the advent of still further Renewable Energy Community Benefit Funds and continued investment in the Council's Additional Works Programme sponsored from Reserves.

There are no interdependencies as the Unit is self-contained, self-managed and self-motivated. The Unit benefits from good relations with Technical Accounts, I.T. and the Planning Dept. It is not reliant on other services to make improvement or change.

SWOT Analysis

KEY STRENGTHS

- *Experienced staff, who are resourceful, caring and have a good work ethic
- *Flexible and adaptive
- *Very good partnership working
- *Innovative, problem solving, 'going extra mile'
- *Economic in use of resources, time and funding
- *Exemplary sickness records
- *Whatever it takes attitude, more than a 'can do' attitude

MAIN WEAKNESSES

- *New demands and duties places strain on the service
- *Staff resilience, business continuity and succession planning
- *Reacting rather than developing and forward planning
- *Capacity – only 2FTEs

<p>*Exceptional knowledge of the County, its people and its facilities at grassroots level – work towards filling known gaps in provision</p>	
<p>KEY OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Agile or hybrid working *Marketing the service *Recruitment *Further collaboration *Broaden skill set 	<p>MAIN THREATS (see also risk area below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Funds change and opportunities to apply are diminished (an organic process that is difficult to predict with any certainty) *Limited experienced staffing resource *Need to ensure all the projects developed by the Unit are financially and environmentally sustainable during times of austerity *Unit not being able to keep pace with demand

Key Actions for Improvement and Service Change		Responsible Officer	Start date	End Date
1	To concentrate on those grant acquisitions and to project manage schemes that yield most compared to time invested(cost benefit analysis)	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25
2	To keep pace with the growing number of Renewable Energy Community Funds and to offer assistance as appropriate, acting as the grant Management Organisation (GMO)	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25
3	To keep abreast of all relevant grant giving information and to link that information to bringing added value to County Borough initiatives	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25
4	To act as a Clearing House for Grant givers as a strategic first point of contact in NPTCB. A 'One Stop Shop' for grant advice.	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25
5	To again manage a proportion of the Additional Works Programme (met from Reserves) , if called upon to do so by the Corporate Body	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25
6	To concentrate on those grant acquisitions that are modest in terms of ongoing revenue implication	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25

7	To provide an accessible and affective Project Development & Funding Service. Work towards 100% customer satisfaction	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25
8	Expenditure forecast to be contained within budget	PH	1.04.24	31.03.25

Evaluation of progress 2023-24 (What has gone well, what has been a challenge?)		Next steps
1	<p>The Unit has been efficient and effective in its use of the Additional Works Programme Reserves to realise the 8 play area refurbishments that were allotted to it. This was completed across the County and the total investment and project management expertise generated projects worth £453,962 in the Neath, Port Talbot, Cwmavon, Briton Ferry and Cimla area.</p> <p>The challenge has been getting Ward Councillors to agree investment as decision making has not always been timely particularly when it involves Section 106 'Open Space' contributions.</p>	Should the Council wish to repeat this exercise, the Unit can achieve the same outputs in yet another Financial Year (depending upon allocation of Reserves).
2	The Unit has managed 12 individual Renewable Energy and Mineral Deposit Community Funds and has acted as the Grant Management Organisation for each of them. This has been run like clockwork with good feedback from grant recipients on how the Unit processed claims in a timely fashion and kept the Applicant informed. This is always a challenge with only 2FTEs in the Unit.	Repeat in 2024/25
3	<p>Inter – Directorate working has added value to projects that have helped the Council with Energy Efficiency bids, refurbishment projects and Shared Prosperity Funding.</p> <p>The main challenges have been the criteria that SPF and other grants (like the Corporate Third Sector Funds) are governed by as they do not work in the Applicant's favour and can hinder the delivery of time- sensitive projects. These Funds will be subject to a review in 2025/26</p>	Better communication with SPF Officers and the Corporate Body to share experiences and make the linkages.
4	<p>The Unit has invested 70% of its time, effort and resource championing the cause of the Third Sector. Capacity building amongst the Third Sector and the Community Councils still remains an issue. There is a general lack of experience which requires a far more 'hands on' approach by the Unit if a project is to be delivered from inception to completion. This is very time consuming for a Unit of 2FTEs.</p> <p>Only 54% (or 64) of the 'Assists' (a total of 119 in 2023/24,) that the Unit has responded to actually generated grant aid, which ultimately led to tangible projects. Many of the enquirers, following receipt of advice, did not pursue the grant aid. This reflects badly on Performance Indicators and could be attributed to would – be Applicants losing the will to see the process through or finding processes too</p>	Unit to continue to assist the Third Sector and Town/Community Councils. They will learn by doing.

	<p>difficult for them (sometimes a change of personnel in an Organisation temporarily de-rails or changes the focus of the Group, possibly away from the intent to apply for Grant aid in favour of new priorities).</p>	
5	<p>The Unit has invested, possibly, an unprecedented amount of time and effort in attracting grant aid to two iconic project proposals in Trefelin and Glynneath. The pay back on these two projects in 2024/25 could be grant aid to the value of £428,926 and £800,000 respectively.</p> <p>The challenges, from a Project Management perspective are that projects of this stature include the need to meet all legislative requirements. The Unit will spend time developing these Statutory Undertakings as part of its role in assisting the project owner. The legislative requirements have grown exponentially and are a challenge. They include Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes (SuDS), Flood Consequence Plans, Coal Risk Mining Assessments, Tree Management Plans, Artificial Lights at Night (ALAN), Japanese Knotweed Treatment Programmes, Section 106 'Open Space' requirements, etc.</p>	<p>Unit to continue to learn from these experiences and embrace the challenge.</p> <p>Gain knowledge on each of the Planning issues to be better equipped to advise clients.</p>