

Meeting:

FUTURE OF STOCKPORT CAN FUND

Report of the Director of Place Management

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report details proposals for a new iteration of the Climate Action Now (CAN) Fund.
- 1.2 One of the six key workstreams of the CAN strategy is Climate Friendly Borough. This workstream sets out that the council will work with residents, communities, businesses and schools across the borough to enable and grow climate action to support our borough-wide target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2038. One way to engage communities and facilitate climate action is through community funding schemes.
- 1.3 A one-off CAN Fund ran between November 2021 and December 2022. The fund engaged residents with the Stockport CAN strategy and enabled residents to take climate actions by providing funding for community projects that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions or enhance local biodiversity. 73 projects were funded and took place across every ward in Stockport. The CAN Fund engaged 5,800 people.
- 1.4 Building on the success of the first one-off CAN fund, the proposal for the next iteration applies learning and embeds best practice to ensure maximum accessibility, impact and reach. The proposal streamlines the fund to make it more efficient and which therefore ensures best value for money.
- 1.5 It is proposed that the next iteration of the CAN Fund is also a one-off funding scheme but will feature two funding streams: the CAN Catalyst Fund and the CAN Seed Fund. The CAN Catalyst Fund would enable larger, high impact projects with allocation of funding assessed and determined by the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment with support from the CAN team. The CAN Seed Fund would support smaller-scale projects delivered at a ward level. Decision-making for the CAN Seed Fund would be made by Members at Area Committees in a similar way to the Ward Flexibility Funding and would sit alongside this scheme. The total combined budget in this iteration of the Fund would be £71,500 provided from within the Climate Change and Environment portfolio budget.
- 1.6 To affect change and harness the collective power of residents and communities to help meet the 2038 carbon neutrality target, the council must promote and inspire positive community led action and innovation. The CAN Fund is one significant way in which the council can help raise awareness about climate friendly actions. A lot has been learnt from the previous CAN Fund which looked to help promote community action around reducing carbon emissions and energy efficiency together with improving the natural environment, many of which had co-benefits both in terms of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Funding projects that encourage engagement in this issue & reducing carbon emissions will have a co-benefit in helping to address the 'cost of living crisis', for example reducing energy and food bills, plus increasing reuse of materials and active

travel. The restructuring of how the CAN Fund is focused & administered has streamlined the processes and reduced bureaucracy but will continue to allow residents and community groups to engage and innovate with this kind of climate action.

1.7 The table below summarises the two funding streams:

	CAN Catalyst Fund	CAN Seed Fund
Total amount allocated	£40,000 over 2 rounds	£1,500 per ward (£31,500 total)
Spend per project	£1,000 - £5,000	Up to £1,000
Decision maker(s)	Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment	Councillors (at Area Committee)
Who can apply	Constituted community organisations and not-for-profits with an organisational bank account and schools	Organisations such as community groups, shared interest groups, charities and schools
Fund priorities	Bigger-scale projects that have significant impact in terms of greenhouse gas mitigation, climate engagement and behaviour change, and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.	Small-scale climate-related projects such as active travel, energy efficiency devices, encouraging reuse and repair, planting and growing, and biodiversity.

2. MAIN REPORT

2.1 The CAN Catalyst Fund

2.2 The first iteration of the CAN Fund saw the most positive climate impacts from bigger projects that spanned ward boundaries. Out of the 73 applications that were funded, three projects represented 94% of the projected greenhouse gas emission reduction estimate. These three projects were also the biggest in terms of spend and represented two-thirds of all money spent.

2.3 Building on this, the CAN Catalyst Fund will support ambitious projects that span ward-boundaries, and which may be boroughwide. Organisations can apply for between £1,000 and £5,000 to support projects that aim to make a significant impact in the following areas:

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- adaptation to the impacts of climate change
- climate engagement and behaviour change

2.4 Additional benefits, such as reducing isolation, improving wellbeing and learning new skills, will be taken into consideration during application assessment.

2.5 The CAN Team will assess all applications for eligibility against set criteria. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment will then decide which

projects they wish to allocate funding. Decision-making meetings will be minuted and Executive Decision Records will be kept to ensure a transparent record.

2.6 This approach will ensure that:

- Applications are assessed against other applications to ensure that we fund effective, high-impact projects that offer good value for money
- There is a strong mix of projects with a fair and even spread across the borough
- More complex projects needing larger amounts of money will have appropriate scrutiny and support from CAN team officers
- Applications spanning multiple wards will be more easily supported
- Officer time and resource spent on administration of the scheme will be limited to two distinct periods

2.7 There will be two rounds of the CAN Catalyst Fund with £20,000 available within each round. Promotion of the Fund to schools, community groups and other eligible organisations will precede each funding round.

2.8 Applications for the first round will be open from 20th March to 30th June 2024, funding decisions will be made in July, and successful projects will receive the funding in September. Applications for the second round will be open from 1st January to 28th February 2024, funding decisions will be made in March, and successful applicants will receive the funding in May.

2.9 Applicants will be required to supply a project description, project plan and timeline, budget, targets for greenhouse gas emissions mitigated or avoided and/or biodiversity protected or enhanced, and target number of engagements.

2.10 The assessment criteria will be made public so potential applicants can have sight of this ahead of submitting an application.

2.11 It is intended to highlight exemplary outcomes from successful projects as part of the Green Print campaign. This will be an opportunity to share tangible examples of climate action that benefit communities whilst helping to tackle climate change, which will increase awareness and understanding of the aims of the CAN strategy.

2.12 **The CAN Seed Fund**

2.13 The first iteration of the CAN Fund demonstrated that availability of small grants has been valuable for communities that accessed it. Therefore, the CAN Seed Fund will continue to provide groups with smaller amounts of funding that kick-starts or supports projects that help deliver the aims of the CAN Strategy.

2.14 The CAN Seed Fund will offer up to £1,000 of funding to community organisations, groups, schools, and charities, for projects that start or grow community climate action and enhance local biodiversity.

2.15 The application process will mirror the well-established administration process of the Ward Flexibility Fund. There will be £1,500 per ward available during the duration of the Fund.

2.16 Members are encouraged to identify potential projects in their wards and to encourage local community groups to apply. Members can also use the CAN Seed Fund to match-fund any climate-related applications to the Ward Flexibility Fund.

2.17 The CAN Seed Fund will be open for applications from 20th March 2024 until the 28th February 2025. The money will be administered on a ward-by-ward basis, and therefore if the £1,500 allocated to a ward is spent before the 28th February 2025 then applications for that ward will no longer be accepted.

2.18 Applicants will fill in an application form that will ask questions about their group and their project, with some justification for funding required. Applicants will be expected to explain in basic terms how their project will impact on climate change or biodiversity. Applications will be processed by CAN team administrators.

2.19 Funding decisions will be made by Councillors at Area Committee meetings. It is also within Members' discretion to decide how much funding to award to each project. The Area Committee meetings at which funding decisions will be made will be as follows:

- 15th – 18th April 2024
- 17th – 20th June 2024
- 29th July – 1st August 2024
- 9th – 12th September 2024
- 28th – 31st October 2024
- 2nd – 5th December 2024
- 27th – 30th January 2025

2.20 There will be restrictions on what kind of projects are permitted to ensure ease of decision-making and administration. Applications to the CAN Seed Fund must be delivered within one ward but an applicant may apply more than once.

2.21 A challenge from the previous iteration of the CAN Fund was gaining proof of land use permission for projects that involved changes to land (such as tree planting), therefore a condition of application to the CAN Seed Fund will be that applicants must provide proof of land use permission at the point of application. If a group applies for the fund without providing proof, they will be rejected.

2.22 **Additional considerations**

2.23 We expect that many of the projects funded will provide additional co-benefits for residents that align with other corporate priorities, which will provide further value for money. For example, many climate projects support and promote healthy eating, improving homes, reducing isolation and active travel.

2.24 We will work with the council's web accessibility experts to ensure that the application process will be simple to use, straightforward, and will use plain and common language, taking care to avoid specialist language where possible.

3. **FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 The CAN Fund (both Catalyst and Seed Funds) will be financed from monies carried over from the 2021-23 CAN Reserve. It is a one-off funding scheme and any unclaimed funding will return to the CAN Budget for 2024-25.

4. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 The CAN Seed Fund will be similar to the Ward Flexibility Fund in how funding will be allocated to projects submitted to the fund and decided at Area Committee. See sections 2.12 to 2.20 for details.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Scrutiny is asked to:

- Share feedback on the plans for the Stockport CAN Fund
- Endorse approach for next iteration of Stockport CAN Fund to go to Cabinet

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Nick Leslie on Tel: 07775804984 or by email on nick.leslie@stockport.gov.uk