



Newcastle Fund

Feedback on
Consultation Proposal

Consultation ended 6 April 2017

Introduction

The Newcastle Fund is the Council's primary vehicle for grants to the voluntary and community sector (the VCS).

In September 2016, the Council launched its [Call for Evidence - Shaping the future of the Newcastle Fund](#) to gather views and ideas on how the Newcastle Fund should look in the future. [You can read a summary of the feedback received from the engagement phase here.](#)

Findings from the engagement phase, along with the Council's broader commitments to cooperative working, were then used to inform a change proposal for consultation – called the [Newcastle Fund Consultation Proposal](#) - which was published on 9 March 2017. Consultation on the change proposal closed on 6 April 2017.

This document provides an overview of feedback received on the Newcastle Fund Consultation Proposal, prior to publishing a final Position Statement for the future of the Newcastle Fund.

Background and Context

The Consultation Proposal was in two parts:

- **Part 1** was about the Fund's purpose and direction of travel. It included proposals on the core purpose of the Fund and how we set priorities for funding.
- **Part 2** was about the way that applications are made to the Fund, our decision making and monitoring processes.

A staggered approach to implementing changes was proposed to allow for changes to be phased over two years.

Consultation

In publishing the Consultation Proposal, we sought to gain a wide variety of views, including those from across the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as well as our public sector and statutory partners (including people representing different divisions across the Council and others who are involved in the allocation of funding to the VCS), as well as communities themselves.

- Newcastle Fund consultation proposal was launched via a Let's Talk topic wall which ran from 9 March 2017 until 6 April 2017.
- We further publicised the Newcastle Fund Consultation Proposal by directly emailing previous applicants of the Newcastle Fund and promoting the consultation through the Council's intranet and internet site.
- Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service also publicised the Newcastle Fund Consultation Proposal to all their members via a range of media platforms in order to maximise reach.
- In addition, a workshop was held on 30 March 2017 at Higham House in partnership with Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service and included representation from a number VCS organisations.

In total we received 11 responses of which 2 were received to the Council Let's Talk Topic Wall, 8 via the Newcastle Fund email, and 1 internal response from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

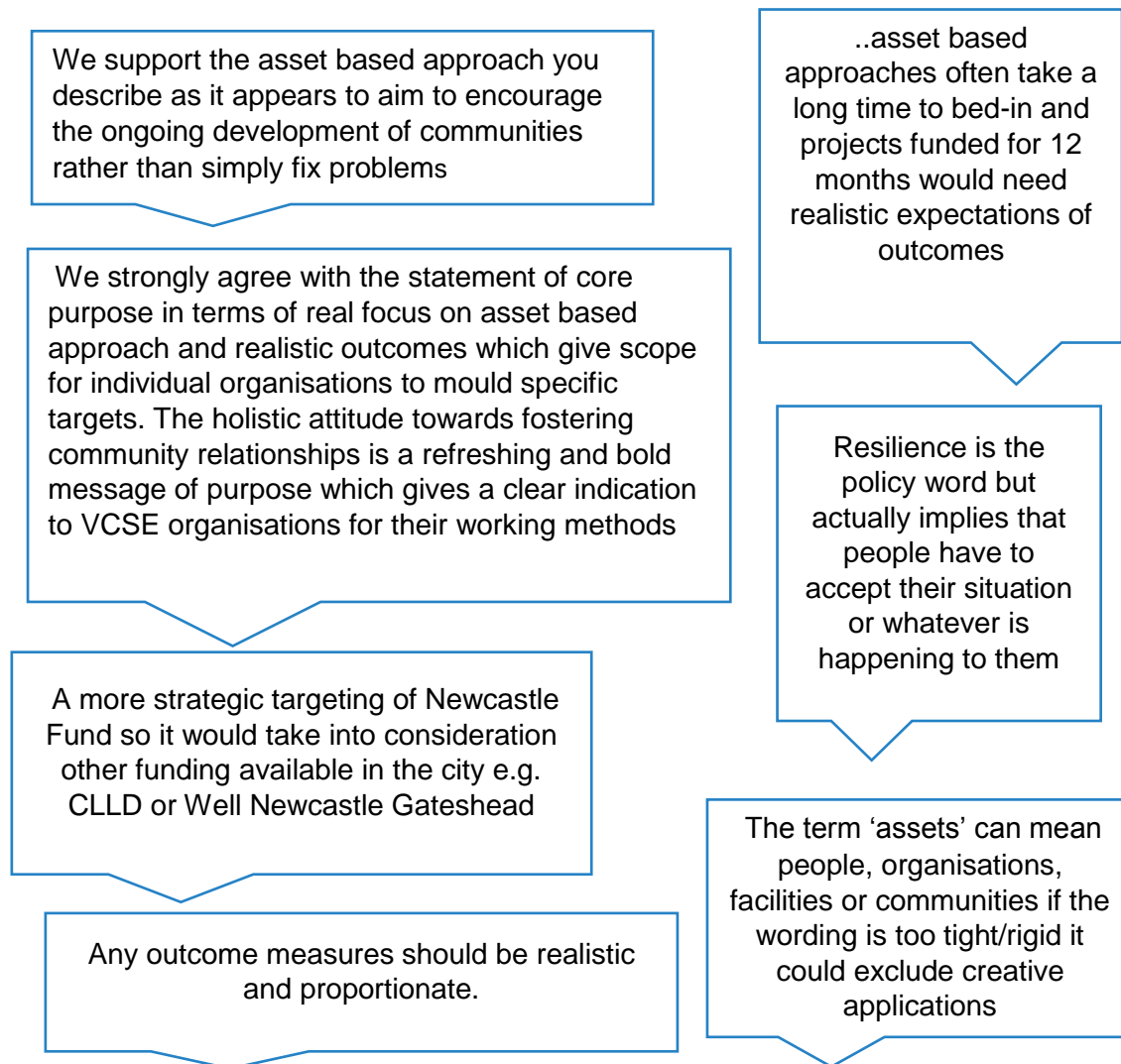
Newcastle Fund Consultation Proposal feedback

In presenting this feedback, we have sought to pull out key themes from the responses, as well as provide a cross cutting sample of direct responses received.

Part 1: Proposed changes to purpose and direction of travel

1.1 Purpose of the Fund

Sample of feedback



Key themes:

Overall, there was strong support for the statement of core purpose for the Fund and the direction of travel in relation to asset based approaches. There was strong support for approaches that build the capacity of both people and communities and enables a vibrant and creative voluntary sector.

Although respondents welcomed a real commitment to asset based ways of working, the feedback received demonstrated the need for a clearer definition and understanding on what is meant by 'asset based ways of working' as everyone may have different views and ideas. It was also recognised that the benefits of these

approaches may be longer term, and therefore the outcomes may not be able to be measured within the shorter term grant awards. Similarly core costs were seen as essential to developing an asset based approach with the concern that year on year funding was not necessarily useful to this approach.

Many respondents supported maintaining the existing outcomes for the Fund. However, there were some comments specifically in relation to the use and focus on the term 'resilience' which was felt to imply people having to accept their situation and whatever may be happening to them, becoming resilient to, rather than empowering aspiration and change. Respondents felt that any outcome measures should be realistic and proportionate, and should relate to local communities.

Representatives who attended the consultation focus group stated that they would welcome a greater understanding of the full range of funding opportunities available across the city, which would allow for more strategic targeting of Fund resources, and would enable organisations to be more effective and targeted about which funding streams are most appropriate to their project aims.

1.2 Priority Setting

Sample of feedback:

I endorse the commitment to draw on community intelligence through the Newcastle Future Needs Assessment, but would like to see the Know Your Community element expanded.

Enabling Ward Committees to have greater influence over the Newcastle Fund will enable local communities to play a more active part in deciding what matters to them.

Newcastle Fund should fund the everyday life work that supports people to live and be well, this does not equate with 'bells and whistles' that is often looked for in funding.

There is tension between the need to maintain a citywide focus and the proposal to use the annual Ward Committee meetings regarding priorities for the fund, there is a need to retain a citywide focus to capture the groups and concerns which may not manifest themselves at local level.

Newcastle Fund should fund the everyday life work that supports people to live and be well, this does not equate with 'bells and whistles' that is often looked for in funding.

If these committees are used to define local priorities, that is quite a complex exercise and is fine if it used to determine local spending. However if the same process is used to determine City-wide priorities, that becomes much more problematic. A lot of the discussion at Ward Committees has tended to focus on environmental issues rather than wider social concerns.

Key themes:

The commitment to draw on community intelligence through the Newcastle Future Needs Assessment was welcomed, with some respondents welcoming expansion to this approach.

However, a large number of respondents raised concerns that the proposal would mean that only annual Ward Committee meetings would be used to inform the priorities for the Fund, and raised concerns about the need to balance city wide priorities with priorities set by Ward Committees. Respondents also commented the need to engage with residents and communities beyond those represented at Ward Committees.

Some feedback highlighted the importance that needed to be given to the following areas when thinking about priorities to include: 'set-up' costs of new organisations who are coming to the area; the utilisation and support of other local resources and infrastructure (for example a shared community building) and the legacy and sustainability in an area and how this complements or enhances what is currently being delivered.

There was a strong view that although high level priorities are important there also need to be some consideration of other funding streams and how and what is already funded in an area.

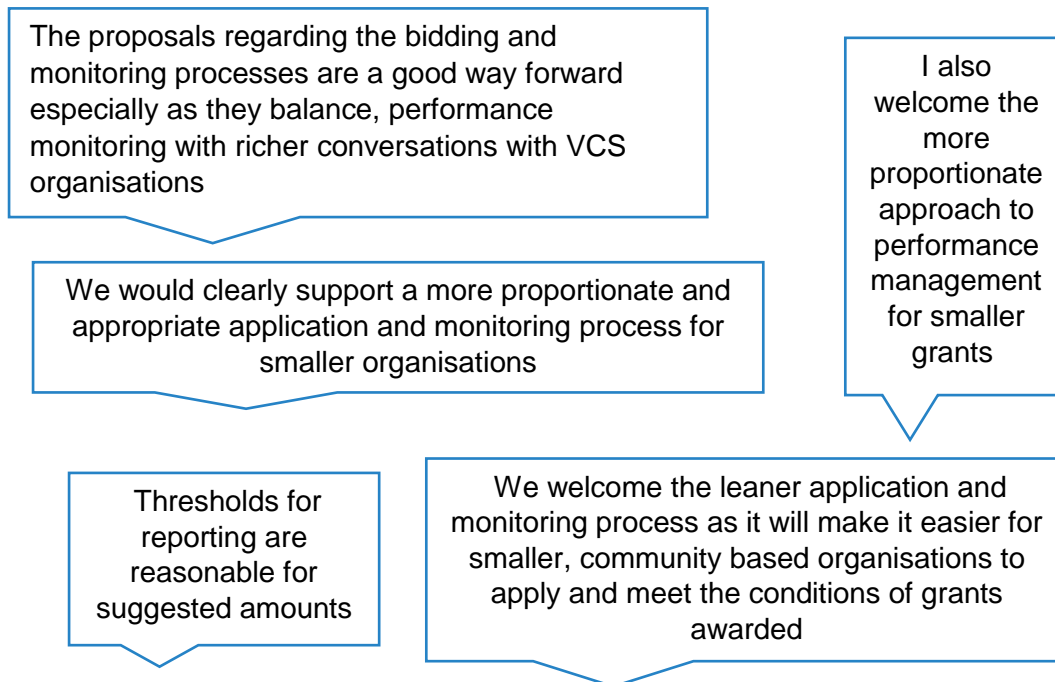
Some respondents felt the Newcastle Fund should fund the everyday life work that supports people to live and be well, this does not equate with 'bells and whistles' that is often looked for in funding.

One respondent felt the Consultation Proposal did not offer the opportunity to consider different ways of using the Newcastle Fund and specifically, opportunities to structure the Fund into a number of smaller grant pots, for which eligibility will depend on the size of organisation (for example, funding specifically for micro to small organisations, and funding specifically for medium to large organisations).

Part 2: Proposed changes to Fund application, decision making and monitoring processes

2.1 Grant Bidding and Monitoring Processes

Sample of feedback:



Key themes:

There was clear overall support from respondents in welcoming a more streamlined version of the application process, along with proportionate monitoring commensurate with the amount of grant received.

Focus group feedback suggested lessons could be learned from other grant monitoring processes where grants are less rigid in the first quarter with more in-depth conversations every 6 months to support detailed and in-depth evaluation of project delivery. In raising Newcastle Fund performance return thresholds it was felt this would support capacity to facilitate this change.

There was a strong view in the feedback for a different approach to monitoring, which would balance quantitative and qualitative information, and specifically recognition of asset based working.

Representatives at the focus group specifically would welcome a commitment of the Fund toward middle income VCS groups on the assumption that larger voluntary

organisations with higher annual income are better resourced to compete for public sector contracts or bid for larger grant aid and/or social finance opportunities. Similarly, the focus group highlighted that it is middle income VCS groups that appear to be struggling to find appropriate size grants and are having to put a number of smaller grants together from different sources which is not a productive use of time as this comes with different monitoring and evaluation expectations determined by the variety of funders. It was felt by some that enabling multi-year core funding (e.g. management and administration) to be applied for on the understanding that the stability this would bring to the organisation would enable those recipients to achieve the impact and outcomes in communities that the Council seeks.

Similarly, some representatives at the focus group felt small funds were often easier to secure. For example, Big Lottery 'Awards for All' that often have a ceiling and are approximately £10,000 which often enables testing out working in a different way, but for smaller grass roots organisations this is substantial to deliver their objective.

However, others views were expressed during the consultation that the Fund should take better account of smaller community sector groups that are perceived to be under-represented in grant awards.

2.2 Decision Making

Sample of feedback:

The decision-making process needs to be clear and transparent.

Publishing the evaluation criteria would be really helpful to be able to build an accurate application for a proposed service/ activity.

The proposals regarding decision making and the drive for greater transparency are also welcome.

We think it is a good idea to publish the panel membership and details of the evaluation criteria.

Newcastle Fund internal procedures across directorates for assessing and recommending application seem very complicated. This contributes to a lack of clarity about the aims of Fund, calls into question the objectiveness of internal decision making and gives the appearance of silo processes.

Key themes:

There was overall clear support for making the decision making process clearer and transparent, and to publish the evaluation criteria and weightings given to the different elements and questions. Respondents commented that this would be particularly useful when preparing their applications.

There was a lot of support for an independent chair of the Panel.

There was acknowledgement that this is a complex Fund and there is not one solution to who should be involved in the evaluation of applications. Impartiality and transparency were identified as key priorities in the evaluation and decision making processes. Firm criteria for the Fund is therefore essential to this aim.

Next Steps

A final Position Statement on the future of the Newcastle Fund will be published in May 2017 setting out the final proposed changes and timescales for implementation.

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