



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 13 NOVEMBER 2025
Subject	WESTHIVE UPDATE
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Rachel Crouch – Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities. Email: rachel.crouch@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Phil Martin - Director of Place Email: phil.martin@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Heather McCulloch – Community Wellbeing Manager Email: heather.mcculloch@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To provide an update on the progress of the Westhive scheme to date and to set out the options for future delivery
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<p>That the Executive resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Consider as part of the 2026/2027 budget setting process, the inclusion of a budget for 'one off' community grant funding, at £120k per year for a three year period from 2026-2029.2. Request officers consider all feedback and platform hosting options, reporting back to Executive in December 2025.3. Delegate the responsibility of working through the procurement of a new multi-year contract to the Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Feedback from organisations on the Westhive Civic Crowdfunding scheme.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Westhive civic crowdfunding platform is due to complete and award funding in Round 5 in October 2025. This will be the penultimate round in the 3-year contract with Spacehive. This update sets out the results of the programme to date including progress since the most recent report to Executive in March 2025. The contract with Spacehive is due to come to an end on the 30th April 2026. This report sets out the options for consideration in terms of next steps – to extend the contract for a further 12 months, enter into a further contract for a 3-year period or longer, or bring the arrangement with Spacehive to a close.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** In March 2023, the Council reviewed the approach to community grant funding, to better align to the outcomes intended from the Council Plan and to foster a greater sense of community engagement and involvement. The Council's intention was to continue to play an integral role in supporting the development of community services through providing grant aid whilst achieving greater access to support for a wider range of organisations and projects than had been achieved previously. The review and recommendations were agreed by the Executive in March 2023.
- 2.2** Following the grant review a series of changes to the grants programme took place. Funding was divided into 2 parts – a) A programme of 3-year Service Level agreements with community organisations linked to the Council Plan and b) The commissioning of Spacehive Ltd to provide the Westhive civic crowdfunding platform which launched in October 2023. Furthermore, a Community Funding Officer role was put in place to oversee the Service Level Agreement process and support applicants across all community funding schemes.
- 2.3** The new grants funding approach enabled multi-year funding for key community services, whilst at the same time rebalancing the remaining allocation to enable the Council to introduce a new programme of larger scale revenue support alongside continued support for building-based and other capital projects.
- 2.4** The Community Funding Officer has been very proactive in offering support to project creators - those who are more used to traditional approaches to grant funding or new to seeking public funds. On top of assisting in navigating our funding system, the officer has helped numerous project creators to identify, and go on to secure, other funds.

3. WESTHIVE PERFORMANCE

- 3.1** Since the launch of Westhive in October 2023, four rounds of pledge review meetings have taken place – in January 2024, June 2024, October 2024 and May 2025. Round 5 projects are currently being assessed. There are 11 projects currently fundraising. A verbal update can be provided at the meeting.
- 3.2** The annual budget allocation to the Westhive general fund is £120,000. This is a Capital and Revenue scheme. Since a criteria revision in March 2025, projects can typically expect a pledge from the Council of a maximum of £12,000 or 75% of the total project costs,

whichever is less. This is applicable to Rounds 4,5 and 6. This is to encourage smaller scale projects to come forward.

- 3.3 The Westhive general fund has allocated £139,373 to date (Rounds 1 to 4). There was a low level of demand for funding in Round 1 so a significant portion of unallocated funding was diverted to meet the financial gap of the 3-year Grant Award Agreements that were entered into in 2024/2025.
- 3.4 In addition to the Westhive general fund, the UK Government's Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) has also distributed funds via the platform. This has primarily been a Capital scheme. The total distributed through CIF has totalled £307,060.00 utilising a combination of UKSPF and REPF sources.
- 3.5 The total amount of funding secured to date (Rounds 1 to 4) by projects using the platform is £948,172.00, of which the Council and CIF investment combined provides £446,433.00.
- 3.6 Over 4 rounds of Westhive a total of 28 projects have successfully reached their project target. Full details are attached as Annex A.
- 3.7 Of the 28 successful projects, 12 will benefit children and young people supporting the delivery of the Council's priorities.
- 3.8 There has been more funding available to support capital projects as opposed to revenue ones given the nature of the funds hosted on the platform.
- 3.9 Funding raised by projects themselves has totalled £501,739.00. This is made up of grant aid from other sources and individual giving. Projects have secured the support of 990 backers across all 28 projects (excluding the Council and CIF).
- 3.10 The approach seems to attract a diverse range of groups and reach projects that may not ordinarily engage in a traditional Council scheme. The modern look and style of the platform may be a factor here.
- 3.11 Projects have been able to pitch to either or both funds depending on the project type. The availability of both funds has meant that large scale capital projects have been able to receive significant funding towards their projects. Where a project has pitched to both funds officers have allocated funding firstly from the CIF budget, given that it has an expiry date. This prioritisation is a factor in the lower-than-expected levels of expenditure in the Westhive general fund.
- 3.12 Some, but not all, project creators have found the technical aspect of the platform challenging. The Spacehive Support Team and Community Funding Officer have been very responsive when feedback is received and provided guidance and support. For some the prospect of seeking any sort of funding, particularly from a public authority where controls must be more robust, is daunting.

4. CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH SPACEHIVE

- 4.1 The contract with Spacehive commenced on 1 May 2023 for a 3-year period, ending on 30 April 2026 with the option to extend to 30 April 2027. The annual contract fee is £30,000 plus a one-year extension cost of £30,000 if activated.

- 4.2** The contract can be extended by the Council for one period of up to 12 months, by giving Spacehive (the 'Supplier') 3 months written notice before its expiry. The notice period for the Council (the 'Buyer') in the event of wishing to end the contract, is a maximum of 90 days prior to the start of the subsequent year. Given the expiry date is 30th April 2026, 90 working days would fall on Friday 19th December 2025.
- 4.3** For the fee of £30,000 Spacehive provides a 'Product Suite' consisting of:
- The Westhive branded online microsite (Movement App)
 - Integrated crowd/grant-funding system
 - Impact reporting suite
- 4.4** In addition, Spacehive provide a verification service. This is a review of each application to ensure it is viable, an appropriate fundraising target has been set and that all elements are appropriately costed and necessary to the project. In addition, a check of all planning permission, licencing requirements, organisational information and supporting documentation is undertaken to verify the group and their plans. This takes place before campaigns start. The team also provides technical support to any applicants needing assistance to navigate the system and utilise the technology fully. Spacehive actively supports project creators through a mix of online resources such as guides and videos and live support including workshops and project drop-in surgeries. The dedicated Spacehive Partnerships Director holds bi-weekly updates on project status with officers.
- 4.5** The contract allows for two funding Rounds per annum. Spacehive provides an online creator workshop for each Round. These workshops provide information on how the civic crowdfunding platform works and enables break out rooms for sharing project ideas and tips for launching a campaign with one-to-one advice.
- 4.6** The Community Funding officer meets regularly with the Spacehive partnership director, attends and contributes to each project creator workshop, promotes the scheme widely and supports residents with their applications, in person, on the phone and online.
- 4.7** The platform hosts the projects details and provides a shop window for supporters. The determination of awards by the Council is managed in-house and coordinated by the Community Funding Officer. All projects are reviewed and scored by officers before a panel meeting is convened to determine award levels. The panel involves the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive, Executive member for Stronger Healthy Communities and a number of Executive members. Award decisions are delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

5. FEES APPLIED TO PROJECTS

- 5.1** Spacehive applies a 'charge' – referred to as a platform fee - to a project only if it reaches its target. For projects actively fundraising prior to September 2024 this was calculated at 5% plus VAT. The fee increased to 7.5% plus VAT for projects using the platform after that date.

- 5.2 The platform fee is automatically calculated and added to each project campaign target at the outset before a group starts fundraising. It is not applied to any existing fundraising that the group has achieved – called ‘pre-campaign funds’ - or ‘In-kind’ donations. It is applied on ‘Partner’ pledges, ‘Crowd’ donations and ‘Offline’ donations. This means that the platform fee charged varies greatly between projects.
- 5.3 The platform fee paid by projects to Spacehive after 4 Rounds stands at £40,250.00.
- 5.4 In addition, at the outset of a campaign an estimation of the likely cost a project is likely to incur in Stripe Fees is added to the fundraising target. These are fees applied by the electronic payment provider. These are capped but vary from project to project and are linked to how many transactions (pledges) are made and the amount of money pledged to a campaign.
- Stripe Transaction fees:
- Maximum 2.9% card Payments
 - Maximum £4/€ Direct Debits (DD) - Partner Pledges (WODC pledge) are added by DD
 - Maximum £5 Bank Transfer Fee
- 5.5 All fees are built into the overall campaign target, they are visible to the project creator and consistently applied. Groups receive 100% of the amount they need to deliver their project.
- 5.6 There are no fees associated with adding ‘pre-campaign funds’ - money raised prior to crowdfunding on the platform – so long as these are added at the outset before the project has launched and started crowdfunding.
- 5.7 It is commonplace for crowdfund platforms to charge fees – sometimes referred to as invisible tips - to enable them to provide a platform and support service. Some are more transparent than others. Some platforms apply charges even where projects do not reach their fundraising target – Spacehive does not.
- 5.8 The Officers have received negative feedback about the charging of fees on top of fundraising targets.

6. SUMMARY

- 6.1 A total of £948,172.00 has been invested into local projects to date. For every £1 invested by the Council and UKSPF/REPF a further £1 has been secured by project creators from other sources.
- 6.2 28 projects have been successful over a two year period – 12 of which will directly benefit children and young people – a significant Council priority. This compares favourably with the previous capital only grant scheme that supported 20 applications over 3 years (6 rounds) between 2020 to 2023.
- 6.3 The Community Funding Officer is proving to be an invaluable resource. The officer provides additional support to project creators both face to face and over the phone. It is likely that fewer projects would come forward if this support were not available.

- 6.4 Securing grant funding is challenging in the current economic climate and competition for funds is intense across all distributors. Having funding available locally is hugely valued by project creators.
- 6.5 The VCS sector is exposed to financial uncertainty due to Local Government Reorganisation and the Council is in a position to limit the impact of this by creating a legacy position in relation to grant funding, and approve a budget for 3 years.
- 6.6 Having multiple funding sources available via one platform means that project creators only have to submit their information once rather than making two separate bids.
- 6.7 Using the platform itself will favour those who are confident with and have access to technology. It is a new type of approach which is distinct to traditional fundraising methods and one which project creators are unfamiliar with. Some project creators have expressed concern over the complexity of the Westhive application process, but it is difficult to say whether this is a frustration with Westhive or a general frustration with the complexity that comes with due diligence requirements of any scheme distributing public funds.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 **Consider as part of the 2026/2027 budget setting process, the inclusion of a budget for ‘one off’ community grant funding of £120k annually for a period of three years from 2026-2029.**

- 7.1.1 The grant budget allocated to one-off funding – currently the Westhive programme - was agreed for 3 years to March 2026. As part of the 2026/2027 budget setting process consideration should be given to grant funding at the same level for a further period of 3 years to safeguard continued support to vital voluntary sector organisations.

- 7.1.2 The VCS sector continues to deliver effective services to support residents and faces a challenging financial environment in which to operate. In recognition of the value of the VCS, the Council has provided a significant level of support to the sector over many years. Residents value these services highly and evidence suggests that putting in place preventative local services can significantly improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Furthermore, where these services are delivered by the voluntary sector they can deliver excellent value for money.

- 7.2 **Request officers consider all feedback and review platform hosting options, reporting back in early December.**

- 7.2.1 To ensure that the Council makes an informed decision about future funding arrangements, and drawing on all feedback received, Officers will investigate what options are available to host the funding resource for a further 3-year period.

- 7.2.2 The contract with Spacehive comes to an end on 30th April 2026 and the Council will need to give 3 months’ notice if it wishes to extend the contract for a further 12 months. An update will be provided by early December 2025.

7.2.3 To conduct this review and undertake the work to put in place a multi-year arrangement by 1st May 2026 will require some additional officer resource for 6 months. The cost estimate for this would be £4,500, which would provide one additional day a week of the Community Funding Officer.

7.3 Delegate the responsibility of procuring a new service to the Director of Place in consultation with the Executive member for Stronger, Healthy Communities

7.3.1 Following the period of research and further discussions with the procurement lead, officers will be required to take forward the necessary steps to put in place a suitable provider.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

8.1 The Council could reduce or remove grant funding altogether. Residents derive significant benefit from these services and value them greatly and such a reduction or withdrawal of support could be viewed negatively.

8.2 The Council could decide not to undertake research into other options for the distribution of funding. Without this research it would be difficult to make an informed decision.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The current annual grant allocation to one-off projects - the Westhive general fund - is £120,000 per annum. The current fee paid to Spacehive for hosting the Westhive platform is £30,000. Funding for both is agreed for three years 2023 to 2026.

9.2 Any underspend of the Westhive budget would be held in reserves.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The ending or extension of the contract with Spacehive requires the Council to give 3 months or 90 days' notice of intention as set out in 4.2 above.

10.2 Spacehive is contractually obliged to undertake due diligence checks as set out in 4.4, to ensure they are appropriate to launch on a civic crowdfunding platform.

11. RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 The Council has supported the VCS to deliver valuable local services over a long period. Residents value these services, and should the Council decide not to continue to provide funding it is highly likely that this will result in some negative feedback to the Council.

11.2 The verification and due diligence checks by Spacehive seek to ensure that pledges will only be made to eligible applicants for appropriate expenditure. While this process prevents pledges being given to support ineligible activities, it cannot mitigate wholly against dissatisfaction where projects are unsuccessful in reaching their targets.

11.3 Where pledges are drawn down, but change in circumstances prevent activity taking place, Spacehive have procedures in place to seek the return of pledges. The Council maintains its discretion not to recover the grant where alternative or more limited activity could still take place.

11.4 A procurement exercise would be required to secure a provider for 3 years.

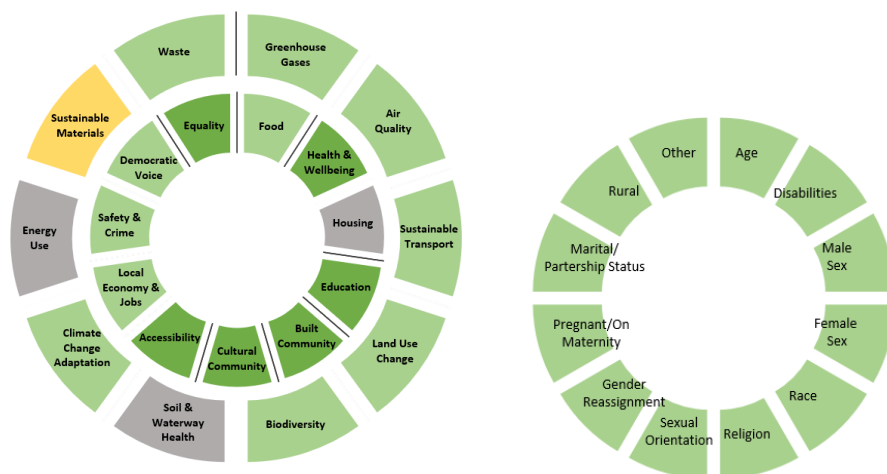
12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

12.1 The Westhive scheme has been designed to be open to geographical communities and communities of interest. The range of projects that have come forward onto the Westhive platform is to a degree testament to this, as they cover a range of very different activities, from different communities of geography and interest across the district.

12.2 The recommendations are designed to increase access to Council funding by all groups in the community.

13. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The SIA is attached below. Whilst all actions were accepted following review, the assessor did comment that the benefits set out in the SIAT would not be achieved in the event of funding not being available in future years.



ENVIRONMENTAL	Scores	Action	Justification	Reviewed	Recommendation
GHGs	2	No action required	Westhive has supported a high number of projects tackling the	Accepted	
Air quality	2	No action required	Funding is dedicated to projects which provide community bas	Accepted	
Sustainable Transport	2	No action required	Again it is difficult to predict what future funds will be availabl	Accepted	
Land use change	2	No action required	Again difficult to predict but expect, based on previous experie	Accepted	
Biodiversity	2	No action required	Again it has been difficult to predict the impact but we have me	Accepted	
Soil and waterway health	0	No action required.	Have not funded projects in the past where this has been a foc	Accepted	
Climate Change Adaptation	2	No action required	As above - we cannot guarantee the impact but we expect som	Accepted	
Energy Use	0	No action required.	It feels like a balance would be struck between some gains and	Accepted	
Sustainable Materials	-2	Review - identify possible improvements	As above it is difficult to predict but we would be encouraging	Accepted	
Waste	2	No action required	As previously mentioned we cannot guarantee what projects w	Accepted	
SOCIAL	Scores	Action	Justification	Reviewed	Recommendation
Food	2	No action required	We cannot predict what projects will come forward in the futur	Accepted	
Health	4	No action required.	The focus of the investment is community development and wi	Accepted	
Housing	0	No action required.	I do not think that the scheme would provide any change in this	Accepted	
Education	4	No action required	The focus of this fund is to build community capacity and supp	Accepted	
Built Community	4	No action required	The scheme has supported projects which improve the availabi	Accepted	
Cultural Community	4	No action required	The funding programme is focussed on enabling community ac	Accepted	
Accessibility	4	No action required	The scheme actively addresses the need to tackle barriers to ad	Accepted	
Local Economy and Jobs	2	No action required	Again it is difficult to predict but projects coming forward may	Accepted	
Safety	2	No action required	Difficult to predict but based on past experience the criteria co	Accepted	
Democratic Voice	2	No action required	This is a funding scheme open to organised groups to apply and	Accepted	
Equality	12	No action required	Positive impact on groups with protected characteristics. Evidence: Recent research findings. Equality of opportunity is a key principle of the scheme. Project	Accepted Accepted Accepted	

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 None

(END)