



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 17 DECEMBER 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. Enter into an agreement with Crowdfunder UK for a 3-year period to provide a funding platform.2. Consider as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process making provision for platform hosting fees of £27,600 per year for a 3-year period.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	None

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The contract with Spacehive is due to come to an end on the 30th April 2026. This report seeks to set out the features of several fund distribution options which have been considered in reaching the conclusion in 4.3.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** In April 2024, the Council introduced a revised approach to the distribution of community grant funding, to better align to the outcomes of the Council Plan and to foster a greater sense of community engagement and involvement. The Council's ambition is to play a key role in the maintaining of local community services delivered by the voluntary sector. The Council offers grant funding through a number of routes, supporting projects and activity of varying scale. The grants programme includes 3-year Service Level Agreements, the Westhive civic crowdfunding platform and the Community Activity Grants.

3. WESTHIVE

- 3.1** The Executive report of 13th November set out in detail the performance of Westhive up to Round 4. A total of 28 projects with a combined value of £948,172.00 have been successful during that period. Round 5 has recently been concluded with a further 10 projects receiving pledges from the Council and the Community Infrastructure Fund of £124, 649.
- 3.2** The Executive has agreed to continue to make grant funding available for community projects at the same level for a period of 3 years.
- 3.3** 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. Spacehive fees have increased since the Council entered into the original contract and should the Council decide to enter into a new 3-year contract with Spacehive the costs, based on our population level, would be £40,000 per annum. There may be a possibility of a 20% reduction in the first year but this has not been confirmed at this time. The Council is required to inform Spacehive of its intentions by the 31st January 2026.
- 3.4** The Spacehive business model includes a fee to project creators of 7.5% plus VAT on funds raised on the platform – including on Council pledges. It has not been possible to negotiate a local charging arrangement to reduce the fee paid by project creators – in exchange for an increased fee to the Council. The reasons cited are that the fee structure is published on the GCloud framework and it would be hard for Spacehive to apply local arrangements.

4. FUTURE PREFERRED OPTIONS

- 4.1** Officers have considered four options:
- **Platform based**
 1. Westhive
 2. Crowdfunder UK

- **Non platform based**

3. Have funding hosted and distributed by a local grant giving organisation, separate to the Council
4. Bring the service in house

Platform based	
<i>Option 1 – Westhive</i>	<i>Option 2 - Crowdfunder UK</i>
Fee paid by Council – flat £40k per year fee for multiple funds inc. verification and one workshop	Fee paid by Council – £27,600 annually to host two funds with receive comparable services. If less than one fund is hosted then fees are lower.
Fee for project creators – 7.5% plus VAT on funds raised on the platform – including Council pledges	No fee charged to project creators
Track record working with the Council – high number of successful applications	New approach and opportunity for fresh start – comms required
No application form element	Application form element
No other funders on the platform	Hosts funds from other providers such as Sport England, Aviva and British Airways and projects are auto-notified if their project might be relevant for other funds
<p>Platform based – harnessing individual giving</p> <p>On GCloud for procurement</p> <p>Work with other Councils</p> <p>Online help centre, helpline articles</p> <p>Stripe fees at 2.4% plus VAT on transactions</p> <p>Councillors have high level of involvement in decision making</p> <p>Account manager support</p> <p>Mainline online support – very limited in person support</p> <p>Verification provided</p> <p>Dedicated fund page</p> <p>National platforms – no local knowledge</p> <p>High visibility for all projects</p>	

Non platform based

<i>Option 3 - Have funding hosted and distributed by a local grant giving organisation, separate to the Council</i>	<i>Option 4 – Bring the process in house</i>
Fee to pay - % of fund	No fee to pay
Handling all management of applicants and processing of grants	All management of applicants and processing of grants done in house
High level of expertise in grant making	Some expertise in grant making
Low level of officer input	High level of officer input – would require additional officer resource
Little or no input by Councillors in decision making	High level of input by Councillors in decision making
Ability to link public funds with other sources e.g. other Council funds and private donors	Could be seen as a retrograde step – as performance was poorer in recent years
Not on GCloud – would require full procurement	
Application process known to local VCS	
Not platform-based	
High level of local awareness and understanding	
Application form-based scheme	
Face to face and phone call support	
No or little opportunity to harness individual giving	
Less visible than platform-based process	

- 4.2** Taking into account the need to secure an ongoing legacy position to take this important support for our local residents beyond the vesting day of the new Unitary Authority(s) it would be more financially prudent and time efficient to establish a longer-term contract. Therefore, we would recommend the approval of a further 3-year agreement as part of the budget setting process for 2026/27.
- 4.3** Should the Council prefer a platform-based approach it appears that Crowdfunder UK provides better value for money for residents. It is estimated that between 3 and 4 months would be needed to mobilise a new scheme – including undertaking a GCloud procurement, setting up contracts, working with IT on the platform set up and undertaking necessary communication activity. Our target launch date would be May 2026.

5. WHAT IS CROWDFUNDER UK

- 5.1** *‘Crowdfunder UK began with a simple mission to empower people to create change and now we’re the leading fundraising platform in the UK with a ‘crowd’ of over 3 million.*

Crowdfunder Connect brings councils, corporates and the crowd into one shared space where they can work together to make an even bigger impact. So far, our partners have helped raise over £400 million for amazing causes across the UK.

5.2 *Our society is facing more challenges than ever, which has led to increased pressure on councils to do more with less, but no one organisation can tackle it all alone. We are revolutionising the world of giving by providing a platform where councils, corporates and the crowd can come together to make a big impact by :*

- *Creating a more resilient funding ecosystem.*
- *Doubling the impact of funds through match funding.*
- *Bringing together council, corporate, and crowd contributions.*
- *Providing innovative solutions to make fundraising easier.*
- *Empowering and supporting local communities.'*

5.3 Crowdfunder UK is active in Oxfordshire with 97,000 + supporters having raised over £4.4M for 1,400+ projects. A collaboration of Crowdfunder partners such as Aviva, British Airways, Sport England, NatWest and Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment have contributed over £450k to this total. *'By partnering with Crowdfunder, you're able to harness this momentum being built by our partners and the public to support the incredible projects in your community.'*

5.4 Crowdfunder Connect can enable several different types of crowdfunding:

Live Match funding - a type of crowdfunding where a partner organisation matches public donations to a project in real-time as they are made.

Bridging Match – where a partner organisation adds 50% of a project's total target once it has raised its first 25%.

Grant funding – a partner organisation provides a grant to a project

5.5 How it works:

- Step 1 Allocate our fund - Set aside money for a local cause or priority area.
- Step 2 Design our application – Crowdfunder creates a dedicated page for our fund on the platform and a tailored application form – based on our requirements.
- Step 3 Match with projects – Crowdfunder notifies eligible projects where they are automatically matched and invites them to apply.
- Step 4 Review and manage - All applications come through to our management dashboard for our review.
- Step 5 Showcase our impact - Approved projects appear on our dedicated fund page. Example: [Crowdfund Salford | Crowdfunder.co.uk](https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/crowdfund-salford).

5.6 As a partner organisation the Council can distribute either by Open Funds or Funding Rounds. An Open Fund is where applications remain open all year-round until funds are allocated. Funding Rounds are where applications are only accepted during set time periods.

- 5.7** All organisations raising funds on the platform must comply with Crowdfunder UK terms and conditions and pass their due-diligence checks. These include:
- All project owners must provide a UK bank account as only UK accounts are accepted.
 - All project owners must provide proof of identity when required by Stripe, by uploading a copy of a UK Government issued ID such as a passport or driving licence.
 - All businesses, organisations and charities must provide registration details and a valid address.
- 5.8** Crowdfunder UK also complete additional checks on projects receiving partner contributions, such as confirming that payments are going to the intended organisation. Crowdfunder or the partner will then carry out eligibility checks to confirm that the project meets the agreed criteria. If the partner asks Crowdfunder to carry out these checks, the service is subject to an enhanced moderation fee which is referenced in 8.
- 5.9** All payments are handled securely through Stripe. During project setup, each organisation connects its own Stripe account to manage transactions. Projects can run on an 'all or nothing' or 'keep what you raise' model, determining whether funds are released or refunded if targets are not met. Partner contributions are held in a dedicated Stripe wallet and allocated to projects once a pledge is made, with funds transferred only when agreed conditions are met.
- 5.10** Crowdfunder Connect consistently sees council contributions more than doubled through additional contributions from other partners and the public. This collaborative model enables councils to support more projects, reach more communities, and address local challenges more effectively. The following examples illustrate this; for every £1 pledged by Cornwall Council, projects receive an additional £4, Salford Council see a return of an additional £2.20 for every £1 they pledge and Plymouth City Council receives an additional £2.55 for every £1 it pledges.

6. CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT WITH CURRENT SCHEME

- 6.1** Round 6 will be the final funding round in the current scheme. Following a meeting with Spacehive and as part of our ongoing review process to ensure we achieve the best outcomes for projects creators, we have agreed to do the following to enhance the process for Round 6:

6.1.1 The Council to :

- Review the Council criteria to ensure the provider is clear and can advise project creators accordingly;
- Undertake a test application to best understand the project creator journey and make any appropriate recommendations to enhance the application process.
- Capture feedback and market research with project creators.

- Ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities to avoid extra work for project creators and the duplication of effort.
- Make early contact with project creators – as they first appear on the platform – to pick up any early queries.
- Review the decision-making process to ensure it is time effective within the terms of delegation.
- Build into the Comms plan a component to promote project campaigns mid fundraising.
- Work with Spacehive to increase return rates of Impact reports.

6.1.2 Spacehive to:

- Alert project creators to the fact that their project may not meet our criteria.
- Review the Creator workshop to introduce elements related to the process of how to apply.
- Make the types of eligible evidence clearer to avoid delays and confusion.
- Make verification robust and consistent.
- Consider including coaching questions to maximise the benefit of Help articles.
- Ensure enough time is given between pause deadlines and panel meeting for projects to secure pledge numbers.
- Work with the Council to increase return rates of Impact reports.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1 The Council could decide to select an alternative approach to distributing funds. The various features are set out in 4.1.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 At the meeting of the Executive on the 13th November it was agreed that the Council would continue to make grant funding available for community projects at the same level for a period of 3 years.
- 8.2 The fees to the Council incurred by using the Crowdfunder UK platform would be as follows:

	Pricing based on a G-Cloud procurement			
Feature	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Number of funds hosted	1	1	2	2
Enhanced moderation	N	Y	N	Y
Crowdfunder Connect Licence Fee (Hosted)	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000	£24,000
Additional Fund distribution and enhanced moderation		£3,600	£7,200	£3,600
Annual fee (£ ExVAT)	£12,000	£15,600	£19,200	£27,600

- 8.3** The annual fee would be fixed for the duration of the contract when using the GCloud platform. Adding in the optional enhanced moderation service makes the offer comparable with the Spacehive service. This incurs additional charges as set out above. There would be no charges applied to project creators where they are a charity or non-profit except the transaction fee levied in relation to the Stripe account and this would be 2.4% plus VAT which is identical to the amount charged by Spacehive.
- 8.4** Extending the current contract with Spacehive for a further year, would incur a cost of £30,000. If the Council were to enter into a 3-year agreement the cost per annum would be £40,000 based on the G-Cloud Framework. There may be the opportunity for a 20% reduction in year 1 but this has not been confirmed. In addition, Spacehive would apply a fee of 7.5% plus VAT on all funds raised by all project creators on the platform. This fee is also applied to Council pledges.
- 8.5** The 3rd party hosting option would incur a fee to the Council – likely to be approximately 12% of the fund size. It is highly unlikely that charges related to transactions would be incurred by project owners. To bring the process in house would incur costs of additional officer time as this would significantly increase the workload internally.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** The current agreement with Spacehive comes to an end on the 30th April 2026. The ending or extension of the contract with Spacehive requires the Council to give notice by 30th January 2026. As part of the current contract the Council can extend for a further 12-month period.
- 9.2** Crowdfunder UK is on the government G-Cloud framework making the process somewhat simpler. Agreeing a new 3-year contract would require the support of the Procurement, Legal and ICT teams.

10. RISK ASSESSMENT

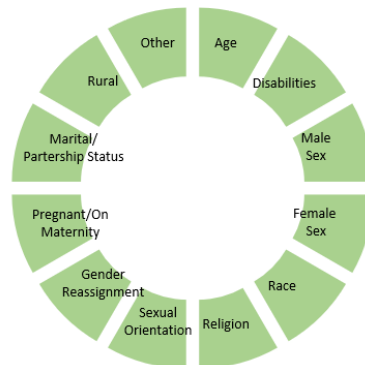
- 10.1** The options being considered have track record and represent effective models. We would expect all approaches to provide robust grant making services. Crowdfunder UK have experience of hosting local authority funds, and funds of national bodies such as Sport England and businesses such as Aviva and British Airways.

11. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 11.1** The Westhive scheme has been designed to be open to geographical communities and communities of interest. Over 5 rounds a wide range of projects have made use of the platform to host successful crowdfunding campaigns.

12. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1** The SIAT 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 This proposal relies on both renewables and fossil fuels.	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 w	Accepted	
Housing	0	No action required.	I do not think that the scheme would provide any change in thi	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 availabl	Accepted	
Cultural Community	4	No action required	The funding programme is focussed on enabling community act	Accepted	
Accessibility	4	No action required	The scheme actively addresses the need to tackle barriers to ac	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	

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 None

(END)