

Notes on Zoom Meeting 20th March 2026, Heart of England Community Foundation – Jeff Robinson and Shamiela Ahmed, Senior Manager – Programmes

Shamiela's responsibilities include:

- Leading all grant-making activity across the Foundation's programmes
- Overseeing assessment of funding applications, including due diligence and quality control
- Presenting applications to grant panels and guiding decision-making
- Building strong relationships with community organisations, charities, and partners
- Supporting organisations to shape stronger applications and understand funder expectations
- Ensuring grants deliver measurable impact across the West Midlands and Warwickshire
- Contributing to programme design, ensuring funding meets real community needs

She explained that they would not be able to contribute towards any professional fees. However, we *can* apply for funding to support community-voice work if there are associated costs, and there are several potential routes available.

There is limited funding available from the Foyle Trust for Net Zero-related work, as well as for projects that support isolated or lonely people and help build friendship groups. In practice, almost all of our community-focused plans would be eligible across the range of funders they work with.

Funders will expect us to demonstrate clear evidence of need, desire, and enthusiasm from the community. They want to see that ideas originate from the community and that local people are genuinely on board.

They recommend submitting a single, well-defined application rather than a phased approach. We need to be specific, but most funders allow one application per year.

The wording of any consultation will be crucial. They plan to approach community organisations who may be willing to share their survey questions with us. Using these as a starting point could be valuable, as they have used similar data to shape successful projects. Although we all have a sense of the challenges, we need to confirm the obvious with evidence.

Applications often fail when they are based on weak ideas driven by enthusiastic individuals rather than demonstrated need. Strong applications come from organisations that have researched their community, understand the impact they want to make, and can articulate that impact clearly.

Being explicit about outcomes and benefits will further strengthen any bid.

Her advice was that taking a little time to get the basics right prevents mistakes, avoids rework, and gives a stronger foundation. Rushing ahead might feel faster, but it usually slows us down later. A clear, well-evidenced start makes everything that follows more confident, credible, and funder-ready.

For volunteer-run community groups with their own management committees, it is helpful that they can rely on the church's existing policies where required.

They are happy to support us before we submit any formal applications. They can advise which funders are best suited to each element of the project and are always willing to help - they simply need clarity about what we want to achieve.

She is looking forward to working with us on our plans.