

Community Engagement and Wellbeing  
222 Upper Street, London N1 1XR

Report of Cllr O'Halloran, Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of: Voluntary and Community Sector Committee

Date: 21 November 2023

Ward(s): All 17 wards

## Subject: Local Initiatives Fund

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1. The Local Initiatives Fund (LIF) is a flexible devolved budget for councillors to use to address issues and priorities in their wards. It is an important element of the council's community provision and helps to meet the needs of local residents. In 2023/24 each ward has an allocation of £13,000 to spend on local schemes. Councillors consider project ideas for their ward and make recommendations to the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee for formal approval.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To consider the new proposals and changes to previous proposals submitted by ward councillors as set out in Appendix A and to agree these proposals in principle subject to the Corporate Director of Community Engagement and Wellbeing being satisfied that the necessary checks have been made and any other issues resolved.
- 2.2. To note the declarations of interest made by councillors due to having a connection with organisations that they are recommending funding for. These are detailed at paragraph 4.3.
- 2.3. To note the amendments to ward budgets resulting from project funding being returned. The amendments are detailed in Appendix B and are included in the budget summary on the last page of Appendix A.

- 2.4. To agree that no more than £1000 underspend per ward can be carried forward by councillors to 2024/25.
- 2.5. To continue with delegated authority to the Corporate Director Community Engagement and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Homes and Communities, to make changes to the use of previously awarded funding.
- 2.6. To note that further applications received for projects addressing the cost of living crisis will revert to being considered by councillors as the extra NLWA funding is now all exhausted.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. The Local Initiatives Fund enables councillors to respond directly to priorities in their ward that lie outside of current mainstream funding programmes and might not otherwise receive funding. It helps them to address the needs of local residents and suggest improvements to local services/facilities or new schemes that will enhance the area.
- 3.2. The Community Partnerships Team in the Community Engagement and Wellbeing Directorate is responsible for managing the Local Initiatives Fund in liaison with ward councillors and members of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Committee. The team ensures that funds are used appropriately and for the purpose for which they are allocated.
- 3.3. The VCS Committee's terms of reference include 'To be responsible for the allocation of the Islington Community Fund including...allocating the Local Initiatives Fund having regard to the recommendations of the relevant ward members/relevant ward partnership or neighbourhood group and on the basis that the funding will be allocated equally among the 16 wards making up the council's area'.
- 3.4. The VCS Committee in April 2011 agreed that each ward councillor should be given a notional allocation of the Local Initiatives Fund (i.e. divided equally between the councillors elected for each ward). In 2016/17, £15,000 was available to each ward; therefore the notional allocation for each councillor was £5,000.
- 3.5. In January 2017, the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee agreed that in order to address the issue of recruiting and retaining support for ward partnerships, an incentive payment of £1,000 per annum would be paid to each ward partnership co-ordinator and that £1,000 per annum be set aside from each ward partnership Local Initiatives Fund budget to fund this support.
- 3.6. In 2021/22, the annual Local Initiatives Fund budget was therefore £225,000. This was £14,000 per ward apart from the Bunhill and Clerkenwell ward budgets which were each £14,500.
- 3.7. In March 2022, it was agreed that two new ward partnership co-ordinator posts needed to be created. An additional ward partnership co-ordinator was recruited to the Finsbury ward partnership due to the additional workload involved in dealing

with two wards. In May 2022, the number of wards in Islington increased from 16 to 17 which meant that a further ward partnership co-ordinator was recruited.

- 3.8. Due to the increased amount spent on honorariums/ incentive payments to co-ordinators and the larger number of wards, the amount of funding available in each ward budget in 2023/24 for local schemes is £13,000. This means there is a reduction of the overall LIF budget from £240,000 to £238,000. Of this £238,000, £17,000 is spent on honorariums with £221,000 left to allocate to local schemes.
- 3.9. In November 2019, authority was delegated to the Head of Community Partnerships, to allocate funding, up to the value of £250, to activity to support Ward Partnership meetings. Awards approved under delegated authority should be reported to the next VCS Committee at which Local Initiatives Fund awards are considered. In September 2021, it was agreed that funding up to the value of £1,000 can be approved by the Head of Community Partnerships and Corporate Director Community Engagement and Wellbeing for activity to support Ward Partnership meetings.
- 3.10. Due to the challenges being faced by the cost of living crisis, the decision was made to open up LIF for applications during the winter period (Oct 2022-March 2023) to ensure that voluntary and community sector organisations were able to respond on the ground to the crisis, and that funding was awarded and processed promptly to support the sector during this difficult time.
- 3.11. In early March 2023, it was decided that any further applications received for projects addressing the cost of living crisis would continue to be prioritised beyond the end of March but would not be funded from the Local Initiatives Fund budget. £20,000 of extra funding from the North London Waste Authority was set aside to fund any further cost of living crisis related proposals received. From 23 March to 2 June, £11,355 of this extra funding was allocated to 11 applications. From 18 July to 30 September, £8,645 was allocated to a further 9 applications which means there is now no extra cost of living funding available. These applications were not considered by ward councillors but by officers in the Community Partnerships team. The maximum that could be applied for under this process was £1000. The relevant ward councillors have been informed of any decisions made for projects related to their ward. The awards agreed from 18 July to 30 September are listed in Appendix A for information only. Further applications received for projects addressing the cost of living crisis will revert to being considered by councillors subject to sufficient funding being available in the relevant ward budgets.

## 4. LIF Awards 2023/24

- 4.1. Occasionally projects do not proceed as planned and funding is returned to ward budgets or the use of a grant has to be changed.

9 reallocations totalling £7,904 have been added back into ward budgets and these are set out in Appendix B. These amendments to the ward budgets are reflected in the budget summary on the last page of Appendix A. This increases the amount available to allocate in 2023/24 from £233,286 to £241,189.

One change in the use of previously awarded funding has been agreed by councillors and is listed in Appendix A.

- 4.2. Since the last VCS Committee in July 2023, 65 applications for the Local Initiatives Fund have been received. Another 8 cost of living crisis related applications have been received, of which 7 were fully covered by the additional NLWA funding. 2 further applications were funded by both LIF and NLWA. This means a total of 75 applications have been received since the last VCS Committee in July 2023.

Four of the 67 LIF applications were related to Ward Partnership activity, were recommended for funding and then formally agreed by the Head of Community Partnerships / Corporate Director of Community Engagement and Wellbeing under delegated authority. These four applications totalling £1841 are listed in Appendix A for information only.

Of the remaining 63 LIF applications, three were deferred until the next round, eight applications were not recommended for funding and one application was referred to Section 106/ Community Infrastructure Levy funding instead leaving a total of 51 applications recommended by ward councillors.

If the remaining 51 councillor funding recommendations are formally agreed by this VCS Committee, there will be £64,890 left in the 2023/24 budget and would mean that 55 LIF grants have been awarded at or reported to the November VCS Committee. 59 grants were awarded at or reported to the July Committee which means that a total of 114 LIF grants have been awarded in 2023/24 to date.

A list of the 51 LIF applications recommended for funding and the recommended amount for each application is set out in Appendix A.

8 of the 67 LIF applications received are from first time applicants to LIF. 4 of these applications have been recommended for funding and a multi ward one has been part deferred. 7 organisations/council departments are listed more than once in Appendix A (i.e. have submitted more than one LIF application to this round).

The total amount of LIF allocated by councillors to cost of living crisis related applications between October 2022 and the July VCS Committee was £40,443. An additional £1,596 has been allocated by councillors to cost of living crisis

related applications in this round. £20,000 of NLWA funding has been allocated by officers to cost of living projects since the March VCS Committee (£8,645 reported to this Committee). This means the total amount allocated to cost of living crisis related applications since October 2022 is £62,039 (£42,039 LIF and £20,000 NLWA).

- 4.3. Councillors must always declare their interest if they have a connection with an organisation that they are recommending funding for. Declarations of interest have been made for the following applications reported to this Committee:
- Cllr Saiqa Pandor is the organiser of the women's pampering day that has been allocated £1780 by 16 wards (Hanley Crouch Community Association applied on her behalf).
  - Cllr Asima Shaikh is the Islington representative on the board of Finsbury Park Trust that has been allocated £550 for festive support (hampers and a festive lunch).
  - Cllr Marian Spall is the chair of Caxton House Settlement that has been allocated £900 for winter festivals.
  - Cllr Michelline Ngongo is a holding trustee of Caxton House Settlement that has been allocated £900 for winter festivals.
  - Cllrs Chapman and Burgess are the appointed elected representatives to the Archway Town Centre Group that has been allocated £1316.60 for the Archway Christmas Spectacular.
  - Cllr Jenny Kay is the vice-chair of the federated governing board of Newington Green Primary School that has been allocated £1088 for emotional support resources for classrooms and a school pantomime. The PTA applied for this funding.
  - Cllr Anjna Khurana is a trustee of Hanley Crouch Community Association that has been allocated £2,004.61 for a Tollington ward partnership fun day and £1675.30 for a women's pampering day on behalf of Cllr Saiqa Pandor.
  - Cllr Tricia Clarke is a governor of Tufnell Park Primary School that has been allocated £1000 for improvements to the reclaimed pond garden.
  - Cllr Satnam Gill, Cllr Tricia Clarke and Cllr Gulcin Ozdemir are all co-opted trustees of Hilldrop Area Community Association that has been allocated £1000 for a Christmas lunch and dinner.

Awards were made to the following ward partnerships for costs associated with holding ward partnership meetings or events:

- Arsenal Ward Partnership – meeting on 17 August - £35.60
- Barnsbury Ward Partnership – fun day date to be decided - £1000
- Finsbury Ward Partnership (Bunhill and Clerkenwell wards) – fun day on 24 September - £675
- Finsbury Park Ward Partnership – meeting on 18 July - £130

- Tollington Ward Partnership – fun day on 21 October (hosted by Hanley Crouch Community Association) - £2,004.61

The councillors funding these costs are members of these ward partnerships and the main organisers of the meetings / events so have declared an interest in the above.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1. Financial Implications

The Local Initiatives Fund in Financial Year 2023/24 has a total of £241,189 to allocate. This is comprised of an annual budget of £221,000 and a carried forward underspend/unallocated amount of £20,189 from previous awards or financial years. An additional £17,000 LIF budget is spent on honorarium/ incentive payments to ward partnership co-ordinators to a total of £1,000 per annum per ward. The core budget available for LIF will be £238,000.

Any recommendations for carry forwards of LIF underspends will be subject to yearly reviews of the wider financial needs of the Council. The current earmarked reserves as a consequence of previous financial year's carry forwards and previous awards are sufficient to meet the funding requirements of this report.

The proposals referred to in this report can be met from budget and reserve allocations from the Local Initiatives Fund. Delays or alterations to LIF projects may increase ward underspends in Financial Year 2024/25.

Financial Year 2024/25 will start with a comprised annual budget of £221,000 and any additional carried forward underspend/unallocated. An additional £17,000 LIF budget will be spent on honorarium/ incentive payments to ward partnership co-ordinators to a total of £1,000 per annum per ward. The core budget available for LIF will be £238,000.

Any recommendations to revert to previously held carry forward capping will reduce the carry forward and the money available for the LIF programme, but will improve the financial position of the Council.

### 5.2. Legal Implications

The general power of competence pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides the council with very broad powers 'to do anything that individuals generally may do'. This covers the power to give grants to voluntary and community sector organisations as proposed in this report and includes anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the whole or part of its area or all

or any of the persons resident or present in that area. The provision of resources through the Local Initiatives Fund is likely to promote the social and economic well-being of Islington's residents.

The council is under a fiduciary duty to ensure that its resources are used appropriately. Where the money is allocated to outside bodies, the requirements of the procurement rules may apply. In any event it will be important to maintain current practice of ensuring that the money will be used for the purposes for which it is allocated and that individual members are made aware of the responsibility they bear in making recommendations in relation to specific groups.

The council has adopted a Code of Conduct for its members which is in Part 6 of the Constitution and is on the council's website. All members need to register their disclosable interests – both disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests that must be declared and registered as required by the council's Code of Conduct for members or by members' duty to act in conformity of the Seven Principles of Public Life.

One of the Seven Principles of Public Life is the principle of integrity, that *“holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.”*

Members' registration of personal interests should be guided by this duty. They should also give the Monitoring Officer who is responsible for the register of members' interests any information they may request in order to keep that register up to date and any other information which members consider should be entered in the register.

### **5.3. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030**

Most if not all, of the projects funded by the LIF grants have carbon and environmental impacts, including the use of energy, fuel, water, food and drink, materials, prizes, generators, fireworks and printing, while events being funded may create waste or journeys that contribute to transport-related emissions especially if attendees drive. However, many projects also have positive environmental impacts, including repairing items including bikes, a free library box, planting, greening areas, local food growing and increasing local biodiversity. Wherever possible, projects will be undertaken with regard with the council's goal of achieving a net zero Islington by 2030, as per Islington Council's Environmental Policy.

#### 5.4. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

When considering proposals the VCS Committee will take relevant equalities implications into account. The Local Initiatives Fund provides resources for local projects which directly meet the needs of local residents, many of whom are from groups with protected characteristics. It enables some of Islington's poorest communities to access community-based services and activities and allows provision to be developed locally which can reach groups of residents that may not otherwise be supported.

## 6. **Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

The Local Initiatives Fund is an effective way of addressing local priorities and provides a mechanism for ward councillors to support small projects which might otherwise not be funded. Proposals submitted for approval represent a wide range of activity and will deliver significant benefit to local communities.

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Local Initiatives Fund Proposals

Appendix B – Local Initiatives Fund Ward Budget Reallocations (for information only)

**Background papers:** none

#### **Final report clearance:**

Signed by:



**Cllr Una O'Halloran, Executive Member for Homes and Communities**



Date: 10 November 2023

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