



Report of: Executive Member for Community Development

Meeting of:	Date	Wards
Executive	30 April 2020	All

Delete as appropriate		Non-exempt
------------------------------	--	------------

SUBJECT: LOCAL INITIATIVES FUND

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 The Local Initiatives Fund 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 2020/21 each ward has an allocation of £14,000 to spend on local schemes, with the exception of Bunhill and Clerkenwell who each have an allocation of £14,500. Councillors consider project ideas for their ward and make recommendations to the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee. This report asks the Executive to approve the proposals submitted by Ward Councillors for this financial year.
- 1.2 The outbreak of COVID 19 has been an exceptional event which is having an enormous impact on services across the borough. The VCS have been challenged with protecting staff, service users and the general public while responding to the crisis in the community. This has meant that the support the Council is providing to the sector has had to adapt acknowledging that the VCS plays a key role in our community offering vital services, often with limited resources.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider the new proposals and changes to previous proposals submitted by Ward Councillors as set out in Appendix 1 and to agree these proposals in principle subject to the Corporate Director of Housing being satisfied that the necessary checks have been made and any other issues resolved.

- 2.2 To note that, In light of COVID 19 contact will be made with those organisations that are agreed for funding, as per the temporary revised procedure referred to in recommendation 2.5 to review potential project changes.
- 2.3 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 3.12.
- 2.4 To note the amendments to ward budgets resulting from project funding being returned and the amendments to the use of previous grant funding awarded. These amendments are detailed at paragraph 3.13 and are included in the budget summary on the last page of Appendix 1.
- 2.5 To agree that any underspend on ward budgets is carried forward into the next financial year (2021/22) due to the COVID 19 outbreak.
- 2.6 To agree a temporary revised procedure for previously awarded applications (including those in Appendix 1) where the project or the use of funding has changed due to the Covid 19 outbreak, in line with the proposed framework (paragraph 4.6 to 4.7)
- 2.7 To agree a temporary revised procedure for new applications due to the Covid 19 outbreak, in line with the proposed framework (paragraph 4.8).
- 2.8 To agree to temporarily cease to monitor organisations ahead of funding being awarded, where the organisation is known to the Council and has received funding previously. Where an organisation is unknown, further information may be requested for any changes to a project, or ahead of funding being awarded (paragraph 4.10).
- 2.9 To agree to temporarily change the process for supporting documents so that these do not have to be provided ahead of funding being awarded. An organisation will need to confirm that they have appropriate, up to date governance documents and the VCS Development team will carry out routine spot checks during this period (paragraph 4.10).
- 2.10 To agree that the council does not fund mutual aid groups with LIF budgets, and that these groups are encouraged to align with existing VCS organisations working in the borough.
- 2.11 To agree for the amendment to delegated authority to the Corporate Director of Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Community Development for final awards, and revised procedures to be brought to VCS Committee in July 2020 for review (paragraph 4.8).

3 Background

- 3.1 In March 2011 the Council agreed to strengthen the role of Ward Councillors by building on existing 'neighbourhood arrangements' for some wards and establishing a mechanism for a more focussed ward based approach throughout the borough. From 1 April 2011 new ward partnership arrangements were introduced in place of the previous area committees.
- 3.2 Simultaneously a report relating to the Islington Community Fund was agreed by Executive. This included a proposal to create a Local Initiatives Fund with each ward having an allocation of £20,000 per year to spend on local projects.

- 3.3 In February 2015, the Executive agreed that the Local Initiatives Fund budget be reduced to £15,000 per ward (£240,000 total).
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 At Executive in March 2011 it was agreed that a Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Committee of the Executive should be set up to oversee the Council's engagement with the voluntary and community sector and to ensure value for money and fairness in the allocation of Council resources to the sector.
- 3.6 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'.
- 3.7 The committee 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.
- 3.8 In September 2014 the VCS Committee agreed to introduce a minimum award of £250 per project. In October 2018 the VCS Committee agreed that a minimum amount of £50 per ward be requested by organisations submitting proposals to more than one ward.

In November 2019 authority was delegated to the Head of Communities, to allocate funding, up to the value of £250, to activity to support Ward Partnership meetings. Awards approved under delegated authority are reported to the next VCS Committee at which Local Initiatives Fund awards are considered.

- 3.9 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.

In 2020/21, the annual Local Initiatives Fund budget is therefore £225,000. This is £14,000 per ward apart from the Bunhill and Clerkenwell ward budgets which are each £14,500.

- 3.10 The Voluntary and Community Sector Development Team in the Housing department is responsible for managing the Local Initiatives Fund in liaison with ward councillors and members of the VCS Committee. The team ensures that funds are used appropriately and for the purpose for which they are allocated.
- 3.11 The fourth tranche of proposals submitted by Ward Councillors for this financial year is set out in Appendix 1. It is recommended that these proposals are agreed in principle subject to the Corporate Director of Housing being satisfied that the necessary checks have been made and any other issues resolved.

- 3.12 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 submitted to this Committee:

- Cllr John Woolf is a member of St Stephen's Church which hosts the Manna which has been allocated £1,000 for their day centre shower and laundry facilities and £2,400 for a community gardener.
- Cllr Osh Gantly, Cllr Sue Lukes and Cllr Caroline Russell are the ward councillors of the Highbury East ward partnership and so are the main organisers of the Highbury East ward partnership meeting that has been allocated £217.
- Cllr Marian Spall is a trustee of Caxton House Community Centre which will be the host venue and which will hold the funding for the Hillrise Summer Festival which has been allocated £2,864.
- Cllr Dave Poyser, Cllr Marian Spall and Cllr Michelline Ngongo will help as volunteers at the Hillrise Summer Festival which has been allocated £2,864.
- Cllr Janet Burgess is a trustee of Whittington Park Community Association that has been allocated £6,020 for building works.
- Cllr Flora Williamson is a governor of St Mark's CE School which has been allocated £1,000 for drop in nature / food growing clubs.
- Cllr Anjna Khurana is a member of the Friends of Wray Crescent that has been allocated £580 for plants, equipment, tools, fruit trees and shrubs.
- Cllr Anjna Khurana, Cllr Flora Williamson and Cllr Richard Watts have declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in the £303 award to Hanley Crouch Community Association as they form the Tollington ward partnership, which is hosting the event that the award is funding.
- Cllr Anjna Khurana is a trustee of Hanley Crouch Community Association which has been allocated £769 for a family wellness day and £303 for a Tollington ward partnership community fun day.

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

In July 2019, £2,000 was awarded to Hanley Crouch Community Association for a Tollington ward community day on 8 June 2019. Less paid staff were needed due to volunteers helping with face painting and other activities. An underspend of £212 has been returned to the Tollington budget for reallocation. This £212 will contribute to the cost of another Tollington ward community day on 29 February 2020. Extra funding is needed for the hire of the two caretakers at St Mark's School. A total of £303.37 is requested for the cost of caretakers so an extra £91.37 has been allocated in this round.

In February 2020, it was listed in the appendix that a £1,099 underspend from the £4,818 grant awarded in January 2019 to St Peter's Children and Young People's Activities Group would be used to hire the Arc centre in August 2020 for these summer holiday sessions. £900 of this £1,099 will now be used to hire the Arc Centre. The other £199 will be used to pay for parent involvement through four local primary schools including meetings and communications, i.e. space hire, phone calls, printing and refreshments.

4. Proposed Framework for LIF Awards during Covid 19 Outbreak

- 4.1 The Council has signed up to the London Funders commitment statement joining other Local Authorities and organisations standing with the sector during this difficult time. The statement reassures organisations affected by the COVID 19 outbreak that the Council, as funders, will commit to four ways of working:
1. Adapting activities – acknowledging that agreed outcomes may not be achieved in the timeframes originally set.
 2. Discussing dates – not adding pressure on organisations to meet tight reporting deadlines.
 3. Financial flexibility – allowing organisations to use money differently e.g. buying equipment and covering staff sickness.
 4. Listening – encouraging frank conversations between funders and grantees, with funders being supportive of their needs.
- 4.2 In light of recent Government guidance during the COVID 19 outbreak many organisations who are funded through LIF will be unable to carry out the proposed activities or events. It will also be difficult to reschedule these in the current climate until more is understood about the longer term effects of this situation.
- 4.3 It is recommended that any underspend on Ward budgets for this financial year is carried over into the next financial year, to ensure that as funder the Council can be flexible in how we support the sector during this time.
- 4.4 **Existing LIF Awards – proposed framework**
Of the 32 projects recommended for funding in this fourth and final round, 3 of these are in the past which leave 29 still to take place. It is likely that many of these 29 projects will have to be postponed due to Government guidelines on social distancing.
- 4.5 Of the 141 projects awarded funding or recommended for funding in this financial year (all four rounds), 66 are in the past and should have finished by now (based on their proposed timescales). This leaves 75 projects that are highly likely to be affected in this current situation.
- 4.6 It is recommended that a project update form (Appendix 2) be completed by previously funded organisations that are requesting a change in the use of funding, including an extension to the timeline for the event. This will then be agreed by Ward Councillors, with delegated authority to the Corporate Director of Housing in consultation with the Executive Member for Community Development to approve final awards to prevent delays to funding being received.
- 4.7 The funding terms and conditions state that all funding should be spent within 12 months from the date of award of the grant. However, it is recommended that extensions be permitted subject to the revised process and agreement by the delegated authority as per paragraph 4.6.

4.8 **New Applications – proposed framework**

New applications will be processed and then approved by Ward Councillors, with delegated authority for final awards taken by the Executive Member for Community Development to prevent delays to funding being received.

4.9 Applications received for events due to happen which will breach Government guidelines on social distancing will not be accepted.

4.10 **Proposed changes to existing framework**

Proposal to cease all monitoring on existing and new projects during the current situation. During this time, the Council will not ask to see supporting documents for any projects but will request organisations applying for LIF to confirm they have up to date governance documents. The VCS Development team will perform routine spot checks during this time.

4.13 It is recommended that the LIF budgets are not used to fund mutual aid groups and that these groups are encouraged to align with existing organisations operating in the borough in the interests of due diligence.

4.12 All proposed project changes to be brought to VCS Committee in July 2020 for information only, as an appendix. A review of all temporary revised procedures to come to July VCS Committee for review.

5 Implications

5.1 **Financial implications**

The local initiatives fund in Financial Year 2020/21 has a budget total of £240,000. £225,000 will be allocated across 16 wards, with 14 receiving a budget of £14,000 each and the Bunhill and Clerkenwell wards receiving £14,500 each. The remaining £15,000 of the LIF budget is spent on honorarium/ incentive payments to ward partnership co-ordinators to a total of £1000 per annum per ward (with Bunhill and Clerkenwell sharing a ward partnership co-ordinator).

The proposals referred to in this report can be met from budget allocations for the Local Initiatives Fund. Delays or alterations to LIF projects may increase ward underspends in Financial Year 2020/21.

Any recommendations for carry forwards of LIF underspends will be subject to yearly reviews of the wider financial needs of the Council.

Any loosening of monitoring procedures will need to ensure that suitable controls remain to ensure financial best practice in the Council's dealings with voluntary and community organisations.

5.2 **Legal Implications**

The general power of competence pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which came into force on 6 April 2012 provides the Council with very broad powers 'to do anything that individuals generally may do'. Where there is not a specific applicable grant making power, section 1 gives power to award 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.

5.3 **Environmental Implications**

Many of the recommended projects have environmental implications that include carbon emissions. Several involve providing food and drink, using energy and water in buildings, or using resources in the form of purchasing consumables, and will also generate waste in some form. Almost all involve travel by the organisers or attendees, some specifically by vehicles such as coaches that are unlikely to be zero emission, which has the potential to increase local emissions and congestion. One project involves capital works, that will use materials and energy and install equipment that will use energy on an ongoing basis.

However, some of the projects promote environmental awareness or encourage cycle use, plant and tree planting and local fruit growing, which may have a positive long-term impact. One project involving refreshments will require visitors to bring their own plate and glasses to avoid using disposable items. The capital project also involves improving the building's insulation and heating system, again providing a long-term benefit.

5.4 **Resident 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.

5.5 The Council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding and 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**

6.1 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.

- 6.2 Agreeing to carry forward residual amounts of funding to next year's budget will help to ensure a more efficient allocation of resources, and flexibility as a funder in the current climate.

Appendices

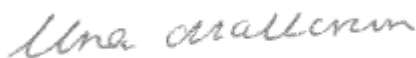
Appendix 1 – Local Initiatives Fund Proposals

Appendix 2 – Project Update Form

Background papers: none

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



21 April 2020

Councillor Una O'Halloran
Executive Member for Community Development

Date:

Report Author: Shabana Aslam
Tel: 020 7527 3848
Email: Shabana.Aslam@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Thomas Cooksey
Tel: 020 2527 1867
Email: Thomas.Cooksey@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: David Daniels
Tel: 020 7527 3277
Email: David.Daniels@islington.gov.uk