

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: 20 March 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 2022/23 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 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.

- 2.4. To note that further applications received for projects addressing the cost of living crisis will be accepted until the end of March but will not be funded from the Local Initiatives Fund budget. These will be considered by the Cost of Living board and the Corporate Director Community Engagement and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Homes and Communities. This is detailed at paragraph 3.11.

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 2022/23 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. In addition, applications responding to the crisis were taken under delegated authority to the Corporate Director Community Engagement and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Homes and Communities, for formal approval to ensure that decisions were made swiftly. These awards have been reported to the VCS Committee retrospectively for information.
- 3.11. Due to limited funding being available in most wards, any further applications received for projects addressing the cost of living crisis will be accepted until the end of March but will not be funded from the Local Initiatives Fund budget. These will be considered by the Cost Of Living board and the Corporate Director Community Engagement and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Homes and Communities. The relevant ward councillors will be informed of any decisions made for projects related to their ward. These awards will be reported to the first VCS Committee in 2023/24 for information.

4. LIF Awards 2022/23

- 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.

Three very small underspends totalling £87 have been returned to the Bunhill, St Mary's and St James' and St Peter's and Canalside budgets for reallocation. The Bunhill and St Mary's and St James' amounts were due to underspends on ward partnership meetings. The St Peter's and Canalside amount was due to an underspend on a £440 grant awarded in November 2022 for signage for Canalside Gardens and Packington Square.

These amendments to the ward budgets are reflected in the budget summary on the last page of Appendix A. In total, £87 has been returned to the ward budgets in this round. This increases the amount available to allocate in 2022/23 from £260,817 to £260,904.

4.2. 48 applications for funding have been received since the last VCS Committee in November 2022.

Five 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 five applications totalling £982 are listed at the end of Appendix A for information only.

Six applications for projects addressing the cost of living crisis were agreed under delegated authority between 9 November and 13 December 2022. A total of £11,326 was allocated to these 6 applications. A further seven applications for projects addressing the cost of living crisis were agreed under delegated authority on 20 February 2023. A total of £10,275 was allocated to these 7 applications. These 13 applications are listed in Appendix A for information only. This means the total amount allocated to cost of living crisis applications since the November VCS Committee is £21,601.

A further two cost of living applications were received for two wards who did not have enough remaining budget to fully fund them. In addition, two of the seven most recent applications addressing the cost of living crisis were not fully funded. The above 4 applications and any further cost of living applications received before the end of March will be considered by the Cost of Living board and the Corporate Director Community Engagement and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Homes and Communities.

Of the remaining 28 applications, two applications were deferred until the first round of 2023/24 and one application was not recommended for funding by ward councillors leaving a total of 25 applications recommended by ward councillors. As some wards were heavily oversubscribed for their remainder in this last round, they could not afford to fully fund all of the applications received so some applications were part funded and the councillors have asked that the balance of these applications be deferred to the next round in 2023/24.

If the remaining 25 councillor funding recommendations are formally agreed by this VCS Committee, there will be £7,885 left in the 2022/23 budget and would mean that 151 grants have been awarded in 2022/23. This £7,885 will be carried forward and added to the 2023/24 budget.

A list of the 25 applications recommended for funding and the recommended amount for each application is set out in Appendix A.

11 of the 48 applications received are from first time applicants to LIF and 9 of these have been recommended for funding. Four organisations are listed more than once in Appendix A (i.e. have submitted more than one application to this round).

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 Phil Graham is employed at St Luke's Parochial Trust that has been allocated £1010 for a food hub.
- Cllr Valerie Bossman-Quarshie is a trustee of St Luke's Parochial Trust that has been allocated £1010 for a food hub.
- Cllr Ruth Hayes is a trustee of Marx Memorial Library that has been allocated £320 for two weekend sessions as part of their 90th anniversary programme.
- Cllr Kaya Comer-Schwartz is the daughter of the coordinator of Cooperation Girdlestone that has been allocated £1866 for a food share programme on and near the Girdlestone estate.
- Cllr Kaya Comer-Schwartz is the daughter of the chair of Girdlestone Gardening Group that has been allocated £1500 for garden furniture, equipment, materials, tools and a contractor.
- Cllr Tricia Clarke is a governor of Tufnell Park Primary School that has been allocated £1000 to make their reclaimed pond garden more accessible.

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

- Arsenal – meeting on 22 November - £278.76
- Arsenal – fun day on 25 March - £500
- Caledonian – meeting on 21 February - £49
- Canonbury – stakeholder meeting on 30 November - £104
- Holloway – community fun day on 28 January - £50

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 2022/23 has a total of £260,904 to allocate. This is comprised of an annual budget of £221,000 and a carried forward underspend/unallocated amount of £39,904 from previous 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 are sufficient to meet the funding requirements of this report.

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.

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 2023/24.

Financial Year 2023/24 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.

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

Some of the projects funded by the LIF grants have carbon and environmental impacts, including the use of energy, fuel, water, food & drink, materials, and printing, while events being funded may create waste or journeys that contribute to transport-related emissions if attendees drive. However, some projects also have positive environmental impacts, including planting, greening areas and local food growing. Overall, projects will be undertaken with regard with the council's goal of achieving a net zero Islington by 2030.

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.

Agreeing to carry forward residual amounts of funding to next year's budget will help to ensure a more efficient allocation of resources.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Local Initiatives Fund Proposals

Background papers: none

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



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

Date: 9 March 2023

Report Author: Patricia Keating, Community Partnerships Investment Officer
Tel: 020 7527 8325
Email: Patricia.Keating@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Ellena Smith, Deputy Finance Manager (Community Engagement and Wellbeing)
Tel: 020 7527 4257
Email: Ellena.Smith@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Sonal Mistry, Interim Chief Lawyer (Governance)
Tel: 020 7527 3833
Email: Sonal.Mistry@islington.gov.uk

Environmental Implications Author: Gearoid Kennedy, Islington Sustainable Energy Partnership Manager
Tel: 07907 979 563
Email: Gearoid.Kennedy@islington.gov.uk