

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: 25 March 2024

Ward(s): All

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, which are detailed in Appendix B.

- 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.

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.

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.

7 reallocations totalling £3403.44 have been added back into ward budgets and these are set out in Appendix B.

- 4.2. Since the last VCS Committee in November 2023, 54 applications for the Local Initiatives Fund have been received.
- 4.3. 3 of the 54 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 £888 are listed in Appendix A for information only.

Of the remaining 51 LIF applications, 1 was deferred until the next round, 10 applications were not recommended for funding, 2 applications were referred to Section 106/ Community Infrastructure Levy funding instead and 1 application was referred to Thriving Neighbourhoods funding, leaving a total of 37 applications recommended by ward councillors.

If the remaining 37 councillor funding recommendations are formally agreed by this VCS Committee, there will be £7004 left in the 2023/24 budget to be carried over to 24/25.

A list of the 37 LIF applications recommended for funding and the recommended amount for each application is set out in Appendix A.

- 4.4. 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 Ruth Hayes is a Trustee of Bridging the Gap that has been allocated £950 for mentoring.
 - Cllr Satnam Gill, Cllr Tricia Clarke and Cllr Gulcin Ozdemir are all co-opted trustees of Hilldrop Area Community Association that has been allocated £500 on behalf of St. George's Avenue Street Party.

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

- Arsenal Ward
- Junction Ward
- Tollington Ward

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. There is a 2023-24 budget of £7,004 across LIF which will be carried forward into 2024/25, with £6,587 allocated

against wards and £417 unallocated. The core budget available for LIF will be £238,000 and a carried forward amount of £7,004.

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**

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 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 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)

Appendix C – Local Initiatives Fund Financial Breakdown (for information only)

Background papers: none

Final report clearance:

Authorised by:

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

Date: 14 March 2024

Report Author: Elena Mitchell, Community Partnerships Officer

Tel: 020 7527 8325

Email: Elena.Mitchell2@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: Richard Martin, Net Zero Programme Manager

Tel: 020 7527 3884

Email: Richard.Martin@islington.gov.uk