

Grants Determination Sub Committee	 TOWER HAMLETS
12 January 2022	
Report of: Will Tuckley, Chief Executive	Classification: Unrestricted
Local Community Fund (LCF) Performance and Annual Update Report Oct 20 – Sep 21	

Lead Member	Councillor Candida Ronald, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector
Originating Officer(s)	Emily Fieran-Reed, Senior Strategy and Policy Manager Mark Waterman, Strategy and Policy Manager
Wards affected	All
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	
Reason for Key Decision	Not a key decision
Community Plan Theme	All

Executive Summary

The Mayor in Cabinet agreed on 31st July 2019 to a programme of funding for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations from 1st October 2019. A total of 50 projects were awarded funding totalling £9.31m up to 31 March 2023 to deliver activity across five themes:

- Inclusion Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Inclusion and Awareness
- Information Advice and Guidance
- Employment and Skills
- Community Safety

Much of the first year of the programme coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and organisations worked to support residents through this period. This report relates to the second year of the programme which included many projects settling into a hybrid of virtual working e.g. via digitally-based formats - and physical-based delivery of project activity. With activity adapting to new ways of delivery, Key Performance Indicators have been amended in some cases to reflect new ways of delivering, arising from the pandemic. Outcomes and lifetime targets remain as originally set.

The Project Summary (Appendix 1) gives an update by project. Projects have been Red, Amber Green (RAG) rated for performance, with this rating taking account of

the covid context. All projects have been rated green and with all projects on track to achieve their original outcome targets. The Annual Report (Appendix 2) gives a programme overview with highlights of the impact of the programme.

The report also includes a proposed amendment in the use of part of the funds allocated to the Infrastructure & Capacity Building project, which is delivered by a partnership led by Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service. The committee is recommended to approve this amendment.

Recommendations:

The Grants Determination Sub Committee are recommended to:

1. Note the performance of the Local Community Fund programme for Oct 20 – Sep 21.as set out in 3.2 to 3.5 below and the Appendices;
2. Note the new arrangements for delivering the Infrastructure & Capacity Building project as referred to in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4;
3. Delegate the Chief Executive and the Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation the decision making authority to agree and undertake appropriate actions in respect of recommendation 2.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Regular performance updates ensure that the LCF themes and individual projects are on track to achieve the targeted outcomes.
- 1.2 Any issues that raise concerns can be addressed and appropriate remedial actions agreed. Where necessary, this could include the reduction, withdrawal or reallocation of funds to ensure that the overall Programme is making the most effective use of resources and maximising the potential achievement of agreed aims and objectives

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Information relating to various aspects of project and monitoring activity is contained within the report to provide Grants Determination Sub Committee with an overall understanding of how projects and organisations have performed against the key elements of their Funding Agreements.
- 2.2 Grants Determination Sub Committee could request further information or alter the recommendations.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 Background

The Mayor in Cabinet agreed on 31st July 2019 to a programme of funding for voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations from 1st October 2019. A total of 50 projects were awarded funding totalling £9.31m up to 31 March 2023 to deliver activity across five themes:

- Inclusion Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Inclusion and Awareness
- Information Advice and Guidance
- Employment and Skills
- Community Safety

3.2 LCF Theme update

3.2.1 Appendix 1 Project Summary gives an update for each project with some information about key performance indicators and progress updates up to the end of September 2021.

3.2.2 Projects continued to adapt well to new ways of working and have retained some of the successful methods of engaging virtually as well as returning to their buildings and offices to deliver physically based activities and workshops.

3.2.3 The RAG ratings of GREEN for all the projects show that although there has been an impact on project activity due to the pandemic, projects are still on track to achieve scheduled project outcomes for the lifetime of the programme.

3.2.4 50 Local Community Fund projects and the Infrastructure & Capacity Building project delivered activities between October 2020 – September 2021.

3.2.5 The Infrastructure & Capacity Building Programme is delivered by a partnership involving VCS infrastructure organisations led by Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services (THCVS), and also involving Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH). The project provides development support to VCS organisations in the borough, including those funded through the LCF programme and other council funding streams.

3.2.6 At the Cabinet meeting of 21 October 2020, it was agreed to vary the funding agreement for the Infrastructure & Capacity Building Programme to extend Programme funding to September 2021 for VCTH's delivery of the COVID-19 Volunteering Recovery Hub. This was to support volunteering in VCS organisations in Tower Hamlets to enable these organisations to respond to the ongoing demands of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery process in the borough. This aligns with a council contract for the Hub to support volunteering within the council to respond to the pandemic.

3.2.7 There are several LCF funded organisations that are based in council-owned buildings. It is a condition of funding that LCF organisations occupying council owned premises have an appropriate property agreement in place. There are monthly meetings between council officers responsible for the VCS and the council's Asset Management Team to ensure that these agreements are in place, and, where they are not, to monitor progress. Where organisations are not actively negotiating with the council to put appropriate agreements in place, quarterly instalments of LCF funding may be delayed or withheld.

3.3 Annual Report

3.3.1 Appendix 2 Annual Report presents a programme report, highlighting the work done by programme Theme, including case studies and equalities and geographical breakdowns of programme beneficiaries, using the aggregated information from the individual project reports and from the support work done by grant officers through the period. **Appendix 3 Local Community Fund Programme and Infrastructure & Capacity Building Programme – Achievements in October 2020-September 2021** highlights the main achievements of the programme through the period.

3.3.2 An Annual Report is a key part of the reporting process for LCF and was originally scheduled to begin with an update up to March 2020 (the first six months of the programme) and for each subsequent financial year of the LCF programme's duration. However, following the impact of Covid-19 from March 2020 onwards it was agreed, in order to relieve some of the project management / reporting pressures on LCF-funded organisations, that the Annual Report would cover the first 12 months of the programme and every 12 months after that, with the final report covering the last 6 months.

3.3.3 The information included with this report includes an outcomes update, equalities and geographical data relating to project beneficiaries, case studies and general project progress for the year.

3.3.4 With the impact of Covid-19 on the LCF programme it was important to support groups with planning to respond to the pandemic, including what steps to take if there were further lockdowns. Grant officers thus worked with LCF-funded organisations to identify what changes there should be to project funding agreements, including description or indicators relating to activity that could no longer take place in its originally planned format e.g. face to face sessions would need to be adapted or replaced with virtual sessions via digitally-based formats. This exercise found that there were no significant changes to the aims or outcomes of the projects, with lifetime targets still on track to be met.

4. PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO PROJECT SPEND

- 4.1 There has been an underspend of £12,000 in the Infrastructure & Capacity Building project, a partnership project led by Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS). The underspend has taken place as one of the project's partners, Tower Hamlets Community Transport (THCT), to which the above funds were due to be allocated to deliver minibuss training to volunteer drivers, has had to suspend its services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The allocation of £12,000 amounts to a full year of the project's funding for THCT. THCT is exploring potential solutions to the challenges that it is facing, but there is a risk that the above funds, and the future project funds due to be allocated to THCT, could and would not be allocated as planned. Therefore, at this moment it is clear that THCT will not be able to deliver the project and in discussions with the consortium partners it has been agreed to refocus this funding to deliver the already agreed grant outcome of 'increased proportion of organisations are well run and better managed'.
- 4.2 THCVS, with project partners, is proposing that the above unallocated project funds of £12,000 are now allocated to another project partner, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH), to deliver within the project a small programme of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) trustee training, that would also involve matching these trained trustees with local VCS organisations. The need for this programme has been identified in the VCS Strategy Volunteering Task and Finish Group, which considered how the Strategy could best support and help deliver on the key recommendations of the BAME Inequalities Commission in regard to developing local BAME community leadership.
- 4.3 THCVS is also proposing that the remaining £18,000 that was due to be allocated to THCT to the project's scheduled end date of September 2023 is allocated to VCTH to deliver further BAME trustee training and matching programme activity to match trained trustees to local VCS organisations.
- 4.4 The above proposed new project activity links in with one of the Infrastructure & Capacity Building project's current outcomes - **Increased proportion of organisations are well run and better managed.**

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A strategic assessment was undertaken of the proposed Local Community Fund (LCF) programme, with the Equality Analysis comprising part of the report recommending funding as agreed at the 31 July 2019 Cabinet. This included looking at the change from Mainstream Grants (MSG) to the Local Community Fund and whether the recommended projects were able to deliver against identified need.
- 5.2 The analysis identified some potentially negative impacts relating to age, race and disability and these were addressed by initiating activity outside the LCF programme including:

- New themes developed for the Small Grants Programme
 - Access and Participation
 - Community Support Services for Older People
- Commissioned Services contracts to address key areas:
 - Young People's Mental Health
 - Early Years
 - Young People's Disability Sports
 - Young Carers

5.3 The programme continues to deliver against the themes developed to address the identified need.

6. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.

6.2 There are no other specific statutory implications relevant to consideration of this report.

7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

7.1 This report updates on the performance of Local Community Fund programme and the impact of Covid-19 on delivery of objectives.

7.2 The Council's Local Community Fund programme has total funding allocation of £9.31m until March 2023, approximately £3.1m per annum. The council has also included a claim for central government funding of £1.46m to support the Covid-19 voluntary and community sector response. Therefore, total funding available is £10.78m.

7.3 Appendix 1 details the individual themes and grant allocations to date, by project, that total £10.11m.

8. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

8.1. The Council must be aware that before transferring any funding to the Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH) it has to close out its obligations to the Tower Hamlets Community Transport (THCT).

8.2 There are no other legal considerations arising from this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Project Summary
- Appendix 2 Annual Report
- Appendix 3 Local Community Fund Programme and Infrastructure & Capacity Building Programme – Achievements in October 2020-September 2021

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A