

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 26 November 2020	Meeting Name: Leader of the Council
Report title:		Repurposing Democracy Fund 2020/21 and New Application Process	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Communities	

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Leader of the Council:

1. To approve the repurposing of the £20,000 Democracy Fund for the current year to support the Connecting at Christmas Southwark Campaign.
2. To agree annual roll-on application period from 2021/22 round rather than fixed quarterly application window.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The Council Assembly on May 18 2019 approved the proposal to replace Community Councils (CCs) with a more flexible and devolved Empowering Communities Programme, that promotes:
 - Resident-led initiatives
 - Strengthens the local leadership role of ward councillors
 - Cabinet accountability
 - Community Champion councillors
 - Transparency of funding
4. As part of the recommendation in the report, it stated that the leader would be asked to approve the creation of a Democracy Fund of £20,000 for the whole borough.
5. This was approved by the Leader in June 2019 and delegated authority to the Director of Communities to take decisions, in consultation with the five community champions.
6. The fund was established so individuals and community groups could bid to organise events, discuss specific or a range of local issues. Funding covers items such as:
 - Venue hire
 - Equipment hire
 - Publicity and invitations
 - Speakers' fees
 - Refreshments etc.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Democracy Fund 2020/21

7. Due to the current pandemic, applications to the democracy fund 2020/21 were not encouraged. The funding of £20,000 remains unallocated as a consequence of successive lockdowns and tiered levels of restrictions, which is likely to be in place for the remainder of the financial year. As a result, the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Communities, in consultation with the community champions, has identified the Democracy Fund to support the Connecting at Christmas: Southwark Campaign.
8. The aim of this programme is that Southwark's older and more vulnerable residents, particularly those living alone, feel cared for and connected at Christmas. It will comprise the following:
 - **A council-led crowd-funding campaign** to draw in funds (through Spacehive) and to encourage all Southwark residents to look out for their neighbours. This will be launched in early December.
 - **A grants programme** to support charities and local groups to deliver a range of activities in the Christmas period. These activities will include Christmas lunches, hampers, gifts, visits, carols. Depending on Covid restrictions, activities/interventions will be delivered to people in their homes or at socially distanced events.
 - **A communications campaign led by Southwark council.**
9. The grants programme will be managed and administered by United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC). There is currently £30,000 committed (£15k from UStSC and £15k from St George the Martyr Charity) in addition to any funds we are able to repurpose from the democracy fund and raise through Spacehive.
10. Because of the tight time frames and the limited funds, the fund will not be run as an open grants round. Instead the UStSC team will reach out to organisations and community groups across the borough who works with older and vulnerable people to encourage a breadth of applications.
11. Discussions by USST have already been initiated with a number of charities and local groups, including: Elim House, Coplestone Centre, Lordship Lane Baptist Church, Walworth Golden Oldies, Brandon 3 TRA, Leathermarket JMB, Pembroke House and People Care Association, Blackfriars Settlement, Link Age, Southwark Pensioner's Centre, Time and Talents, Southwark Carers, and London Senior Social, among others. All of these groups are keen to do something; some have already acquired funds but others need grants to deliver.
12. UStSC will deliver the fund at no cost to the council and will also do some co-ordination between the various providers, and connecting corporates with charities if corporate contributions (hampers, meals, gifts) etc. are forthcoming.
13. Winter is often the hardest time of year for older people and Christmas this year is going to be particularly tough. Many would normally attend Christmas gatherings organised by local organisations or be visited by friends and family. Around 450 people would normally have attended Southwark's two large Christmas parties – at Guy's Tower and Bacon's College – but both have been cancelled.

14. Local groups, churches, charities and the council are all keen to ensure that options are put in place for their members and those who would normally be attending the two Christmas parties.
15. The work on the ground will go hand in hand with a communications campaign to encourage people to donate, volunteer and be mindful of the needs of those around them over Christmas.

Democracy Fund 2021/22 and Future Rounds

16. After consultation with Community Champions, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Communities and Constitutional Steering Panel, it is recommended that from 1 April 2021, the quarterly application process is replaced with a continuing application period throughout the year. This would allow groups to apply for funding when they need it most rather than waiting for the application window to open. One of the key drivers for introducing the Democracy Fund was to give the community access to funds to organise urgent one-off meetings/events when it was really needed. The quarterly application periods delays this process.
17. Community Champions would assess these applications when they are received via an online form and will make recommendations to the Director of Communities for authorisation throughout the year.

Community impact statement

18. The Empowering Communities Programme provides an alternative structures and processes to enable all Southwark residents to participate in discussing matters of interest and concern for their local community, while strengthening the relationship with their elected members.
19. This particular programme will support our communities to support each other addressing inequality and need within our neighbourhoods; building community resilience; beneficiaries will in particular be those who are older, suffer from limiting health conditions and disabilities.
20. Placing the emphasis on resident led initiatives for smaller areas, will help bring together members of Southwark's diverse local communities, in compliance with the council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 which requires the council to have due regard when taking decisions to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct.
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.
 - c. Foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those that do not share it.
21. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.
22. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity is further explained by the Act, which states that it involves

- Removing or minimising disadvantages connected with a relevant protected characteristic.
 - Taking steps to meet the different needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic.
 - Encouraging persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or any other activity in which they are underrepresented.
23. Due consideration was given to this duty during this process and no adverse impact on any group with a protected characteristic was evident.

Resource implications

24. There are no resource implications. The new arrangements will be met within existing resources.

Consultation

25. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Communities and Community Champions have been consulted.

Financial Implications

26. There are no financial implications arising from this report. The intervention is a one off award.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law & Democracy

27. This report seeks the approval of the Leader to the repurposing of the Democracy Fund for the 2020-21 budget given the current exceptional situation in the Covid pandemic. This is to support the Connecting at Christmas Southwark Campaign. It also proposes a more flexible process for dealing with future applications to the Fund.
28. The general power of competence in section 1(1) of the Localism Act 2011 enables the council to do anything that individuals generally may do, and the proposals set out in this report relating to the Democracy Fund are covered by this power.
29. The Cabinet Member's attention is drawn to the Public Sector Equality duty (PSED General Duty) under the Equality Act 2010, which requires public bodies to have regard, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. The Leader is specifically referred to the community impact statement above, setting out the consideration that has been given to equalities issues which should be taken into account when approving the recommendations in this report.

30. This is an executive decision that can be made by the Leader in accordance with the council's constitution. Whilst the decision is a key decision it is being dealt with under the urgency provisions in the constitution.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

31. The report recommends the reallocation of funding to the Connecting at Christmas Southwark Campaign. The pandemic has prevented the holding community events which would fulfil the original purposes of the Democracy Fund.
32. The service currently reflects an underspend equivalent to the noted £20,000 reallocation to Connecting at Christmas and paragraph 24 notes there are no other expected financial implications as a result of the recommended actions.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Council Assembly report – Reform of Community Councils – Empowering Communities Programme	http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s82461/Report%20-%20Reform%20of%20Cs%20-%20empowering%20communities%20programme.pdf	Forid Ahmed - 0207 525 5540

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
Report Author	Forid Ahmed, Empowering Communities Programme Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	26 November 2020	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	yes	yes
Cabinet Member	yes	yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	26 November 2020	