

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 11 May 2021	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods
Report title:		Resident Participation Fund 2021-22	
<b>Wards or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director of Communities	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Neighbourhoods approves:
2. The proposed 2021/22 budget for the £900,000 Resident Participation Fund plus £15,000 from the former Homeowner Fund previous years' underspend as shown in Appendix 1.
3. A £114,000 grant to SGTO to provide Independent Advice for residents for the period April to September 2021 and notes the further provisions for this service beyond October 2021 in paragraphs 20 and 21.
4. A grant to Citizens Advice Bureau - Independent Leaseholder Advice Service of £45,000 from April 2021 to September 2021 (made up of £30,000 from the Resident Participation Fund and £15,000 from previous years' underspend) and notes the further plans for this service beyond October 2021 in paragraph 23.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. The £900,000 Resident Participation Fund was agreed by Cabinet in February 2020, as part of its overall review of resident participation across the borough, when it agreed wide ranging actions to strengthen the way the council works with the people who live in council homes.
6. These changes are opening up the council's approach to resident participation so everyone who lives in a council home can get involved in a way that suits them. They also shift the resources the council puts into resident participation back to the grassroots, giving residents more support and funding to do the things they want to do to improve their local estates and communities, as part of the council's commitment to make all its homes and estates great places to live. The current resident participation service changes aims are to:
  - Involve more people
  - Provide more and easier ways to get involved
  - Increase support for the grass roots
  - Reflect changes to council services

7. In spite of the challenges presented to the Resident Participation service over the last year as a result of the global pandemic, a lot has been achieved in terms of implementing the new Resident Participation structure approved by Cabinet in February 2020 and in doing so:
  - Online panel set up, consisting of 552 residents
  - 5 Local Housing Fora set up, each meeting via Zoom four times since July 2020
  - Elections to strategic bodies (Tenant Forum and Homeowner Forum) successfully held in December 2020
  - Resident chairs elected for each Local Housing Forum in December 2020
  - Covid-19 support offer developed to Tenant and Resident Associations, including guidance on how to meet online using Zoom and use of telephone dial-in service for those without computer access
  - Development of the borough's first exclusively online TRA
  - Development of a Forward Plan for Resident Participation, ensuring a proactive and timely approach to resident consultation initiatives
  - 68 out of 128 TRAs funded through the annual TRA grants programme
8. In September 2020, the council made a commitment to the Southwark Stands Together programme and a pledge to lead the way in tackling inequality, injustice and racism. It also set out new values that were incorporated into both what and how the council do business and work with the wider community. The resident participation service has already started activity to deliver on these commitments.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

9. The total figure for this budget in its first year of operation (2020-21) was £900,000 this was topped up by an additional allocation of £30,000 which was drawn down from the former Homeowner Fund underspend. This additional £30k was for additional provision of independent advice services for homeowners in the context of the covid pandemic.
10. The expenditure for this 2020-21 budget stands at £736,267. This represents a total underspend for the year of £193,733 (including the additional £30,000 budget allocation). Some 88% of this underspend is accounted for by the dramatic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Tenant and Resident Associations, with a £29,006 underspend on core grants for TRAs and a £141,862 underspend on Getting Involved Grants.
11. The impact of the pandemic meant that take-up of these grants were lower than anticipated. Some of this funding was eventually re-purposed to support TRAs incurring particular costs associated with helping in the emergency response to the pandemic. It is expected that take-up of these grants will increase as the year progresses, and lockdown rule ease but not to pre pandemic levels.
12. The activities that the Resident Participation Fund will support were set out in the report approved by Cabinet in February 2020. Below are each of the headings

and proposed allocations for 2021/22, how they compare with what was agreed by Cabinet in 2020 and the rationale for any changes:

13. £178,000 for TRA Core Grants: This allocation would remain as per Cabinet paper. These are grants paid annually to fully established TRAs covering council homes. The amount TRAs receive will be unchanged from 2020-21. TRAs covering 240 or less tenancies will continue to receive £1,300, with TRAs covering more than 240 tenancies continuing to receive an additional £5.50 per tenancy, as is currently the case.
14. Currently the formula for TRA Core Grants requires a budget of £178,000. If more homes are to be covered by TRAs in the future, funding for the Resident Participation Small Grants will need to be reduced to cover this cost.
15. The TRA grant payable in 2021-22 will remain at the level set in 2018/19 when it was increased. The basic level is £1,300 for estates where the property count does not exceed 240 tenancies. For estates where there are more than 240 tenancies an additional amount of £5.50 per tenancy is allowed. The previous increase was in 2015/16 which was the first increase since 2006. The current TRA grant allocation is available to meet the costs that TRAs need to function, with TRAs being responsible for determining how the grant is spent, and being accountable to their members for this.
16. In order to deliver on the council's Southwark Stands Together commitments officers are currently looking into what practical steps are needed to start collating the demographic make up of TRA management committees who receive these annual grants, and all TRA committees in general, so that this information can feed into the wider council review of grant making and commissioning processes to remove any barriers to equal access to funding and delivery opportunities.
17. £272,000 for Resident Participation Small Grants (Getting Involved Grants): This allocation would remain as per Cabinet paper
18. The GIG programme aims to bring communities together through communal projects. Against a year-long backdrop of lockdowns, social distancing, shielding, and stay-at-home policies, take up of these grants has been significantly lower than originally anticipated. However, with the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme, and a roadmap out of Covid-19 restrictions now in place, it is expected that interest in this grant programme will increase amongst resident groups but not to pre pandemic levels. Given the current challenging circumstances, it is proposed that instead of the customary annual application period in April/May, the council will invite applications in April, July and October with a shorter turn around time so that there is more flexibility for TRAs to apply.
19. In order to deliver on the council's Southwark Stands Together commitments the application process for these grants will include for the first time requesting information on the anticipated demographic make up of beneficiaries. This information will also feed into the wider council review of grant making and commissioning processes to remove any barriers to equal access to funding and delivery opportunities.

20. £274,000 from the Resident Participation Fund plus £15,000 from former Homeowner fund underspend for Independent Support and Advice Services: The Cabinet approved allocation for these services was £260,000 to fund Southwark wide independent support and advice services for council tenants and resident homeowners, currently provided by Southwark Group of Tenant Organisations and Citizens Advice Bureau.
21. The 2020/21 RPF allocation for these services was £288,000 (£228,000 for SGTO and £60,000 for CAB). Cabinet approved a RPF allocation for these grants of £260,000 indicating that this 9.72% saving would be achieved by the moving these services from grants into contracts. However due to the pandemic this shift has not been possible and, whilst there are plans for it to take place this year, the recommendation for 2021/22 is to allocate to these services a total of £274,000 plus £15,000 from former Homeowner fund underspend.
22. The current grant to SGTO will be extended pro rata at the same current level to cover the period April to September 2021, which equates to £114k. There will also be an additional budget line of £102,919 for this service provision during the period October to March 2022, reflecting the council's expected efficiency savings arising out of a procurement exercise relating to a 3-year contract for independent advice services. This contract is due to commence at the beginning of October 2021. SGTO have stated that their running cost for that period would be £120,566 and they have stated that they will cover the £6,566 shortfall from their underspend. Appendix 3 shows the most recent quarterly performance submission for this service and the proposed KPIs for the grant extension period.
23. The current grant to CAB will be extended at the same level to cover the period April to September 2021 and which will be made up of £30,000 from the Resident Participation Fund plus a one off £15,000 allocation from former Homeowner fund underspend. There will also be an additional budget line of £27,081 for service provision during the period October to March 2022, also reflecting the council's expected efficiency savings arising out of a procurement exercise relating to a 3-year contract for independent advice services. This contract is due to commence at the beginning of October 2021.
24. £100,000 Training, this allocation remains as per Cabinet recommendations, to support the active participation of tenants and residents in their local community, including training that support people to set up and run all aspects of TRAs. Of this figure, £82,533 relates to the cost of employing 1.6 Full Time Equivalent Community Training Officers. The remainder (£17,467) includes direct costs associated with the provision of resident training, including the cost of funding the council's online resident training provider (Virtual College).
25. £34,000 for other resident participation activities, the Cabinet approved allocation for these activities was £50,000. The reduction takes into account the need to balance the budget due to the anticipated savings on independent advice services not having been realised yet. It also accounts for the fact that this provision was made to cover the cost of running face to face resident participation meetings, which are currently not taking place. It is proposed to use £18,000 from this allocation to fund a resident-led participation and research project on the

economic impacts of the pandemic on residents. The aim of this is to have a collaborative approach with residents to help the council develop and implement appropriate strategies and plans to manage covid related debt over the medium to long term. This will include looking at how the council and central government can best support residents who might be struggling financially, particularly after the current package of economic support from central government comes to an end (including the furlough scheme).

26. £42,000 Administration of the above grants/contracts. This figure remains as set in the Cabinet paper and relates to the total costs (including on-costs) of employing a full-time TRA Grants Officer.
27. TRAs that manage halls were previously generating income by hall hire. In the current situation that is not possible however the council has placed a freeze on TRA halls rent accounts to cover the period to September 2021.
28. The council's Tenant Resource Centre at Taplow has become largely redundant over the last year, as a result of Covid-19. Given that, in recent years, the use of the centre has declined continuously (a decline unlikely to be reversed appreciably by the end of lockdown restrictions), it is being proposed that the centre does not reopen as a resource centre and that, instead, printing facilities – its principle function – be provided by an external source. The Tenant and Homeowner Involvement Team has identified a supplier that will deliver printing to TRAs in a 48-hour timescale (giving residents in the borough an alternative to venturing outdoors for printing services).

### **Policy Implications**

29. There are no specific policy implications relevant to the Resident Participation Fund budget for 2021/22 specifically, as it is a yearly budget for the purposes described.
30. TRAs are an important part of the fabric of the borough. The Resident Participation Fund provides resources to enable TRAs to operate and to manage themselves.
31. TRA grants ensure that associations are able to hold and service meetings and meet the basic costs of doing so. In addition they enable TRAs to organise activities and social events that are open to all tenants and residents on an estate. Recognised TRAs are entitled to be consulted on matters affecting their community and are also a part of the council's engagement structure with residents. Getting involved in a TRA is a good way for residents to meet their neighbours and to take an active part in the life of the estate.
32. These decisions relate to delivering on the Southwark Borough Plan 2020-2022 priority of empowering more people who live in council homes to get involved in making decisions about their homes and estates.

## **Community Impact Statement**

33. The Resident Participation Fund supports tenant and resident associations and related support services including training, two resource centres, and SGTO.
34. SGTO convenes regular group meetings for TRAs across the borough. These are well attended and provide a participatory forum for involvement and community activity.
35. Services provided through the resource centres in the form of access to IT and printing facilities as well as the training offer, have the objective of promoting TRA member involvement. This is to support the development of engaged and inclusive tenant and resident communities across the borough by providing opportunities for participation that reduces exclusion and inactivity.
36. The Tenant and Homeowner Involvement Team continues to work to address the gap in representation of younger residents in the council's formal resident participation structures. Over the last year, it has worked with an external agency (funded by the council's Digital Innovation Fund) to explore ways in which digital engagement with younger residents can be effectively cultivated. This has resulted in the team acquiring a number of prototypes, to be tested in the coming year.

## **Resource Implications**

37. The activities contained within the Resident Participation Budget can be delivered within existing resources.

## **Legal Implications**

38. These are explained in the comments from the Director of Law and Democracy below.

## **Financial Implications**

39. There is no proposals to increase or decrease this budget compared to the previous year.

## **Consultation**

40. The £900,000 Resident Participation Fund, and the parameters for its distribution, were agreed by Cabinet in February 2020 as part of its overall review of resident participation across the borough. This followed a two year long consultation which included:
  - An independent review between into resident involvement undertaken by The Kaizen/Social Engine including which engaged over 1,000 local tenants and homeowners (April to May 2017).
  - An independently chaired co-design panel with a majority of residents from a diversity of housing tenure, geography and demographics which received

evidence in the form of written submissions from existing bodies, residents involved in current structures (September to December 2018).

- Publication of the co-design panel findings followed by a four week consultation (January to February 2019)
- A final round of consultation which had over 1,100 responses (July to October 2019).

41. The proposed budget follows the distribution set by Cabinet in February 2020, with some small deviations which have been caused by the current pandemic situation. Notwithstanding the fact that Covid-19 impacted negatively on some expenditure forecasts (e.g. Getting Involved Grants), given the expected easing of restrictions on gatherings and communal events, it is deemed prudent that historic costs (projected) guide the budget entries for 2021-22 as far as possible.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Director of Law and Governance**

42. Under the council's constitution an individual cabinet member has delegated authority to approve grants in excess of £2,500 and so is authorised to approve the recommendations in this report.
43. The report notes the Resident Participation Fund and the parameters for its distribution were agreed by cabinet in February 2020 following extensive consultation summarised in paragraph 40. It is noted at paragraph 41 that the budget proposed in this report follows the distribution agreed by cabinet in 2020 with some small deviations for which justification is provided.
44. In the exercise of all its functions, the council must have due regard to the public sector equality duty in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Specifically to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, (b) to advance equality of opportunity and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. The relevant protected characteristics for this purpose are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. The cabinet member is referred to the community impact statement (in paragraphs 33-36) which sets out consideration given to the duty.

### **Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (H&M 21/006)**

45. The Strategic Director of Finance and Governance notes the recommendations for the proposed 2021/22 budget expenditure of £915,000 for the Resident Participation Fund funded from the base budget and an underspend from the previous year.
46. The assumed cost savings through letting the independent support and advice service as a single supplier contract were delayed in 2020/21 and will now happen part way through this year, however, other resident participation activities will be reduced to remain within the overall budget.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Resident Participation Cabinet Report -	160Tooley St SE1 2QH	Eva Gomez 0207 525 7246
<a href="http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s86945/Report%20Southwark%20Resident%20Participation%20Framework.pdf">http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s86945/Report%20Southwark%20Resident%20Participation%20Framework.pdf</a>		
SGTO and CAB services budget breakdown	160Tooley St SE1 2QH	Eva Gomez 0207 525 7246

## APPENDICES

Appendices	Title
Appendix 1	Resident Participation Fund Proposed Budget 2020-21
Appendix 2	SGTO most recent performance report KPIs submission and Outcomes 2021-2022

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
<b>Report Author</b>	Eva Gomez, Resident Involvement Manager	
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<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	10 May 2021	

