

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 7 November 2022	<b>Decision Taker:</b> Leader of the Council
<b>Report title:</b>		Repurposing Democracy Fund 2022/23	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director of Communities	

## RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Leader of the Council:

1. Approve the repurposing of the £20,000 Democracy Fund for the current year (2022/23) to support the Connecting at Christmas Southwark Campaign.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. 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
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. In November 2020 the Democracy Fund 2020/21 was repurposed to support the connected at Christmas campaign as severe lockdown restrictions meant the budget was not spent.

7. In 2021 – 2022 a total of thirteen applications were received, five were successful and total of £3,136 was allocated. Three were unsuccessful and the remaining applications did not meet the criteria. These applicants were advised to apply for the Neighbourhoods Fund instead.
8. This financial year so far there has been no applications received.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Democracy Fund 2022/23**

9. In discussion with Community Champions and the former Cabinet member, we are recommending again to repurpose the Democracy Fund to support Connected at Christmas project.
10. The aim of this programme is to support Southwark's older and more vulnerable residents, particularly those living alone; feel cared for and connected at Christmas. It will comprise the following:
  - 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.
11. The grants programme will be managed and administered by United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC) as part of its small grants programme. We are also recommending that we use £12,000 underspend from the Common Purpose grants to supplement this programme.
12. The team will reach out to organisations that provided services last year to encourage collaborations.
13. UStSC will deliver the fund at no cost to the council and will also do some co-ordination between the various providers.
14. 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 neither have or will be reinstated post pandemic and lockdowns.
15. The work on Connected at Christmas forms part of the wider work stream to support residents through the cost of living crisis and in particular the development of the warm hub programme. Here the Southwark funders, VCS, Council, faith organisations and health partners are pooling resources in terms of money, and spaces, and people to provide some respite for vulnerable residents.

16. A group of organisations that work with older people and other vulnerable residents, have been meeting in recent months to consider how best to provide support, to mitigate the impact of the cost of living increase on older and other vulnerable residents.
17. Organisations have proposed that setting up Warm Hubs around the borough could be an effective way of providing a warm space for people to go to rather than stay at home in cold and expensive to heat homes. Providing Warm Hubs would involve some additional costs that could include providing refreshments, activity, hosting, increased staffing, opening and heating costs. We are seeking collaborations with others to support warm hub programmes and anticipate being able to source a significant sum jointly to support this work.

### **Policy framework implications**

18. The Democracy Fund has a budget of £20,000 per annum. This is subject to annual budget setting process. The fund allows groups to organise one off meetings to discuss issues of local concern.

### **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

#### **Community impact statement**

19. The services to which this report aims to benefit the lives of some of the most vulnerable residents. Low-income households spend a larger proportion than average on energy and food so are more affected by price increases.

#### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

20. The service recipients provided with support with food and fuel will be low-income households who are most vulnerable to the effects of increased energy bills and the cost of living. This disproportionately affects those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

#### **Health impact statement**

21. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis, has disadvantaged many communities in the borough and highlighted health inequalities. Elderly residents who are near the poverty line as well as low income families will be particularly vulnerable at this time.

### **Climate change implications**

22. There are no perceived climate change implications arising from this report.

### **Resource implications**

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

## **Legal implications**

24. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **Financial implications**

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

## **Consultation**

26. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Communities and Community Champions have been consulted in addition to VCS partners working with us on the warm hub programme.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

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

27. This report seeks the approval of the Leader to the repurposing of the Democracy Fund for 2022/23 given that no bids have been made this year so far and there is an urgent need to provide support to the community in the light of the cost of living crisis. This is to support the Connecting at Christmas Southwark Campaign.
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 Leader'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.

### **Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FIN1325 – JB)**

31. The report requests approval to repurpose the Democracy Fund for 2022/23 to support the Connecting at Christmas Southwark Campaign. The fund total is £20,000.
32. Paragraph 10 notes the type of activities the funding will support through the United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC) small grants programme. Paragraph 17

notes the Warm Hubs programme as a separate activity involving collaborations with other organisations over the winter.

33. Paragraph 24 notes the fund forms part of the existing resources of the service and paragraph 8 notes the fund is currently uncommitted.

#### Other officers

34. No further comments sought.

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Council Assembly report – Reform of Community Councils – Empowering Communities Programme	Environment & Leisure 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Forid Ahmed - 0207 525 5540
<a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s82461/Report%20-%20Reform%20of%20CCs%20-%20empowering%20communities%20programme.pdf">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s82461/Report%20-%20Reform%20of%20CCs%20-%20empowering%20communities%20programme.pdf</a>		

#### APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

#### AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
<b>Report Author</b>	Forid Ahmed, Empowering Communities Programme Manager	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	4 November 2022	
<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 Governance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	4 November 2022	