

Item No. 15.	Classification: Open	Date: 6 December 2022	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		The Thriving High Streets Fund	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Martin Seaton, Jobs, Business and Town Centres	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON, CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, BUSINESS AND TOWN CENTRES

Our town centres and high streets are at the heart of our communities. They provide the energy and distinctiveness to how our diverse neighbourhood work. They are where our local businesses and voluntary and community organisations work together, providing vital local products and services on our doorsteps. They are where people come together to shop, to have fun, to be in the community. It's therefore vital that our town centres and high streets remain vibrant, thriving, accessible and sustainable spaces, which are safe for all and contribute to the prosperity and cohesion of our local communities.

Our Council Delivery Plan 2022-26 is clear. We are committed to ensure every part of Southwark is a great place to live, with thriving neighbourhoods, including high quality green spaces and more trees, great fitness, sports & health facilities, good and outstanding schools, a local library and high quality playgrounds and investment in town centre and high streets.

Too many of our high streets and town centres have seen reductions in footfall and trade over a number of years with an increased trend towards online shopping, which accelerated in the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Smaller businesses in particular have struggled to adapt to the macro economic challenges our local places are facing with the cost of living crisis and increases in energy prices adding to the pressures. That's why as a Council and community we are again stepping up to these challenges, with additional support to businesses through our cost of living programme among other measures that we have put in place since the pandemic so cruelly hit our borough.

This report asks Cabinet to approve the next measure of support in the renewal of our high streets and town centres. Through our thriving high street fund, we will be inviting local businesses, charities, cooperatives and community led organisations to put forward proposals for high street focused projects. We are especially seeking ideas and projects that will support a greener, fairer, more equal, safer and healthier high street in line with the objectives set out in the report.

The recommendations outlined in this report will ensure Southwark's town centres and high streets continue to serve local residents and attract visitors from across London and beyond. All done while remaining safe and accessible places where all can come together and help make Southwark even better both now and in the years to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the proposals set out for a £1.4m Thriving High Streets Fund programme are approved by Cabinet.
2. To approve an allocation of £460,000 revenue funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to invest in the THSF grants programme for three years 2022/23 to 2024/25 in line with the grant agreement agreed with the GLA (pending).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. A core objective of the Council Delivery Plan 2022-26 is to ensure every part of Southwark is a great place to live, with thriving neighbourhoods, including high quality green spaces and more trees, great fitness, sports & health facilities, good and outstanding schools, a local library and high quality playgrounds and investment in town centre and high streets.
4. Our approach to thriving neighbourhoods is under development and will be about empowering communities to shape the places they live. This will build on the work and progress in recent years such as healthy high streets, building of new homes, social regeneration charters and the work our communities did together through local community hubs to support the most vulnerable during the pandemic among other key, shared activity.
5. Our approach will include developing longer term visions for how we will work with the community to protect and preserve what makes our neighbourhoods and town centres great and unique, whilst also bringing about sustainable change to make our neighbourhoods fairer, greener, safer and healthier. The work will be supported by shorter term action plans for the things we need to work on together with more greater urgency including where we need to invest and to deliver improvements.
6. Action plans are in development for town centres across the borough, tracking current activity, including current challenges and opportunities, identifying gaps and resourcing implications. These plans are being developed in partnership with ward members, local stakeholders and businesses. These plans will support the development of longer term visions and strategies across our places. The Thriving High Streets Fund will be a key resource in helping us realise short and longer term plans and improvements across our neighbourhoods.
7. More specifically, the Council Delivery Plan 2022-26 includes a commitment to *'Launch a new Thriving High Streets Fund to invest in all of*

Southwark's high streets' as part of the objective of '*Investing in our town centres and high streets*'.

8. The primary aim of the proposed Thriving High Streets Fund is therefore to help our high streets to thrive; to build resilience in our high streets as the cost of living impacts are felt across our neighbourhoods; to tackle health inequalities in our communities; to promote our work in tackling the climate emergency; and to make our high streets more inclusive to support long term plans for making every part of Southwark a great place to live.
9. This report seeks decision for agreement to establish a £1.4m Thriving High Streets Fund programme, outlining a proposed structure for delivery and implementation. The funding will be drawn from Southwark's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Communities & Place borough allocation.
10. Funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) will be made available from the GLA to support the delivery of the thriving high streets fund for a series of innovative, grassroots, spatially-based projects over a three year period. Applications will be invited to propose creative projects to deliver new approaches to improving our high streets and town centres, as well as those embedding and reinforcing more established activities. The funding will include £950k capital and £460k revenue to be spent on town centres and high streets across the borough. This report is specifically concerned and seeks decisions with the £460k revenue fund in the form of a THSF grants programme. Further work will be undertaken by the Director of Planning and Growth regards the £950k capital allocation and next steps.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

11. The proposed THSF grants programme has been designed to respond to the range of challenges high streets face as well as the unique attributes of each of the town centres and high streets in Southwark. All projects will support delivery of the town centre action plans that are being agreed as part of the Council Delivery Plan commitment on '*Investing in our town centres and high streets*'. Applicants will be required to demonstrate how their proposals meet the following objectives:
 - Produce sustainable benefits to the local economy beyond the funding period
 - Introduce new or creative approaches to improving Southwark's high streets and town centres
 - Add to and align with existing initiatives in the proposed area
 - Build the capacity of the local businesses or groups to accelerate economic growth beyond the funding period
 - Make our high streets and town centres more inclusive, particularly for residents from low income backgrounds and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
 - Benefit a significant number of local businesses and not disproportionately benefitting a few

- Attract match funding from other organisations or crowd funding
12. Applicants must also demonstrate how their project proposal closely aligns with two or more of the following themes (alignment with Southwark Stands Together being a mandatory requirement):
- **Healthy and safe high streets** - This theme opens up the opportunity to support projects that make our high streets safe and welcoming places to visit. This theme welcomes projects that target health inequalities, including, but not limited to, working to abolish food deserts in the borough, increasing access to health promoting goods and services, and creating green recreational spaces, or those supporting safety measures combatting violence against women and girls (VAWG) amongst others.
 - **A Greener Southwark** – This theme welcomes activities that support our work to tackle the climate emergency, achieve net zero in the borough and promote environmental sustainability, such as reducing carbon emissions or pollution, waste reduction and greening.
 - **Cost of living crisis** – This theme is targeted at promoting activities which support our aim for a fairer, more inclusive local economy, reducing the impact of the cost of living crisis on businesses, residents and visitors to our high streets. For example, assisting businesses in lowering energy costs, growing and selling reduced price fresh produce and supporting alternative community uses of existing spaces on our high streets.
 - **Southwark Stands Together** – All applicants will be required to demonstrate how their project will incorporate the ambitions of Southwark Stands Together; increasing diversity, reducing inequalities and tackling racism.
13. The fund will encourage partnership working that brings together diverse skills and expertise across our town centres and high streets. Applicants will be asked to demonstrate that their approach is supported by local businesses in the town centre or high street that is expected to benefit from the activity, and will be encouraged to seek match funding from other sources – potentially multiplying the fund’s investment into the area.
14. Subject to GLA approval of Southwark’s UKSPF allocation, applications for the first round of the THSF grants programme are expected to open in early 2023.
15. The funding allocation process has been designed to enable the staged funding of creative and innovative proposals, supporting the development and testing of new ideas so that they can then attract additional sources of funding. Applicants that have been awarded funding in this round will have the opportunity to seek additional funding for their projects in subsequent rounds of the Thriving High Streets Fund.

16. The Local Economy Team will work closely with the Communications and Marketing Teams on the development of the fund's prospectus and supporting documentation. The prospectus will outline the council's aims, intentions and requirements for the fund, providing detailed criteria for applicants to develop their proposals around. The prospectus will then be published and a communications plan developed to ensure it is promoted widely and ensure it reaches the attention of as many Southwark based partners, community groups and organisations as possible.
17. Applicants will have a six-week window to develop and submit their proposals after the prospectus is published. Applications will be evaluated by a panel of officers from across the council, considering them against the published criteria and working carefully to ensure as diverse a range of projects as possible are recommended for award, spread across our priority town centres so that beneficiaries are not all concentrated in one part of the borough. The panel will make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Business and Town Centres, who will have the final approval on proposed awards.
18. The THSF will support the council's broader ongoing work supporting our town centres and high streets.

Learning and Evaluation

19. Learning will be built upon the experience of similar programmes, specifically the High Street Challenge (2014-2020) and the High Street Renewal Fund (2021-2022). Through these programmes, funding has been awarded to 68 projects with a total value of £1,325,975.
20. An evaluation of The High Street Challenge was carried out in order to understand its successes and highlight opportunities to improve its impact. This evaluation combined with an assessment of the needs our high streets and town centres in the current economic climate informed the development of the High Street Recovery Fund. This learning is carried forward to the Thriving High Streets Fund.
21. The evaluation of the High Street Challenge carried out in 2018 also captured feedback from funding recipients and council officers across departments, and this informed the development of the High Street Recovery Fund and subsequently the Thriving High Streets Fund.

Consultation

22. A range of stakeholders have been consulted on the design, purpose and scope of the proposed THSF, leading to agreement on the themes set out.
23. To ensure we have a consistent, cross-council approach to our overarching town centres and high streets work, including the development of the Thriving High Street Fund, we have worked with officers across the council.

Internal stakeholders consulted include Environment, Public Health, Culture, and Sustainable Growth teams. Governance arrangements are in place, through which the work is reported to the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Business and Town Centres.

24. Consultation has included the Senior Officer Group for Town Centres, chaired by the Director for Strategy & Economy. The cross council director-level group meets on a monthly basis to ensure corporate oversight of the council's work on town centres, discuss key issues, monitor activities and oversee the development and implementation of the town centre action plans.
25. At the assessment stage, before making their recommendations for awards from the fund, the evaluation panel will consult colleagues with relevant expertise, such as those responsible for Markets, Highways, Licensing, Culture and Events, Sustainable Growth, and Public Health. This will also serve to ensure that THSF awards align and add value to the whole-council approach to revitalising our town centres and high streets, and do not run counter to council policy or conflict with existing activity.

Next steps and timeline

26. Following agreement by Cabinet, officers will work up a more detailed programme of delivery, the key, initial stage milestones of which are set out below. Cabinet are reminded that the fund is subject to GLA approval and therefore the timeline may require amendment, including as a result of actions emerging from the town centre action planning work.

What?	By when?
Approval of Thriving High Streets Fund	December 2022
GLA final confirmation	January 2023 (TBC)
Launch of fund prospectus	January 2023
Submission of proposals, assessment, evaluation and agreement	Feb/March 2023
Planning for future rounds aligned with town centre action plan development	Feb/March 2023

Policy implications

27. The Economic Wellbeing Strategy 2017-22 was adopted in December 2016 having secured council-wide endorsements. Support to businesses is central to two of its strategic objectives:
 - **Business:** A growth borough, where business thrives and prospers.
 - **Thriving town centres and high streets:** Dynamic, diverse, digital centres that are great places to visit, spend time and enjoy.
28. Work is underway on developing Southwark 2030, our vision for how the borough will look and feel in the long term and the contribution residents,

businesses, public sector partners, the voluntary and community sector, the Council and others will make to deliver on that vision. In support of this, work is also underway on how we grow a shared, fairer economic that works for all in our borough through a refreshed economic strategy which identifies high streets as key to a resilient economy and a means to promote equality and tackle challenges experienced in the borough.

29. The Thriving High Streets Fund will support the delivery of the Economic Strategy through the opportunities presented by the fund to harness the energy of businesses and other imaginative and enterprising people or groups, in order to breathe new life into our town centres and use innovative approaches to stimulate footfall and customer spend.
30. The Southwark Economic Renewal Plan was developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and it captured all council activities aimed at reducing and mitigating the economic impacts of the crisis. The activities are set out under four key themes – employment & skills, business, wellbeing, and high streets and town centres. The Thriving High Streets Fund falls primarily under the last of the four themes, forming part of a cross-council approach to supporting our town centres and high streets in recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and cost of living crisis, but it was designed in such a way that its outcomes will cut across all the themes of the plan.
31. The THSF has been designed to support the ambitions of the council's Southwark Stands Together Programme, with Southwark Stands Together included as one of the fund's four key themes and the only theme for which alignment is a requirement for applicants.
32. In line with the council's Climate Change Strategy and action plans, all applications will also be required to ensure that their proposal would contribute to net zero and delivering a greener, more sustainable borough.

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

Community impact statement

33. Community benefits will accrue through the direct outputs of this project. These include; increased number of visitors to the high street, increase in customer spend, public spaces created or improved, under used or empty spaces brought back into use, retail spaces improved, young entrepreneurs engaged, match funding secured and new jobs created.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

34. Due regard has been paid to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 specifically; to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those who do

not. The principles of the PSED are imbedded in the core objectives of the Thriving High Streets Fund, as the programme intends to improve and develop participation from all sections of the community in a manner that will positively impact high streets and town centres. As part of the assessment process, applicants are asked to define how their projects will be inclusive and welcoming to all, linking directly to the council's Southwark Stands Together initiative. When considering the response to this question, the panel will score applicants based on how well their proposed project will engage a diverse local community and business groups, and promote inclusivity.

35. Care has also been taken in development of the prospectus to ensure the accessibility of the fund for Southwark-based businesses, community groups, educational establishments and voluntary sector organisations.
36. As part of the evaluation process, proposals will be assessed for their ability to build the capacity of local businesses and residents to support their high street or town centre to thrive beyond the life of the fund. Therefore, it is expected that the projects that are recommended for funding will have a long-term positive impact in their chosen areas.
37. The recommendations support the council's equalities and human rights policies and are not considered to have any significant adverse effect on socio-economic equalities.

Health impact statement

38. The recommendations as set out in this report are not considered to have any adverse effect on health equalities. The recommendations are in fact anticipated to have a positive effect on health equalities. Health inequalities were specifically considered in the fund's design, with one of the four key themes to which fund applications must be aligned relating specifically to activities which reduce health inequalities and promote and support health-related activities.

Climate change implications

39. The recommendations as set out in this report are not considered to have any adverse effect on climate change. A requirement of fund applications is to ensure project activities do not have any detrimental impact on the environment.
40. Furthermore, the fund specifically encourages applications for projects focused on activities that support the Council's work to tackle the climate emergency, achieve net zero in the borough and promote environmental sustainability, such as reducing carbon emissions or pollution, waste reduction and greening.

Financial implications

41. It is proposed that the THSF be funded through the Southwark allocation of the UKSPF. Southwark's allocation from the GLA will include £1.4m through the Community & Place theme, which prioritises support for town centres and high streets.
42. Of the £1.4m, £460k has been agreed to support revenue projects. The GLA are currently assessing proposals from local authorities that align with the London UKSPF Investment Plan submitted to Government. Southwark has proposed to the GLA that this sum be approved for investment in the THSF.
43. Once agreed, a grant agreement will be entered into with the GLA setting out project deliverable and agreed spend and output profiles. The council will ensure that the delivery of the THSF will adhere to the grant agreement agreed with the GLA.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Governance

44. Under the delegation set out in Part 3D of Southwark's constitution, the cabinet member proposes revenue budget allocations to Cabinet and seeks agreement of significant programmes. The Thriving High Street Fund is a significant programme that may have cross-cutting implications.
45. The UKSPF supports a commitment to level up all parts of the UK by delivering on each of the levelling up objectives:
 - Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
 - Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
 - Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
 - Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.
46. The primary goal of the UKSPF is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. To access the allocation, the Council will be asked to set out measurable outcomes that reflect local needs and opportunities. These should inform the interventions they wish to deliver. Places will be able to choose from investment across three investment priorities of communities and place, local business and people and skills.
47. The communities and place investment priority enables places to invest to restore their community spaces and relationships and create the foundations for economic development at the neighbourhood-level. The intention of this is to strengthen the social fabric of communities,

supporting in building pride in place. The supporting local business investment priority enables places to fund interventions that support local businesses to thrive, innovate and grow. Through the people and skills investment priority, the council can use their funding to help reduce the barriers some people face to employment and support them to move towards employment and education. Places can also target funding into skills for local areas to support employment and local growth.

48. The commitment in the Council Delivery Plan includes Thriving High Streets Fund to invest in all of Southwark's high streets as part of the objective of investing in town centres and high streets. The plan meets the investment priorities set out in the UKSPF.
49. The cabinet should consider the public sector equality duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The council must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The report discusses the equality impacts throughout the report, but particular attention is drawn paragraphs 8, 12, 27 and 33 of the report. Cabinet is advised to consider these paragraphs and the council's duties. This is a key decision as it likely to be significant in terms of the impact on communities and specifically in more than one wards.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

50. The report is requesting cabinet to approve an allocation of £460,000 to invest in the Thriving High Street Fund from Southwark's allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for three years 2022/23 to 2024/25 in line with pending agreement with GLA.
51. The report is also requesting cabinet to approve the proposals for the Thriving High Streets Fund as detailed in the report.
52. The strategic director of finance and governance notes that this allocation will be funded from Southwark's allocation of £1.4m from GLA's UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
53. Staffing and any other costs to be funded from departmental revenue budgets.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Economic Strategy 2022-2030	Local Economy Team, Chief Executive's Department	
Economic Renewal Plan	Local Economy Team, Chief Executive's Department	
Economic Wellbeing Strategy	Local Economy Team, Chief Executive's Department	

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Martin Seaton, Jobs, Business and Town Centres	
Lead Officer	Danny Edwards, Head of Local Economy	
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
	Officer Title	Comments Sought
		Comments Included
	Director of Law and Governance	Yes
	Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes
	Cabinet Member	
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