

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 11 August 2023	Meeting Name: Cabinet Member for Homes, Communities and Finance
Report title:		Approval of grant payment to Southwark Group of Tenant Organisations (SGTO) and other get involved grant payments (GIG)	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Nat Stevens, Resident Involvement Manager	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Cabinet Member for Homes, Communities and Finance approves the following payments from the resident involvement fund:
2. £114,000 grant funding to the Southwark Group of Tenant Management Organisations (SGTO). This comprises an amount of £57,000 for Quarter 1 (April-June 2023) and £57,000 for Quarter 2 (July-September 2023).
3. The payment of £40,000 paid to 8 tenants and residents associations (TRAs) to set up the 2022 Christmas warm hubs. The hubs were set up to provide hot food during the winter months to support residents to cope with the rising cost of living, address the challenges of loneliness, improve the physical and mental well-being of residents.
4. The Christmas small grants payment of £3,300 to 11 sheltered housing units which enabled residents to put on social events in December 2022 to foster good relationships between residents, promote community cohesion and improve the well-being of residents.
5. The current GIG applications to the value of £66,054 from 13 TRAs, 1 TMO and 1 sheltered unit to provide a range of community cohesion, health and well-being activities over the 2023 summer months. These applications have been outstanding since February 2023.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. The Cabinet decision in February 2020 set out a framework to put resources back into the local communities and to empower residents to make local decisions on how to use the allocated resident involvement funds to improve their estates, neighbourhoods and foster community cohesion. Appendix 1
7. The February 2020 Cabinet decision pooled the former tenants fund, homeowners fund and tenants and residents social inclusion grant into a single resident involvement fund of circa £900,000 per annum.

8. Half of the resident involvement fund (£450,000) was allocated to fund grass roots resident involvement and empowerment activities comprising of a core grant of £178,000 to support the growth and development of TRAs and £272,000 allocated to the get involved grants (GIG) to be disbursed in payments of up to £5,000 to support projects and activities that bring tenants and residents together and improve their wellbeing.
9. The other half (£450,000) is earmarked to provide independent support and advice services with a value of (£260,000) and a further £100,000 is set aside to facilitate the active involvement of residents including empowerment and capacity building to set up and run tenants and residents associations (TRAs).
10. A budget of £50,000 is allocated to support residents to attend meetings, conferences to support effective resident involvement. A paid officer is assigned to administering the resident involvement fund and a budget of £40,000 is allocated for the administration of the grants.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

SGTO

11. The February 2020 Cabinet report made provision for independent advice and advocacy services for both homeowners and tenants. The provision of annual grants was to be replaced with a formal commissioning of such services through the Council's procurement process leading to the award of three-year contracts.
12. The independent advice and advocacy is currently provided by Citizens Advice Southwark (CAS) for homeowners and Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGTO) for tenants and flexibly for residents. It was anticipated in February 2020 that the contracts would be in place by October 2020 and the grant payments to CAS and SGTO would continue until the formal procurement process was completed.
13. This is however not the case as the pandemic and the lack of adequate staffing resources have slowed the process. The advice from the procurement team is that the homeowner advice contract, because of its low value circa (£60,000), can be procured through the single supplier negotiation process subject to approval of the departmental contract review board (DCRB). The Gateway reports have been approved by the DCRB and it is anticipated that the contract would be in place by February 2024.
14. The value of the tenant advice contract is about (£200,000) per annum and the advice from the procurement team is that the single supplier negotiation route is not an option for the Council. A new staffing resource has now been put in place to set out the key performance indicators for this service and draw up a contract specification that would include measurable outcomes to illustrate the tangible benefits of the advice and support contracts for tenants and more broadly residents.

15. The indicative timescale to complete the tender process and to get a contract in place is March 2024. The Cabinet Member for Housing is therefore requested to authorise the extension of the grant payment to SGTO until March 2024 to allow the procurement process to run its course. Regular updates will be provided to the Cabinet Member to note the progress of the tenant advice and support contract procurement process.

GET INVOLVED GRANTS (GIG)

16. The February 2020 Cabinet report sets out a role for local housing forum chairs to review all GIG applications and make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Council Homes for approval of such applications. This approach is in line with the peopled powered agenda to ensure that local residents are empowered to make decisions on how to allocate resources for resident involvement as no one is more qualified to determine the needs of the local communities than local residents who live on the estates and in the neighbourhoods they serve.
17. There have however been a number of challenges trying to embed the new changes to the GIG decision-making process for local housing forum chairs including getting all five local housing forum chairs to attend the GIG training, the absence of a chair for the north east local housing forum and other personal circumstances of chairs who have had to be away for a considerable length of time.
18. Following phone conversations with chairs shortly before Christmas 2022, it was agreed that the urgent small grant payments to the sheltered units (£3,300) and the warm hubs voluntarily set up by 8 TRAs to help residents with the cost of living be approved. Each TRA was awarded £5,000 to set up the warm hubs and the total award was £40,000. The Cabinet Member is requested to retrospectively approve these awards.
19. There are currently 14 outstanding GIG application at a total value of (£66,054.19) from 14 TRAs awaiting decisions by the local housing forum chairs. Some of the applications have been outstanding since February 2023 including applications submitted by some local housing forum chairs.
20. There has already been a considerable delay in processing the outstanding applications and this is causing a lot frustration for the TRAs who are keen to embark upon community cohesion activities, supporting residents with the cost of living, arranging trips for young people over the summer holidays and other social events for residents in the sheltered schemes. The Cabinet Member is requested to authorise the outstanding applications to the value of (£66,054.19) to enable the TRAs to proceed with their various summer community cohesion and other social activities.

GIG BUDGET

21. There is already a very significant underspend of the GIG budget to the value of £164,907 for the 2022/23 financial year. The total spend for 2022/23 was

£83,166 out of a budget of £248,073. The resident involvement team is working with existing and emerging TRAs and other community organisations to organise more grass root activities to encourage resident involvement and promote community cohesion. The credit balance of the GIG fund is currently circa £412,980.

Health impact statement

22. GIG has been of incalculable value in helping promote the health and well-being of residents. The warm hubs have helped to improve the dietary requirements of residents, prevent loneliness and promote the mental well-being of residents.

Climate change implications

23. GIG is used for fund revenue programmes to build community cohesion and there is no adverse implications for climate change.

Resource implications

24. GIG is managed within existing resources in the Housing Department. The budget is ring fenced from the Resident involvement budget which forms part of the Housing Revenue Account. The GIG budget currently records a surplus of £412,980.

Finance implications

25. See below concurrent from the Director of Finance and Governance below.

Legal implications

26. See below concurrent from the Director of Law and Governance.

Community impact assessment

27. The March 2021 census revealed that Southwark is a very diverse borough with 40% of residents born in a county that is not part of the UK, Ireland or the Channel Islands. Just over half (51%) of the population identified as being from a White ethnic background and about 49% identified as other ethnic minority groups.
28. The council plan makes a firm commitment to putting residents at the heart of service design and delivery and empowering communities to shape the places they live in and make decisions about the issues that affect them. GIG offers flexible and inclusive ways for resident involvement.
29. Section 20 of the Equality Act 2010 requires decision-makers to make reasonable adjustments to support residents who are disabled and would suffer a substantial disadvantage from the decision-making process on matters that affect the design and delivery of landlord services.

People Powered Southwark Impact Assessment

30. Putting residents at the heart of everything we do and empowering communities to shape the places they live in and make decisions about issues which affect their lives is critical to the aims and objectives the GIG funding.

The benefits GIG include:

- Giving power to residents to shape, influence and direct the design and delivery of landlord services.
- Working with residents to understand their needs, priorities and aspirations for their neighbourhoods and local community.
- Treating our residents courteously, fairly and with respect.
- Adapting our approach to resident involvement in response to the changing needs and complex work patterns and lifestyles of our residents.
- Developing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by residents and working together to find practical solutions.
- Embedding the principles of co-design, co-creation and co-production of services that put residents firmly in the driving seat.

Impact on Neighbourhoods

31. GIG funding helps to direct resources to grass root resident involvement and facilitates a range of people powered community activities to encourage wider resident involvement.
32. GIG also helps to develop and amplify more flexible and inclusive ways of involving residents in the design and delivery of landlord services. This includes empowerment and capacity building opportunities so residents are equipped to hold the council accountable for the standard and quality of the landlord services it delivers.
33. GIG funding helps local communities to ensure the local areas is a great place to live with great communal gardens, funding for themed community events helps to build community cohesion.

Closing the gap

34. The March 2021 census revealed multiple levels of deprivation in the Borough and GIG helps to address the indices of social and economic deprivation by:
 - Funding community kitchens to assist with the cost of living crisis

- Establishing community early help panels consisting of various government departments and other voluntary agencies working together to provide the best advice to residents so they can claim all the financial support they are entitled to, get professional advice to keep bills down and navigate a path to meaningful training and employment
- Support youth engagement activities like after school clubs and football clubs. The aim is to support young children to optimise their educational attainment levels and improve their life chances.
- By providing funding to other organisations who help TRAs tackle poverty, racism and discrimination, as well as the inequalities in health, education, housing and employment that hold people back.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance

35. The Localism Act 2011 enables the council to do anything that individuals generally may do, which would include incurring expenditure, giving financial or other assistance to any person or entering into arrangements or agreements with any person. This power can be used even if legislation already exists that allows the council to do the same thing although the council cannot to do anything which it was restricted or prevented from doing under that previous legislation.
36. The provision of grants from within the funds identified for the Getting Involved Grants (GIG) falls within the scope of activities the council can undertake under the Localism Act 2011.
37. Under the decision-making arrangements set out in Part 3 of the council's constitution, the decision on the recommendation in paragraph one of this report is one that the cabinet member is able to take.
38. The council is under an on-going duty, in exercising all of its functions, to have regard to the public sector equality duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires the council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, and advance of equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (such as age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership) and those who do not.
39. When making a decision on the recommendation in this report the cabinet member must actively consider the PSED. The community impact statement set out in the report identifies relevant matters to be taken into account in discharging that duty.

Strategic Director of Finance

40. The Strategic Director of Finance and Governance notes the recommendations of the report and that existing resources are available to cover the recommended

grants from within the Resident Involvement Fund budget, with a further funding round later in the financial year.

Other officers

41. None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Cabinet Report Southwark Resident Participation Framework – 4 February 2020 Cabinet Report Southwark Resident Participation Framework - 4 February 2020 PDF 2 MB

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Cheryl Russell, Director of Resident Services	
Report Author	Nat Stevens - Resident Involvement Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	4 July 2023	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance	Yes	Yes
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	11 August 2023	