

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 5 March 2024	Meeting Name: West Central Multi-Ward Forum Meeting
Report title:		Allocation of Neighbourhoods Fund for 2024-25	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		Camberwell Green, Faraday, Newington, North Walworth, St Giles	
From:		Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the west central multi-ward forum allocates a total of £150,000 of the Neighbourhoods Fund 2024-25 to the list of applications outlined in Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Neighbourhoods Fund (NsF) was introduced in 2015 by merging two former revenue programmes known as Cleaner, Greener, Safer revenue (CGS) and Community Council Fund (CCF). The cabinet member for communities, employment and business authorised the amalgamation of the CGS revenue fund and community council fund, into a single funding programme to create a new Neighbourhoods Fund for the 2015-16 round and onwards. This decision was taken on 12 December 2014.
3. The NsF has a borough-wide funding budget of £630,000 with an allocation of £10,000 per councillor, for each ward. This is subject to annual budget setting process.
4. The purpose of introducing the NsF was to give local areas decision making powers over significant amounts of revenue funding, that they could allocate to meet locally determined priorities.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5. Each ward will have £10,000 per councillor of revenue grants to allocate and it is proposed that any unallocated funds from the previous rounds (years) are to be carried forward and added to the financial year commencing 1 April 2024.
6. The multi-ward forums will use the criteria set out below for the allocation of this funding:
 - a. Creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds to get on well together; (e.g. community cohesion)

- b. Establishing projects which treat each other with respect and consideration (e.g. being a good neighbour, inter-generational contacts)
 - c. Encouraging residents to be responsible for their own neighbourhood (e.g. community clean-ups; volunteering initiatives)
 - d. Specific measures to enhance a neighbourhood's environment (e.g. increased cleaning).
- 7. A multi-ward forum may choose to allocate some of their NsF resources to their CGS capital allocations.
 - 8. Subject to the availability of resources, the NsF may be used to 'buy' services from the council.
 - 9. As with any executive decision taken by Multi-Ward forums, this is subject to the council's existing scrutiny arrangements.

Policy framework implications

- 10. The NsF has a borough-wide funding budget of £630,000 with an allocation of £10,000 per councillor, for each ward. This is subject to annual budget setting process. The fund can allow individuals and community groups to organise their own events /projects to enable communities to come together.

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

Community impact statement

- 11. The roles and functions of multi-ward forums include the promotion of involvement of local people in the democratic process. Multi-ward forums take decisions on local matters including environmental improvement and community safety as well as consultation on a wide range of policies and strategies that affect the area.
- 12. An explicit objective within the Empowering Communities Programme (ward and multi-ward meetings) is that they be used to actively engage as widely as possible with, and bring together, Southwark's diverse local communities on issues of shared mutual interest.
- 13. The allocation of the 2024-25 NsF West Central Multi-Ward forum budget will in the main, affect the people living in the West Central Area. However, in making the area a better place to live and improving life chances for local people, the West Central Multi-Ward area, NsF activities will have an impact on the whole of Southwark.

14. The NsF is an important tool in achieving community participation and cohesion. Having a strong, vibrant and engaged community is a key part of creating a fairer and just society through enabling volunteering, participation, inclusion and well-being at a borough wide and neighbourhood level.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

15. In fulfilling the above objectives that Multi-Ward forums have of bringing together and involving Southwark's diverse local communities, consideration has also been given to the council's duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which requires the council to have due regard when taking decisions to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct
 - b. Advance of 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 characteristic and those that do not share it.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

16. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not share it is further defined in s.149 as having due regard to the need to:
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages connected with a relevant protected characteristic.
 - Take steps to meet the different needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic. Applications for NsF projects come from the local community via a simple online form. This simple process enables individuals and groups to apply for projects that have a direct impact on their community and meet the needs of those that make up that community.
 - Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or any other activity in which they are under-represented. The programme is promoted widely across the borough to as many residents and community groups as possible using the council's main marketing team and via other teams across the council including Resident Services, Community Engagement and via Community Southwark and other community networks. The programme is also advertised in Southwark News to reach a wider audience.

- Equalities data is collected at this time so that an analysis can show where applications have come from and where there are gaps that need to be addressed by specific targeted outreach.
17. When undertaking the duties under section 149 the council must ensure:
- The duty must be fulfilled before the decision in question is enacted;
 - The duty must be exercised in substance with 'rigour and an open mind'; it is not a matter of 'ticking boxes'; and
 - The duty is continuing; it does not end with the completion of any equality impact assessment and due regard must be had as policy evolves and is implemented.
18. Equalities data is collected at this time so that an analysis can show where applications have come from and where there are gaps that need to be addressed by specific targeted outreach. The open application process enables residents with protected characteristics to facilitate events that are relevant to them, and equality monitoring is required which will assist the council in continuous compliance with the public sector equality duty.

Health impact statement

19. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has disadvantaged many communities in the borough and highlighted health inequalities.
20. Improving access to council funding will enable organisations to better support the health and wellbeing of their communities. It will also increase their ability to support their communities and address key issues within their localities.

Climate change implications

21. There are projects listed in the Appendix that may have positive climate change implications in the West Central Area (e.g. community gardening projects) if they are successful.

Resource implications

22. There are no resource implications.

Legal implications

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

Financial implications

24. The West Central multi-ward NsF has been allocated a total of £150,000, for 2024-25.

25. It is recommended that Multi-ward forums set aside some unallocated funds from previous years in order to prevent an over allocation of funds, as well as to act as a contingency from which urgent or incidental requests can be funded throughout the year.

Consultation

26. The NsF projects may require consultation with stakeholders, including the project applicant, local residents and tenants and residents associations where applicable.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance

27. The Local Government Act 2000 (“the 2000 Act”) gives the Leader the power to delegate any executive function to area committees. The allocation of the neighbourhoods fund is an executive function.
28. Multi-ward forums are ‘area committees’ within the meaning of the 2000 Act.
29. The delegation can be found in Part 3H of the constitution, which enables multi-ward forums to approve “the allocation of neighbourhood funds, cleaner, greener, safer and devolved highway capital schemes of a local nature using the resources and criteria identified by the cabinet.” This is therefore a decision that the multi-ward forum is empowered to take.
30. The Localism Act 2011 gives councils a general power of competence whereby they have power to do anything that individuals generally may do. This power can be used even if legislation already exists that allows a local authority to do the same thing. However the general power of competence does not enable a local authority to do anything which it was restricted or prevented from doing under the previous legislation.
31. The general power of competence includes the power to:
 - (a) incur expenditure;
 - (b) give financial assistance to any person;
 - (c) enter into arrangements or agreements with any person;
 - (d) co-operate with or facilitate or co-ordinate the activities of any person;
 - (e) exercise on behalf of any person any functions of that person;
 - and
 - (f) provide staff, goods, services or accommodation to any person.
32. The provision of funding under the NsF falls within the scope of the kind of activities the council can undertake under the general power of competence as this includes the power to give financial assistance to any person.

33. In allocating funding under the NsF multi-ward forums must have regard to the council's equality duties set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The report author has demonstrated how those duties have been considered in the body of the report.
34. This report is recommending that the multi-ward forum approve the allocation of monies from the NsF 2024-25 as specified at Appendix 1.

Strategic Director of Finance

35. The 2024-25 budget allocation for the neighbourhoods fund will be agreed by council assembly as part of the budget setting process. The report notes the allocation is £10,000 per councillor by ward and thus £150,000 should be awarded to the West Central Multi-Ward.
36. Paragraph 25 notes the need to maintain a contingency element from the funding available for urgent or incidental requests. This is a prudent measure to assist in the effective running of the Neighbourhoods Fund.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Neighbourhoods Fund 2024-25 - Information sheet	Environment , Neighbourhoods & Growth, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Pauline Bonner, Neighbourhood Co-ordinator 020 7525 1019
Link: https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/210042/NF-info-sheet-2024-25.pdf		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	2024-25 West Central Multi-Ward NsF Summary Of Application Tables 2024-25

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Forid Ahmed, Neighbourhood Manager	
Report Author	Pauline Bonner, Neighbourhood Co-ordinator	
Version	Final	
Dated	21 February 2024	
Key Decision	Yes	
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
Strategic Director of Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth	No	No
Cabinet member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		21 February 2024