

## **Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 13 July 2020**

Wards: all

## **Subject: Allocation of Neighbourhood CIL funding to the Sustainable Merton Community Champions**

Lead director: Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration

Lead member: Councillor Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Tim Catley, S106/External Funding Officer

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### **Recommendations:**

1. Approve the allocation of £50,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding to Sustainable Merton Community Champions 2020-21 Programme in advance of Cabinet's consideration of bids submitted under the Neighbourhood Fund 2020 bidding round.
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## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks the allocation of £50,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding to Sustainable Merton Community Champions 2020-21 Programme.
- 1.2 The recommendation comes in advance of the consideration of bids submitted under the Neighbourhood Fund 2020 bidding round – to be brought to Cabinet for a decision in September 2020 – due to the need for funding to be secured before September for the Community Champions programme to be delivered.
- 1.3 The bidding round which is held each year to allocate Neighbourhood CIL funding to projects has been delayed this year due to Covid-19. A knock-on effect of these delays is that funding would not be available until September 2020 at the earliest when Cabinet makes its decision on successful bids in accordance with governance that it approved in 2017.

## **2. DETAILS**

- 1.4 In accordance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) 15% of the council's CIL receipts (received from

development being constructed in the borough) must be spent upon addressing the demands that development places on an area. Allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy funding. This 15% element of CIL income is commonly referred to as “Neighbourhood CIL”.

- 1.5 The carrying out of bidding rounds was introduced to provide fairness and transparency in accordance with governance for the allocation of Neighbourhood CIL approved by Cabinet in September 2017. The Neighbourhood CIL funding made available for bids is known as “Merton’s Neighbourhood Fund”. To date bidding rounds have been held once a year with two rounds held so far (one each in 2018 and 2019) and Cabinet has agreed allocations before the summer break in both occasions.
- 1.6 Cabinet decided at its meeting on 19th January 2019 to allocate a portion of Neighbourhood CIL receipts to a separate initiative called the “Ward Allocation Scheme”, allowing each ward £15k to spend on specific small scale public space projects. Cabinet agreed that the Ward Allocation Scheme would operate under separate governance arrangements to that agreed for the Neighbourhood Fund. This report is concerning the Neighbourhood Fund, not the Ward Allocation Scheme.

### **Community Champions and delays to the Neighbourhood Fund 2020 bidding round**

- 1.7 Due to Covid-19 the commencement of this year’s bidding round for the **Neighbourhood Fund** was delayed and a decision was made to have a longer bidding round in anticipation of community groups and organisations finding it difficult to prepare their submissions as quickly as usual. As a consequence the bidding round is due to close on 3 July 2020 with September 2020 the earliest month for Cabinet to consider which bids should be allocated funding.
- 1.8 One high priority project requires funding to be guaranteed before September 2020. The amount of funding required and the reasons why it requires urgent allocation are as follows:
  - **Community Champions** - £50k is required to support the 2020-21 Financial Year programme which commenced in April. The programme is run by Sustainable Merton and includes a continuation of the work of the Community Champions that Cabinet agreed could be awarded a Neighbourhood Fund grant in 2018 and 2019. A description of their programme and how the funding will be spent is set out in the Appendix. New for this year is provision of a mobile community fridge, which has been running during lockdown providing Covid-19 support. The programme is considered a suitable recipient of Neighbourhood CIL funding given the central

role the Community Champions play in building social capital around the borough in the area of sustainability. Their work is a place marker for new residents and businesses of the borough including those attracted by new development so far as underlining the importance Merton places on sustainability and the types of behaviours and activity that should be adopted. Urgency is sought so as to provide funding certainty with respect of the current implementation of the 2020-21 programme.

- 1.9 Allocating funding to the project in advance of the conclusion of the bidding round and the Cabinet decision that follows would require the governance set up for Neighbourhood CIL (see paragraph 1.5) to be waived (for the funding of the project).

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 Cabinet may choose not to waive the governance in order to make a decision on whether to grant funding to the Community Champions programme alongside its decision on the 2020 Neighbourhood Fund bids in September 2020. However, officers have been informed that such a delay would lead to the withdrawal of Sustainable Merton trustee support with respect to programme funding.

### **4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.4 A competitive bidding round for the Neighbourhood Fund commenced on 12 May and was due to close on 3 July 2020. A report on bids will be brought before Cabinet in September for a decision in accordance with governance approved by Cabinet in September 2017 following public consultation on spending priorities.
- 4.5 This report seeks the waiving of the governance (namely the consideration by Cabinet of bids alongside bids submitted within a publically available competitive bidding round) required for the allocation of Neighbourhood CIL funding, with respect of the allocation of £50k Neighbourhood CIL funding to the Community Champions 2020-21 programme for the reasons set out in this report.
- 4.6 Paragraph 1.7 sets out the reasons why the waiving of the governance is considered appropriate in this instance.

### **5. TIMETABLE**

- 5.1 Allocation of the funding to the projects as per the recommendation would allow for the release of funding to be secured in July 2020 towards the

Community Champions helping to address urgent demands brought about by Covid-19.

## **6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 £2 million Neighbourhood CIL income is available for allocation to new projects. £1 million of this funding has been promoted as being available for successful bids submitted in the 2020 Neighbourhood Fund bidding round. Funding may be required for projects in Wimbledon/Plough Lane area to facilitate the opening of the Wimbledon Stadium and this is considered a priority given the scale of CIL income received from this development and its strategic importance to the borough however this not expected to exceed £500k. Accordingly sufficient funding is available to support the allocation of the £50k Neighbourhood CIL income as set out in this report.

## **7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 As set out in the body of this report.

## **8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 N/A

## **9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 N/A

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 N/A

## **11. APPENDICES – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report**

- Appendix – Community Champions 2020

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- [Agenda item 4 Cabinet Meeting 18 September 2017 – Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Governance](#)
- [Agenda item 12 Cabinet Meeting 15 July 2019 – Neighbourhood Fund project selection 2019-20](#)

## **APPENDIX – COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS 2020**

### **How our proposal addresses the demands of development**

This proposal recognises the opportunities associated with the urgency for people to live more sustainable lives and takes into consideration changes to lifestyles and mobility constraints as a result of COVID-19. We want Merton residents to be informed, mobilised and actively making changes to their lifestyles in order to reduce general waste, reduce their use of plastics, adopt reusable alternatives and to increase their use of the food waste collection system. This proposal also recognises the growth in housing in the borough, particularly multiple dwellings and strategies to support the health and wellbeing of residents particularly in the east of the borough.

This is a borough wide initiative involving 70 volunteer Community Champions and is a model project for building social capital and strongly supports the Community Plan that is currently being finalised, with specific reference to working to bridge the gap between the East and West of the borough, contributing to your community, leading a healthy and fulfilling life and making Merton a better place to live and work.

### **Proposed use of funds**

We have in place a Community Champion and Volunteer Coordinator who oversees the contribution made and projects carried out by our 70 and growing number of Community Champions, all working as volunteers to make Merton cleaner, neater, tidier and more sustainable. The funding supports Sustainable Merton to take forward this work from April 2020 as a model for building social capital that can be grown and adapted, working with Council officers and partner organisations involved in Merton's Sustainable Communities and Active Transport Partnership, including social housing landlords, Business Improvement Districts, and the Chamber of Commerce.

During a 12 month period at least 2500 residents will be educated and informed on Climate Change priorities, including waste reduction and management, food waste and food miles, air quality, adopting reusable alternatives, community gardening and tree planting and cleaner neighbourhoods and streets.

Following the Covid 19 restrictions and lockdown we have reshaped our service offer to include weekly web chats with our Champions, as well as regular communications on all things environmental, in order to keep Climate Change on the agenda whilst being sensitive to the lockdown and priorities around COVID-19.

Our proposed forward plan of action while lockdown is in effect, during the gradual easing of restrictions, and when life returns to normal freedom of movement is to:

- increase the number of Community Champions to 90.
- involve our Community Champions in learning and creating presentations on reducing food waste, proper recycling/use of the waste collection system, reducing plastic, and improving air quality in the borough. We will identify three Community Champions for each of these areas to put together informative presentations that they can deliver digitally while social distancing is in effect, and in person once things go back to normal. We will incorporate ideas on how

- to take action from home, and include short videos. This work would target all ages, with relevance to family action.
- continue the weekly webchats we introduced in March 2020 - running one every 2 weeks on key topics such as plastic free lifestyles, the circular economy, air quality effects, environmental justice, and sustainable business.
  - run 4 Community Champion learning events during the year - providing them with updates on the Council's Climate Action Plan and Air Quality Plan and seeking their input to new initiatives. These would be run by video conferencing or as face to face group meetings.
  - build involvement in Community Gardening, with specific emphasis on two green spaces in Mitcham which we manage - Mitcham Community Orchard and Phipps Bridge allotment.
  - coordinate and promote borough wide litter picks and other street cleansing and management activity.
  - organise tree planting and tree maintenance activity in partnership with other organisations such as Clarion Housing and the National Trust
  - launch Merton's first Community Fridge which will be primarily run by our Community Champions and spearhead a mobile Community Fridge initiative in April 2020, coordinated with LBM Public Health and partner organisations such as Wimbledon Foodbank, and providers of adult care, to create a sustainable model to address food poverty in 2020-21.
  - continue to develop our Business Champion model, working with Merton Chamber of Commerce, which directly supports the Council's Climate Action Plan, encouraging businesses to undertake climate action audits, introduce action plans and share their stories to encourage others to follow their lead.
  - coordinate Merton Partnership sub groups - the Environment sub group, and air quality monitoring group, bringing together community representatives to inform and support the Council's aims and objectives.
  - coordinate Green Coffee, a monthly meet up over coffee on all things environmental. This will be a video conferencing approach until social distancing is lifted.
  - Expand our network of contacts in local schools and organize several school workshops throughout the year on various topics related to sustainability. These workshops will involve both learning content and identify ways through which children can get involved with local initiatives.
  - In partnership with the Council, have 20 individuals trained in air quality monitoring (including teachers and Community Champions).
  - Continue to run several social media campaigns, interspersed with on-the-ground or digital events, including our #BreathCleanerAir, #WasteWarriors, and #PlasticFreeMerton campaigns. Coordinate opportunities for Community Champions to contribute to these campaigns through content creation and sharing their stories.
  - Organize several events as coordinators of Refill Merton, a local chapter of the National award winning Refill campaign to reduce the purchase of single use

plastic bottles. We are in the process of organizing one of these events for City Hall to educate Council members about plastic reduction.

**Bidding request (over 20k)**

£50,000

This funding supports the full cost of our Community Champion Manager and volunteer coordinator, as well as a contribution to the work of the Chief Executive and our communications coordinator and will be used to deliver the reshaped service and to grow the role of the Community Champions and the projects they take forward.

Sustainable Merton

The Old Boiler House, Morden Hall Park, Morden Hall Rd, SM4 5JD

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