

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 9 November 2020

Wards: all

Subject: Allocation of Neighbourhood CIL funding

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

Recommendations:

1. Approve the allocation of Neighbourhood CIL funding towards two urgent projects to support impacts of Covid-19 upon community facilities namely £49,650 to Carers Support Merton for promoting digital equality for carers and £45,000 to the Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth to cover an additional Debt Advisor or General Advisor dedicated to Merton to address capacity challenges.
 2. Approve the allocation of £300,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding towards Morden Town Centre improvements.
 3. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing to allocate up to £20,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding to the purchasing of IT equipment including devices and other items to support school pupils across the borough in accessing internet based learning from home required due to Covid, in line with Cabinet's agreed Neighbourhood Fund criteria
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the allocation of Neighbourhood CIL funding towards three urgent projects. Two of those projects are to support impacts of Covid-19 upon community facilities namely £49,650 to Carers Support Merton for promoting digital equality for carers and £45,000 to Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth to cover an additional Debt Advisor or General Advisor dedicated to Merton to address capacity challenges.
- 1.2 For the third project with respect to which a decision is sought – allocation of £300,000 to Morden Town Centre improvements – Cabinet is asked to

approve the allocation on the basis that the improvements are delivered by 31 March 2022.

- 1.3 Cabinet approval is also sought with respect of granting delegated authority to the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing to allocate up to £20,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding to the purchase of IT equipment including devices and other items to support school pupils across the Borough in accessing internet-based learning from home required due to Covid, in line with Cabinet's agreed Neighbourhood Fund criteria.
- 1.4 The recommendations come in advance of the next bidding round in 2021 so that funding can be used to address the demands of Covid-19 with respect of the funding for Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth, Carers Support Merton and internet access to school pupils across the borough, and to meet, with respect of the Morden Town Centre Improvements, a strong aspiration to deliver the improvements before the end of March 2022 to deliver on-the-ground improvements whilst the developer selection and master planning process progresses for the longer term regeneration project.
- 1.5 The allocations would enable a portion of the available balance of £830,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding (following allocation to projects approved for funding by September Cabinet) to be spent on projects that need the funding urgently rather than waiting until Autumn 2021 to start spending the funding pending the approval of bids submitted to the 2021 bidding round.

2. DETAILS

- 1.1 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. This 15% element of CIL income is commonly referred to as "Neighbourhood CIL".
- 1.2 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 three rounds held so far (one each in 2018, 2019 and most recently from 12th May to 3rd July 2020) and with Cabinet approving allocations to supported bids.

- 1.3 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.

Carers Support Merton, Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth and home internet access for school pupils

1.4 Due to Covid-19 the following two high priority projects require funding to be guaranteed as a matter of urgency and cannot wait until autumn 2021 and the decision of Cabinet to approve bids submitted to the 2021 Neighbourhood fund bidding round. The amount of funding required and the reasons why it requires urgent allocation are as follows:

- **Carers Support Merton** - Carers Support Merton are seeking funding of £49,650 to employ a volunteer co-ordinator 27 hours a week to recruit and train a pool of volunteers to support carers 1:1 for 8 weekly sessions to develop the 'digital skills for life', with the aim to progress their learning further, and potentially to develop skills for work. Digital Equipment will be loaned to carers where required. This will be targeted to informal carers to help them adjust to demands of Covid since the onset of which much of the support services have moved online. The funding is required urgently so that the carers can acquire the skills needed to access the online support as soon as possible in light of the worsening Covid situation. The funding proposal is set out at Appendix 1.

The proposal is considered a suitable recipient of Neighbourhood CIL funding as it helps to build a more resilient environment of support for carers who may have difficulties accessing technology and attaining the skills to use it and better equipped communities to respond to life's challenges all which help to support Merton as a place to live, invest and develop, building social capital and bridging the gap.

- **Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth (CAML)** - £35k plus a contingency of £10k is required to employ an additional advisor to address severe capacity shortages that have arisen for CAML due to a large increase in demand for advice because of Covid. The advisor would be dedicated to serving Merton residents. The amount would cover the cost for a debt advisor which is the preferred approach however if the recruitment is not possible then the funding would also cover a general advisor. A placement into either of these roles would address the capacity shortages, with the greatest demand being for debt advice. The funding proposal is set out at Appendix 2. A contingency of £10k has been added that will be held back by the Council to cover any overrun should it arise, given it is understood that the £35k may not cover all of the on-costs and/or may restrict the number of suitable applicants from applying for the role therefore causing delays in meeting demand.

The proposal is considered a suitable recipient of Neighbourhood CIL funding given the critical role the CAML plays in building resilience and social capital across all of Merton's communities including new residents and businesses in our developments during this most challenging time in many people's lives and bridging the gap. Urgency is sought as the capacity issues are being experienced now and could get worse over the coming months with more adverse impacts of Covid being felt and lockdowns coming into effect.

- **Home internet access/devices for school pupils** – up to £20k towards the provision of internet access (via dongles and sim cards) and devices for children to continue learning if sent home from school as a result of Coronavirus.

As of Thursday 22 October, individual schools have been responsible for teaching children online who have been sent home. Many schools across the borough will have significant numbers of children without internet access or devices or both. In the event that a class or bubble is sent home, because a classmate has been identified with or suspected of having coronavirus, these children will need help.

The proposal is considered a suitable candidate for Neighbourhood CIL funding in principle supporting demands of development in so far as improving the resilience of the borough as a place for new families to move to and bring up children bridging the gap and improving social capital through great connectivity with the school communities. A detailed proposal will be submitted over the forthcoming month and Cabinet is asked to grant delegated authority to the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing to approve the allocation up to £20,000 towards the measures subject to consideration of the detailed proposal.

Morden Town Centre Improvements

- 1.5 £300k is sought towards Morden Town Centre Improvements as a strong aspiration to revitalise the town centre with short term deliverable measures whilst the procurement of a development partner progresses. This scheme would build upon the ideas within the existing project "Merton The Place", which is currently being scoped supporting high street recovery and Placemaking with measures to support meanwhile use

activities and improvements pending the wider Morden Regeneration Scheme.

- 1.6 Improvements would include public realm initiatives, shop front improvements at the premises not part of the Morden Regeneration scheme, measures to support local businesses including lamp post banners. Public art around Morden station, improvement to vacant properties and tidying the highway will enhance the outlook of the town centre.
- 1.7 The proposals would address the Neighbourhood CIL assessment criteria giving the town centre a much needed boost improving Morden's existing offer as a place to work, meet and shop rather than just travel through, helping to build social capital and bridging the gap.
- 1.8 The improvements are also considered an important part of the longer term picture for Morden as it will help to support the Regeneration contributing to the making of a place and improving it as a location for investment and supporting the viability of improved development outcomes.
- 1.9 An alternative option of deferring the decision to grant funding to the Morden Town Centre Improvements so that it can be considered alongside proposals submitted during the next Neighbourhood Fund bidding round due in the summer 2021 is not supported. The Neighbourhood CIL governance arrangements approved by Cabinet in September 2017 were introduced to assess competing bids for the funding on an even footing.
- 1.10 Allocating the funding now is considered appropriate for the reasons given at paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12 with respect to competitive bidding and because the delay associated with deferring the decision to be taken alongside the decision on the successful bids submitted during the next bidding round would restrict the amount of work that could be done given it will likely leave only the second half of 2021-22 Financial Year for delivery.

Proposals in the context of the Neighbourhood CIL Governance

- 1.11 It should be noted by Members that all bids submitted in the 2020 bidding round considered to have met the assessment criteria were approved, with only schemes that were not considered to qualify for Neighbourhood CIL funding missing out. This led to the funding available for 2020 bids not being fully utilized with £1,413,819 funding allocated out of the total of £2.1 million available received to the end of June 2020. Accordingly the unallocated balance of £686,000 would have been sufficient to fund the proposals that are the subject of this report should they have been

submitted during the bidding round. On this basis it is considered that allocating the funding as proposed in this report would not undermine the competitive bidding principles of the approved governance arrangements.

- 1.12 A further £140,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding has been received since June 2020 to the end of September 2020. If Members were to approve the allocation of the funding to the three proposals in this report and a further £20k is approved under delegated authority for the devices/internet access for school pupils £415,000 of the funding received to date could be put aside for the 2021 bidding round. Further top-ups from funding received over the next three quarters is likely to take the funding available for 2021 bids close to the £1m mark.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Allocating funding to the projects set out above in advance of the conclusion of the next bidding round and the Cabinet decision that follows would require the governance set up for Neighbourhood CIL (see paragraph 2.2) to be waived (for the funding of the project).
- 3.2 Cabinet may choose not to waive the governance in order to make a decision on whether to grant funding alongside its decision on the 2021 Neighbourhood Fund bids likely in the autumn 2021. However, the immediate and urgent demands of the CAML, Carer Support Merton and IT support for home based school pupils in Mitcham and Morden brought about by Covid will not be met and as set out in para 2.10 the opportunity to deliver improvements to Morden Town Centre by the end of March 2022 will not be maximised. Furthermore as set out in para 2.11 the waiving of the governance is mitigated by the fact that the proposals would affectively be allocated funding not utilised by 2020 bids and on the basis that there was no competition between bids submitted during the bidding round for funding.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.4 A competitive bidding round for the Neighbourhood Fund commenced on 12 May and closed on 3 July 2020. A report on bids was brought before Cabinet on 7 September 2020 and decision was made 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 three proposals.

- 4.6 Paragraphs 2.11 to 3.2 set 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 December 2020 or early 2021.

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Community Infrastructure Levy, 15% of which is used for the Neighbourhood Fund, is payable when CIL-liable developments start to be built, not when planning permission is granted.
- 6.2 As at Quarter 2 2020-21 £873,570 of Neighbourhood CIL Funding is currently available for allocation to new schemes. Accordingly sufficient funding is available to support the allocation of the £414,650 Neighbourhood CIL income as set out in this report.
- 6.3 The balance of Neighbourhood CIL of £458,920 not applied to bids approved by Cabinet/under delegated authority granted by Cabinet will be rolled forward to support bids approved in future bidding rounds.
- 6.4 The Cabinet approval required to add Morden Town Centre Improvements to the Capital Programme is being progressed as part of the September 2020 Financial Monitoring Report

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council may apply funding to these projects by virtue of the Council Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 and the Localism Act 2011 respectively.
- 7.2 Government guidance states that local communities should be engaged and agree how best to spend the Neighbourhood Fund. By virtue of advised necessity two of these projects need funding in the short term if they are to be wholly effective and therefore an alteration to the governance process agreed in September 2017 is required. The third project could be actioned now or deferred for the next bidding round.
- 7.3 Funding will need to be allocated and applied in accordance with the Councils funding rules.
- 7.4 The Morden Development Funding will be applied to in house services, additions to existing contracts and where applicable will applied to new competitively tendered services with third parties. These will need to be conducted in accordance with the Councils Contract Standing Orders and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (or any such amended or alternative regulations as applicable after 31 December 2020).

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 1 – PROMOTING DIGITAL EQUALITY FOR CARERS IN MERTON

- APPENDIX 2 – CITIZENS ADVICE MERTON AND LAMBETH (CAML)
CIL NEIGHBOURHOOD FUND APPLICATION MERTON ADVISER

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

AGENDA ITEM 4 CABINET MEETING 18 SEPTEMBER 2017 –
NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY GOVERNANCE

AGENDA ITEM 12 CABINET MEETING 7 SEPTEMBER 2020 – MERTON'S
NEIGHBOURHOOD FUND PROJECT SELECTION 2020

APPENDIX 1

Promoting Digital Equality for Carers in Merton

Summary

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, key services have further adapted their online offer to enable people to access services online. However, many informal carers in Merton are not able to access digital support leading to digital inequality and social isolation. This has had a significant impact on their wellbeing.

Carers Support Merton are seeking funding of £49,650 to employ a volunteer co-ordinator 27 hours a week to recruit and train a pool of volunteers to support carers 1:1 for 8 weekly sessions to develop the 'digital skills for life', with the aim to progress their learning further, and potentially to develop skills for work. Digital Equipment will be loaned to carers where required.

This proposal aligns with one of the key priorities of the Merton Carers Strategy, which is being presented at the Health and Wellbeing Board in November for approval.

Details

Carers Support Merton (CSM) was established in 1992 and supports unpaid family carers from the age of five. Caring for a loved one is a rewarding role, although it can also be isolating, frustrating and exhausting. It is well documented that caring has a significant negative impact on the health and wellbeing of a carer.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, services have further adapted their online offer to enable people to access services online. This includes GPs, shopping and health and wellbeing activities. Carers Support Merton has also developed our use of digital in order to improve all aspects of our operations. We have found that online support is proving to be a much more flexible for carers who cannot leave the person they care for. Whilst this change is necessary to ensure our future sustainability, we have been acutely aware that throughout the pandemic, a significant proportion of carers in Merton are becoming increasingly excluded from accessing support, less independent and more socially isolated.

We know from national research (Lloyds Bank Digital Index)¹ and our own anecdotal evidence that the following factors are barriers to digital inclusion.

- Lack of understanding of the benefits of accessing the internet
- No access to hardware devices (some carers do not have a smart phone)
- No access to internet connection
- Fears about online safety

Therefore, Carers Support Merton propose to seek funding to employ a volunteer co-ordinator 27 hours a week to recruit and train a pool of volunteers to support carers 1:1 for 8 weekly sessions to develop the 'skills for life' as set out in the Department of Education Digital Skills Framework (updated April 2019). After the support, we would look to link carers to continue to learn independently and to link to adult learning

opportunities, which will progress their learning further, and potentially to develop skills for work.

For carers who do not have a device we would lend equipment (purchased for the project) for the initial 8 weekly sessions, and then, once we have the confidence they have the commitment and skills to make use of it, we would source a device. For carers in financial hardship, we would look to source via the Carers Discretionary Grant or other local grants available.

By the end of the 8 weeks carers will be able to:

- communicate, collaborate, and share information online
- to find, manage and store digital information and content securely
- register and access online services, buy and sell goods and administer and manage transactions online
- find solutions to problems using digital tools and online services

Direct Staff Costs 27 hours	£28,350
Volunteer expenses (e.g. travel)	£3000
Marketing	£1100
Overheads, Administration, Management, Office expenditure, rent, Insurance	£8000
Direct Project Cost: IT equipment for worker, phone, staff expenses, recruitment	£2200
Project IT Equipment	£7000
	Total Budget: £49,650

¹ <https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index.html>

APPENDIX 2

Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth (CAML) - Merton Adviser

Summary

CAML have been providing free, independent and confidential advice to Merton residents for 81 years. The service is experiencing a massive jump in advice demand across Merton, which far exceeds their ability to support all Merton residents trying to contact them and waiting times for generalist advice appointments are lengthening. In addition, they are seeing a rise in complexity of issues and also individuals in distress/crisis resulting in more time for client appointments/support and owing to the intensity of the work more advice supervision/line manager support for team members supporting clients.

CAML is seeking funding of £35,000 to employ an additional dedicated Merton Adviser for a one year period. The Adviser will support Merton residents across the borough through a mix of telephone, online, video conferencing and face-to-face support (from their Mitcham office or outreach subject to government guidance).

All CAML staff Advisers are accredited through Advice Quality Standards (AQS). With this funding, they are looking to appoint a full-time Adviser who will also be debt accredited to best support Merton demand needs over the next 12 months. If they are unable to appoint a Debt Adviser in recruitment, they will appoint a Generalist Adviser and support debt training/accreditation.

Details

CAML is experiencing a massive jump in advice demand across Merton as a result of Covid-19. Merton residents attempting to contact the charity via Merton Adviceline (telephone), online query form and dedicated email (the latter implemented in lockdown) has doubled in the past six months alone. In September 2020, more than 1,600 callers tried to ring Merton Adviceline – the highest monthly number on record following August 2020 which is now the second highest month. This rate of acceleration far exceeds their ability to support all Merton residents trying to contact them and the waiting time for generalist advice appointments is lengthening (now approaching 4 weeks).

In addition, they are seeing a rise in complexity of issues and also individuals in distress/crisis resulting in more time dedicated to individual client appointments/support and owing to the intensity of the work more advice supervision/line manager support for team members supporting clients.

As a result CAML is facing a perfect storm with accelerating advice demand across Merton and fewer available advice appointments (owing to combination of longer appointment times, more demand for on-going support and more team member support - advice supervision and/or line manager - required for appointments).

Increasing Merton's Social Capital

Funding for an additional dedicated Merton Adviser will have an enormous impact.

The Adviser will support Merton residents across the borough. With CAML's premises located in the East of the borough, their collaborative working and reputation they support a high percentage of clients living in lower social economic support areas within Merton. In the six months to end-September 2020, for example, CAML supported 171 clients from Cricket Green, 155 from Lavender Fields, 150 from Pollards Hill and 146 from Figge's Marsh.

This enhanced capacity to address increasing demand from clients in the East of the borough will support the borough's wider targets around bridging the gap in wellbeing and resilience of our communities between the east and the west of the borough and increasing social capital in those areas with lowest socio-economic outcomes.

CAML offers support through a mix of telephone, online, video conferencing and face-to-face support (from our Mitcham office or outreach subject to government guidance). To best support Merton residents CAML also work with Language Line and British Sign Language support.

In terms of priority advice issues, in the past six months Merton residents have sought CAML's support for Housing (23%), Welfare Benefits (16%), Employment (14%) and Debt (10%). Within this debt has sharply accelerated in more recent months and will be a major concern for Merton residents going forward.

The overarching goal of increasing social capital and supporting social economic issues absolutely reflects the work of this advice charity.

Neighbourhood Priorities

CAML has a long, established and valued track record of working collaboratively with other organisations for the benefit of individuals and families in Merton. No organisation should work in a silo and CAML proactively engages and works with many organisations across Merton to ensure residents receive the best support possible.

In 2018 Merton Council carried out two surveys focusing on local advice and information services. For residents responding, more than one third (the highest percentage) said they had used CAML's services in the past year. Over 50% of local voluntary sector organisations said they signpost or refer their clients to CAML (second only to the Council).

Requested Funding and Sustainability

CAML is requesting £35,000 to support the costs of a dedicated adviser for a 12-month period to support the significant acceleration in demand from Merton residents as a result of Covid-19. CAML recognises the impact of the pandemic for Merton will be significantly longer than the 12 month period and will endeavour to secure funding to extend the role for a further year.