

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 13 March 2024

Wards: All

Subject: Merton Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023/26

Lead director: Polly Cziok, Executive Director of Innovation and Change

John Morgan, Executive Director of Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health

Lead officer: Keith Burns, Interim Assistant Director; Customers, Policy and Improvement, Innovation and Change

Phil Howell, Interim Assistant Director for Commissioning, Adult Social Care, Integrated Care & Public Health

Lead member: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Contact officer: Amanda Roberts; Policy, Strategy and Partnerships Officer
(020 8545 4685 / amanda.roberts@merton.gov.uk)

Recommendations:

1. To note the work undertaken to commission the Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023-26 and the outcome of this process.
 2. To note the delivery of the first annual round of the Merton Giving Fund, Civic Pride Small Grants.
 3. To note the early proposals for the second annual round of the Merton Giving Fund, Civic Pride Small Grants.
-

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with details of the work to commission the council's Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector, the outcome of this process and an update on the separate "small grants" element of the fund.

1.2 A total £4,937,941.50 has been allocated to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations who applied for grant funding from the Merton Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023/26. This was a positive and significant increase of 35% more funding than the previous Strategic Partner Programme 2019-22.

1.3 With Nurturing Civic Pride being one of the administration's key priorities for Merton, the funding programme has involved extensive engagement and collaborative working alongside the voluntary and community sector

including benchmarking and researching into the national, regional and local context. Understanding how and where our residents need support reflects our commitment to restoring Civic Pride in our borough. We want people to feel proud to live, work and visit in Merton.

- 1.4 It was agreed by Cabinet in September 2022 that all core funding that goes to the voluntary sector and the local area should come under the overarching umbrella of a Merton 'Civic Pride Fund' (CPF). This reflects our commitment to investing in the local VCS infrastructure that supports our local communities.
- 1.5 The whole commissioning process for this fund including the [prospectus](#)¹ was co-designed with the voluntary and community sector through extensive engagement and a Collaborative Working Group, which was led by an independent chair.
- 1.6 The new fund had four pots of funding, which were aligned with the council's '[Working Better With Communities](#)' framework. A total of forty applications were received. The following applications were received for each element:
 - Services that provide help - 5
 - Services that grow strengths and capabilities - 13
 - Active, supportive communities - 20
 - An enabling system and place- 2
- 1.7 The Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector fund brought together multiple funding pots under one single grants process.
- 1.8 The aims of the 2023-26 Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector were to:
 - Invest in and support Merton's local voluntary and community infrastructure.
 - Nurture a strong sense of community and reduce inequalities.
 - Bring together preventative services that provide information, advice and support in the community to strengthen Merton resident's physical, social, emotional, and economic resilience.

2 DETAIL

Main Grants Programme

- 2.1 Following approval by Cabinet on 22 September 2022, the grant opened for applications from 3rd October and ended on the 11th of November 2022, after a six-week period. A total of 40 applications were received.
- 2.2 To support smaller organisations through the application process online webinars, 1:1 support sessions and virtual workshops were facilitated by both Merton council and Merton connected. FAQs were developed, and organisations could contact the funders at any stage with queries.
- 2.3 A funding panel was convened on 29 and 30 November and 6 December 2022 to score applications against the weighted criteria, including the ways

¹ [Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector | Merton Council](#)

- of working set out in the funding prospectus. The panel included representatives from the Council (including the Equalities Officer) and Southwest London Integrated Care Board.
- 2.4 Applications for each element were scored and ranked. Any that were found to fall below the minimum threshold of a weighted score of 60 or fell outside the scope set out in the Prospectus were automatically not eligible. Funding allocations were then considered for each theme based on ranking.
- 2.5 A decision report was prepared, and an Equality Analysis completed for the Chief Executive to approve recommendations on organisations to be funded on 30 December 2022. All applicants were notified by letter of the decision on the 5 January 2023. Funding agreements and monitoring arrangements were finalised in March 2023 and funding commenced from April 2023.
- 2.6 Out of 40 applications, 20 organisations were successful with funding, with 24 projects. Included at Appendix 1 is a list of organisations that were successful and unsuccessful following evaluation and the amount agreed for 3 years following chief officer decision. For further details of the summary (including description and scoring), please refer to Appendix 1 of the following January 2023 Cabinet report: [Report Civic Pride VCS Jan 2023.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)
- 2.7 We ensured that as part of the equality analysis, organisations that were eligible but low scoring have been supported by the council and Merton Connected to identify alternative funding opportunities.
- 2.8 Following key decision approval, letters were sent to all organisations in early January 2023. New funding agreements for the Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector programme began on 1 April 2023, for all allocated funding, with ongoing grants monitoring arrangements in place.
- 2.9 Key headlines of this funding include the following:
- At almost £5 million, this combined grant programme has been the largest contribution to support the voluntary and community sector for many years.
 - With 20 organisations being funded for three years, this is the largest amount of organisations funded via grants.
 - Out of the 20 organisations, three organisations had not received this funding previously. This provides both stability within the sector, and opportunities to explore new projects.
 - 28% of the total funding available has gone to smaller groups/organisations.
 - Over £1 million to organisations that support older people.
 - Over £500,000 to organisations that support people with disabilities and impairments.
 - £203,962.00 to BAME Voice, a significant increase on the previous round of grant funding.

Small Grants Fund

- 2.10 To support and develop Merton's small, volunteer and community led organisations, including diversity-led groups, it was agreed that the Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector programme would allocate funding for smaller groups. This is following findings from the [Merton State of the Sector Report 2021](#) and the [BAME Impact Report](#) which indicate that smaller organisations can struggle to compete with the larger local organisations when applying for funding.
- 2.11 As part of theme 4: An enabling system and place, it was agreed to have a small grants fund to the value of £150,000 over three years of the grant programme, using the Merton Giving funding mechanism to distribute funds to successful bidders.
- 2.12 Merton Giving has become a very successful vehicle for distributing funds across the Borough, to organisations that support vulnerable communities, families, young people and ethnic minority communities. Merton Connected, who oversee Merton Giving in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce provide additional support to organisations applying for funding, with community accountancy and monitoring outcomes to ensure that grants meet the required outcomes and criteria.
- 2.13 The first annual round of the Merton Giving Fund, Civic Pride Small Grants launched in October 2023.
- 2.14 The specific aims of the small grants fund were to build capacity and resilience, address gaps in services and support available and support innovation and testing of new approaches and provide emergency assistance. This could be achieved either building on existing activity or launching new activity. Ideally the projects were focused during a 6-month period starting in December 2023. However, we recognised that the nature of activity may vary so the funds could be spent over a shorter or longer time frame (over 1 year) to best achieve the intended outcomes. Applications for Emergency Assistance needed to be delivered within six months of the award.
- 2.15 Organisations could apply for grants of up to £2,500 (grant requests could be accepted for slightly more than this if there is a clear business case and outcomes were clearly demonstrated within the application). Priority went to organisations where annual turnover was less than £25,000, as this reflects 40% of VCS organisations in Merton.
- 2.16 Additional funding already earmarked for preventative activities, tackling inequalities and emergency assistance, brought the total pot for year one to £92,172.60. A portion of the total funding was specifically designated for support and services for adults.
- 2.17 Two well attended Meet the Funder workshops were held on 12th October and the materials were made available from these workshops.
- 2.18 Applications closed on 13th November. Following a grants panel on 29th November, grants were allocated to a total of 23 organisations to a value of £54,209.59, with funded projects starting in early December 2023, subject to applicants providing all required information and documentation.

3 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 It is proposed that the next round of the annual small grants fund takes place in May 2024, and a more detailed timeline is now being worked up for this. Council officers will be exploring opportunities to align with other small grants pots, including any potential funding linked to the 'Borough of Sport' theme.
- 3.2 Regular engagement with current Civic Pride Strategic Partners and wider VCS will continue to take place via the well-attended monthly Community Response Steering Group, which is facilitated by the council.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 A number of engagement activities have informed this fund.
- 4.2 Transforming How We Work with Communities project, and as part of this the listening and engagement work to shape the working better with communities framework.
- 4.3 Your Merton engagement and findings report.
- 4.4 VCS community response monthly steering group.
- 4.5 Covid-19 Impact reports for people with dementia and their carers, people with a learning disability and their carers, people from black and minority ethnic communities and young people.
- 4.6 Merton Connected 'State of the Sector' report.
- 4.7 The outcomes of the Big Conversation for people with a learning disability.
- 4.8 A large online engagement event facilitated by Collaborate CIC took place on the 27 April 2022 attended by over 50 people. At the event, initial ideas were sought on the principles underpinning the work, the process, the vision, and the proposed outcomes of the programme. Delegates were invited to continue to co-produce the whole programme through Collaborative Working Group, which met 5 times.
- 4.9 The formal consultation on the prospectus was open from 21 July to 16 August.
- 4.10 Conversations with commissioners within the council and beyond have taken place throughout this process. The early proposals were taken to a commissioner's workshop on 24 May 2022.

5 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None specific for this report. The funding available for the Civic Pride Fund was met within existing core budgets for the four key themes in Civic Pride Fund (CPF): Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector.

6 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None specific for this report.

7 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None specific for this report.

8 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None specific to this report.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None specific for this report.

10 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix 1: Successful and unsuccessful applicants for Civic Pride Funding: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023-2026.

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1 Cabinet report – Merton Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023/26 – commissioning requirements 19/09/2022 - [Final Cabinet report 19 September Civic Pride VCS.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=714)
- 2 CMT report - Merton Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023/26 - commissioning requirements 16/08/22
- 3 CMT report - Strategic Partner Programme 2023-2026 12/05/2022
- 4 Key Decision Report - Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 25/02/2019 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=714>
- 5 Key Decision Report - Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 18/12/2018 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=687>
- 6 Cabinet report – Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 commissioning requirements 17/09/2018 - <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=629>
- 7 Cabinet report – Future Funding of the Strategic Partner Programme – 03/07/2017 - <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=47>

Appendix One - Successful and unsuccessful applicants for Civic Pride Funding: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023-2026.

- 1. Services that provide help:** the services that provide emergency assistance to people in crisis and direct help to adults in need.

Successful Applicants

Organisation	Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
Power Centre Church	£65,200.00	£38,073.00
Commonside Community Development Trust	£36,927.00	£36,927.00
Merton Vision	£30,945.00	£30,945.00

Unsuccessful Organisations

Organisation	Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
Faith in Action - Merton Homelessness Project	£90,000	No funding
Inner Strength Network	£120,000	Not eligible

- 2. Services that grow strengths and capabilities:** the services that provide good quality information, support and non-accredited advice, accredited advice and casework and specialist and/or legal representation where necessary.

Successful Applicants

Organisation	Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
Age UK Merton	£1,557,087.07	£530,581.20
Association for Polish Family	£163,000.00	£163,000.00
Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth	£1,616,504.00	£1,293,203.20
Commonside Community Development Trust	£98,439.00	£78,751.20
Merton Centre for Independent Living	£148,248.00	£148,248.00
Merton Mencap (AF1)	£68,466.00	£54,772.80
Merton Vision (AF2)	£73,882.00	£59,105.60
South West London Law Centres	£228,724.00	£228,724.00
Springfield Advice and Law Centre	£190,300.00	£190,300.00
Wimbledon Guild	£148,293.00	£148,293.00

Unsuccessful Organisations

Organisation	Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
Alzheimer's Society	£153,494.00	No eligible
Home-Start Merton	£58,980.00	Not eligible
South London Refugee Association	£134,259.59	No funding

3. **Active, supportive communities:** the services that co-design support and solutions with people and communities to help grow their relationships and connections and increase their level of activity. This will include low level preventative activities and Healthwatch Merton.

Successful Applicants

Organisation	Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
AFC Wimbledon Foundation	£211,150.00	£0* ²
Age UK Merton (AF1)	£314,029.41	£0*
Attic Theatre Company	£38,514.00	£38,514.00
Commonside Community Development Trust (AF1)	£142,574.00	£142,574.00
Friends In Helier	£178,000.00	£150,410.00
The Merton and Morden Guild of Social Service	£144,500.00	£122,102.50
Merton Community Transport	£52,031.03	£43,966.22
Merton Mencap	£68,520.00	£68,520.00
Merton Mencap (AF2)	£56,706.00	£0*
Merton Mencap (AF3)	£48,300.00	£0*
Merton Mencap (AF4)	£41,865.00	£0*
Merton Vision	£182,664.00	£154,351.08
North East Mitcham Community Association	£40,536.57	£34,253.38
Wimbledon Guild (AF1)	£102,696.00	£0*
Merton Connected (AF1)	£375,000.00	£375,000.00

² * As preventative activities had a large number of strong applications, far exceeding the funding available, the panel made the decision to discuss alternative funding arrangements with four organisations. These organisations have agreed to withdraw their funding applications and are in ongoing conversations with the Council to confirm future opportunities. This has enabled a wide a reach as possible for preventative activities, making best use of available funding.

Unsuccessful Organisations

Organisation	Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
Accoutre Centre for Learning	£30,000	Not eligible
Ethnic Minority Centre Ltd	£49,989.00	No funding
South Mitcham Community Association	£122,938.00	No funding
Unique Talent CIC	£370,740.00	No funding
Jigsaw4u	£132,107.00	Not eligible

4. **An enabling system and place:** the services that help to support an enabling system and place. This will include voluntary and community sector infrastructure support and the provision of small grants.

Successful Applicants

Organisation	Funding Amount Requested 2023-2026	Funding Amount 2023-2026
BAME VOICE	£203,962.00	£203,962.00
Merton Connected	£807,300.00	£603,338.00

This page is intentionally left blank