

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 10

Subject: Thriving Communities Investment Fund 2025-2029

Date of meeting: 27 June 2024

Report of: Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Human Rights

Corporate Director: Corporate Services

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Ward(s) affected: All

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: It is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure or making savings above £1,000,000 & it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report seeks cabinet approval for a 4-year programme of investment in the city's Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS). This investment will support the community and voluntary sector to work with the council to deliver the four over-arching priorities of the council plan, to meet communities' needs, to provide value for money and to grow and thrive as a valued partner in jointly addressing the challenges of funding pressures and increasing demand. It has been designed with consideration to the future release of a micro-grants programme for community groups working with marginalised and vulnerable residents in the city experiencing the most disadvantage.
- 1.2 The programme of investment is called the 'Thriving Communities Investment Fund' and will run from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2029. Investment is anticipated at circa £1.824m per annum, subject to annual budget setting by Budget Council in February each year. The potential investment over four years will be £7.297m.
- 1.3 The current CVS multi-year grant programme ends in March 2025 and for further grant investment to start 1st April 2025 a prospectus is required to be published in Summer 2024 with approval of bids in late Autumn 2024.

- 1.4 The proposal has been developed in collaboration with the community and voluntary sector through a range of meetings and discussions including dialogue specifically with current funded providers, a large in-person event open to CVS organisations of all sizes and an on-line event.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet agrees the outcomes and approach for the Thriving Communities Investment Fund 2025-2029 as described in Section 3 of the report.
- 2.2 Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director for Corporate Services to take all necessary steps to implement the Thriving Communities Investment Fund as outlined in this report in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Equality and Human Rights.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 In March 2025 the council current multi-year grant investment programme into the community and voluntary sector will end. To ensure seamless investment into the sector a new programme has been designed with input from the community and voluntary sector and subject matter experts from across the council. This is to ensure the new programme aligns with the priorities of the council plan, considers the current context and challenges facing the sector and communities and supports groups, activities and projects where residents are experiencing the greatest inequality.
- 3.2 The new investment fund will work across two investment streams:
 - Community catalyst funding
 - Strategic partnership funding
- 3.3. The proposed investment streams and approach are designed to be agile, innovative and are set out to achieve the following:
 - i. Reaching the greatest number of diverse residents with an identified advice or financial need. This is especially important at times of cost-of-living pressures, high energy costs and rising accommodation costs. Immediate focus is on alleviating the impact of poverty but over the four years of investment the council would seek to work with the partnership to re-balance crisis support with preventative action.
 - ii. Working with communities of place and identity to ensure their access to services and economic opportunities, which requires strong community and voluntary sector organisations that have the confidence and trust of those communities and can delivery measures to address inequalities within the city.
 - iii. Developing communities across the city (based on geography and/or identity), within the context of 100s of community organisations requires a strong model of third sector development led by organisations with the appropriate skills and experience in working with communities and groups.

This will include area focused asset-based community development, improving communities' resilience and social capital and strengthening community engagement. Releasing and enabling community power is critical to the future re-invigoration of our communities.

- 3.4 The community catalyst funding will be for small and medium groups delivering on council priorities targeting our city's most marginalised and impacted communities/residents and building groups' resilience. It will offer groups the opportunity of two years funding for core and projects costs for 2025-27. There will be one bidding round in Autumn 2024 for funding 2025-27 and one bidding round in Autumn 2026 for funding 2027-2029. A lived experience panel will be created to support the grant decision making process. Only organisations with an annual income of £500,000 or less will be eligible to apply to the community catalyst fund. Bids will be capped at £10,000 per application and these can be made by single organisations or partnerships of organisations.
- 3.5 The strategic partnership funding will provide four-year (2025-2029) strategic investment in two key partnerships: one to deliver strategic anti-poverty activity and one to enable community power and growth. It will provide funding for core and project costs. It will be granted through a direct award to the partnerships following their submission of a bid proposal to the council. The proposal will be evaluated by an officer panel of subject matter experts and include a period of clarification and negotiation. The process will run throughout Autumn 2024 with the process concluded by December 2024 and new grant agreements in place for 1st April 2025.
- 3.6 The strategic partnership funding will work to support the council's four strategic priorities set out in its Council Plan 2023-2027. The partnership funding focuses on the following outcomes:
 - i. an inclusive economy that promotes equality of opportunity and shared prosperity in the city (Council Plan Outcome 1: A city to be proud of) by ensuring that CVS strategic partner organisations attract funds from outside the city, and work in partnership with both the private and public sector to deliver a low carbon and circular economy.
 - ii. engagement and collaboration, fight discrimination and embrace diversity, and work to reduce inequality (Council Plan Outcome 2: A fair and inclusive city) by using our CVS strategic partner organisations to engage with residents whose voices are least heard, making sure that no one is left behind, refreshing and improving how we work with residents and community groups across the city.
 - iii. a healthy city where people thrive (Council Pan Outcome 3) by supporting CVS strategic partner organisations to be more sustainable through the council's investment, helping them to work jointly with statutory partners to deliver services that focus on preventative work to help residents take safe and well.
 - iv. joining up support for, and collaborative working with CVS partners across the city, recognising that CVS organisations are part of the

solution to addressing the complex and interconnected challenges that the city faces (Council Plan Outcome 4: A responsive council with well-run services).

- 3.7 The strategic partners have been identified through consideration of existing partnership arrangements funded to delivery similar outcomes and their delivery success, alongside a review of strategic objectives and outcomes across all council directorates and their key CVS delivery partners. As a grant making process the council has discretion to invest directly in organisations that align strategically with the council's priorities..

i. Advice and Financial Inclusion

- 3.8 A partnership led by Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove will be funded to provide advice and support for residents who present in need, including general, financial and food advice. The services will deliver across differing areas of the city as well as having a core base in Hove Town Hall. The service will help and support 7,000 residents per year with a focus on reducing inequality in line with the council's Cost of Living Action Plan.

- 3.9 To provide a trusted route for help and advice, with 'many connected doors' to access support, the following organisations will receive funding as part of the partnership:

- Citizens Advice Brighton and Hove: information, advice and guidance on welfare benefits, debt, employment law, housing, immigration, consumer law and discrimination
- BHT Advice: immigration, housing, housing advice at court, human rights casework, and digital advice
- St Luke's Advice Service: advice and guidance on welfare benefits and debt.
- Money Advice Project: advice and casework on debt, welfare benefits, income maximisation, money management, budgeting and financial capability.
- Youth Advice Centre: advice and guidance to young adults including sexual health, emotional wellbeing, debt, welfare benefits, family mediation, homelessness, employability and life skills.
- Brighton & Hove Food Partnership: support to the Emergency Food Network
- Possability People: financial advice
- Trust for Developing Communities, Hangleton & Knoll Project and Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project: community education

- 3.10 Other organisations may participate in this partnership however they will not be allocated funding. This is based on assessment of their financial need and strategic relationship to the council.

ii. **Community Power and Growth**

- 3.11 The council will be investing in one strategic partnership led by the Trust for Developing Communities to deliver community engagement, community development, and infrastructure support.
- a. Community engagement
- 3.12 Funded strategic partners will work with residents and communities experiencing additional disadvantage and barriers because of their protected characteristics, all of who have 'lived experience' leaders within their management or boards of trustees. The partners will be required to support the council in engaging with these communities, amplifying the voices and challenges these communities are experiencing. While each community will have its own work elements, an overarching principle will be intersectionality in all aspects of delivery. The organisations funded will be as follows:
- Autism/Neurodivergence – Impact Initiatives.
 - Black and racially minoritised – Bridging Change, Sussex Interpreting Services
 - Carers, including young carers – The Carers Centre.
 - Disability – Possability People, plus a D/deaf group and a sight loss group to be identified
 - Gypsy, Roma, Traveller – Friends, Families & Travellers.
 - Lay Assessors – Healthwatch Brighton & Hove.
 - Learning Disability – Amaze (Children and Young people), Speak Out (Adults).
 - LGBTQ – Switchboard (Adults), Allsorts Youth project (Young people), Clare Project (Trans)
 - Women – Brighton Women's Centre.
- b. Community development and infrastructure support
- 3.13 The CVS in Brighton & Hove brings in significant additional funding from outside the city. This has been evidenced through an independent evaluation by Ottaway Strategic Consultancy of the Third Sector Commission 2017 – 2020 which showed that a ratio for every £ invested through the council's grant funding, the Third Sector Commission, an additional £5.04 was secured through additional or external resource generated. While this figure ebbs and flows a little year on year, the latest analysis (2022 – 2023) retains a level of £4.79 for each £ invested through the Commission.
- 3.15 The strategic partners will be expected to identify, nurture and develop communities and CVS organisations using an asset-based community development approach. They will release and enable the skills, abilities and practical assets of residents and communities and act as an anchor for co-ordinating and improving joined up action in neighbourhoods and attracting further investment into neighbourhoods. This investment will continue to be directed across the four areas of the city: North, East, West and Central –

working flexibly and with agility within the areas to focus on needs and opportunities as they arise over the four years of investment.

- 3.16 CVS organisational support will also include representation of communities and CVS interests at council and city consultative activities, forums and partnerships, plus provision of support to community assets including buildings, skills development for organisations’ leaders, CVS policy development, and provision of practical support to small, volunteer-led community groups. It will help improve the economic growth of the city through provision of support for volunteers and engagement with the private and ‘for profit’ sector as to the added value they can contribute.
- 3.17 Empowering residents to the level of being able to take part or lead community activities may also include provision of low-level community learning that enhances their skills and confidence.
- 3.18 This investment will also include a specific element for support for Black & Racially Minoritised CVS organisations, with the expected outcome being the funding of a distinct organisation to carry out this work.
- 3.19 The strategic partners funded will be:
- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
 - Community Works
 - Hangleton & Knoll Project
 - Resource Centre
 - Sussex Interpreting Services
 - Trust for Developing Communities
 - A Black & Racially Minoritised CVS entity to be identified during 2024/25.
- 3.20 Table 1 below provides a high-level breakdown of the annual funding per investment stream of the Thriving Communities Investment Fund. The funding breakdown is calculated based on current spend in 2024/25 on similar thematic areas in the Third Sector Commission 2020-2025.

Investment stream	Value (per annum)
Community Catalyst	£200,000
Strategic partnership – advice and financial inclusion	£456,100
Strategic partnership – community power and growth: engagement	£447,400
Strategic partnership – community power and growth: development and infrastructure	£720,840
Thriving Communities Investment Fund Total	£1,824,340

- 3.21 Detailed breakdown of the funding for the strategic partnerships will be set out in the grant-making prospectus that will be published in July 2024.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Consideration was given to continuing with a programme like the Third Sector Commission 2020-2025. However, feedback from the sector included the need for greater focus on small to medium sized groups with support for core costs that provides these groups with stability to grow their projects/activities and their sustainability. There was also strong support for investment in key organisations underpinning the council plan priorities especially regarding alleviating poverty and supporting our city's residents facing the greatest inequality.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Officers engaged with the community and voluntary sector through a range of meetings and discussions including dialogue specifically with current commissioned providers, large in-person event open to CVS organisations of all sizes and an on-line event.

- 5.2 Key themes of the sector's feedback were:

- i. Ensuring equitable distribution of limited funds across organisations of different sizes and focus areas.
- ii. There was no consensus around the definition of a small group.
- iii. A strong view that small and medium sized organisations could bid for funding on their own, or in partnership.
- iv. The period of funding for small and medium sized groups should be two years rather than four years.
- v. Investment in core areas of work was supported, including advice, infrastructure and community development and engagement.
- vi. The proposed re-structuring of the key investment areas was supported.
- vii. There was strong support for the application process changes, e.g. using an application form rather than a commercial online portal.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 This report recommends that Cabinet agrees the outcomes and approach for the Thriving Communities Investment Fund 2025-2029. Investment is anticipated to be circa £1.824m per annum, in alignment with the 2024/25 budget for this purpose and subject to annual budget setting by Budget Council in February each year. The total investment over four years is estimated to be £7.297m

Name of finance officer consulted: Monica Brooks Date consulted:
30/05/24

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 Under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to incur expenditure which in its opinion is in the interests of and will bring direct benefit to its area of any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants.
- 7.2 The process of grant funding by the Council is not subject to Contract Standing Orders or the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. However, the mechanism for determining the distribution of grant funding should be fair, open and transparent.

Name of lawyer consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date consulted 29.05.24

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed to inform the design of the Thriving Communities Investment Fund 2025-2029. No disproportionate impact has been identified on any singular equality group.

9. Sustainability implications

- 9.1 The third sector can act without the constraints public organisations are subject to, enabling it to be more creative in its responses. It creates added value and can draw in additional resources, particularly those not accessible or funded by local government. In recognising the value and asset of the sector and by investing in its skills and expertise, the council aims to help harness and develop them for the benefit of local people. By doing so, the council can maximise the impact of public funding, achieve added value and better ensure value for money. This in turn enables additional resources to be levered into the city and helps to meet the needs of citizens who might not access public services. Prior to the publication of the Prospectus advertising the funding, advice will be sought from the Social Value and Sustainability Procurement Manager so that corporate sustainability and social value can be added into the application process.

10. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 10.1 The proposed plan and investment will have a strong alignment with the Council Plan Outcome 3, supporting a healthy city where people thrive by supporting CVS strategic partner organisations to help them work jointly with statutory partners to deliver services that focus on preventative work to help families to be safe and stable. The proposed Community catalyst Fund will further support this through smaller investment for projects that deliver on the Council Plan, especially Outcome 3.
- 10.2 Applications for funding will be expected to demonstrate their delivery against the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019 - 2030.

11. Procurement implications

- 11.1 The Thriving Communities Investment Plan 2025 – 2029 places a strong emphasis on Social Value through its grant awards to the local community & voluntary sector. The proposed changes to the way in which applications are

made and grants awarded will strengthen this social value for the local community.

12. Crime & disorder implications:

12.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

13. Conclusion

13.1 An iterative and agile approach to the continuation of the council's investment in the community and voluntary sector means that the council can be reassured that it is maximizing its investment, streamlining its processes for the benefit of the CVS and the council, and ensuring the best possible outcomes for residents and communities.

13.2 Through stronger alignment with the council plan the Thriving Communities Fund ensures that it is supporting all other funded activity delivered either directly or commissioned by the council against these priorities. It is acknowledged that some segments of the CVS are not prioritized for funding, through this fund, namely the arts and culture and the environmental sections of the CVS. However, it is recognized that these groups play an underlying role in supporting the health and well-being of residents, and in reducing inequity in the city and have access to the Community Catalyst Fund as well as other opportunities such as the Shared Prosperity Fund.

1. Background documents

1. Thriving Communities Investment Fund 2025-2029 Equality Impact Assessment
2. Third Sector Commission 2017 – 2020, Final Evaluation (January 2021, Ottaway Strategic Management Ltd)

