

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 4 June 2019	Meeting Name: Leader of the Council
Report title:		Empowering Communities Programme - Creation of Democracy Fund and Ward Fund	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Communities	

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Leader of the Council:

1. Approve the introduction of a new ward fund (WF) for ward councillors to organise at least six ward based meetings a year.
2. Approve the creation of a democracy fund (DF) to allow communities to hold their own events/meetings to tackle local priorities and to delegate to the director of communities decisions relating to these events after consultation with the council community champions.
3. Delegate future ward fund decisions to the cabinet member for culture, leisure, equalities and communities.
4. Replace Leader's Question Time with an annual residents conference to be coordinated by community champions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. The council assembly on May 18 2019 approved the proposal to replace community councils (CCs) with a more flexible and devolved empowering communities programme, that promotes:
 - Resident-led initiatives
 - Strengthens the local leadership role of ward councillors
 - Cabinet accountability
 - Community Champion councillors
 - Transparency of funding
6. As part of the recommendation in the report, it stated that the leader would be asked to approve the creation of the new Ward Fund (£2k per ward) and a Democracy Fund of £20,000 for the whole borough.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Ward Fund

7. Each of the council's 23 wards will have access to a fund to organise meetings to discuss matters of local interest to residents. Meetings could involve just one ward or link together 2 or more wards.

8. Ward meetings would be held at least six times a year. The dates of the ward meetings will be published on the Southwark website (Modern.Gov) as they are arranged. At least one meeting per ward will include a discussion of community funding proposals including cleaner greener safer (CGS) and Neighbourhoods Fund.
9. Community champions will exercise oversight of how the ward fund is used by receiving quarterly reports on completed and proposed ward fund meetings.

Democracy Fund

10. A Democracy Fund of £20,000 per annum will be established, for which individuals and community groups can bid to organise events, to discuss specific or a range of local issues. Funding would cover items such as:
 - Venue hire
 - Equipment hire
 - Publicity and invitations
 - Speakers' fees
 - Refreshments etc.
11. To ensure autonomy of residents' initiatives, the events will be serviced by the organisers and not require council officers' attendance.
12. The Democracy Fund will be overseen by five councillors who were appointed by council assembly on May 18 2019 as community champions. They will recommend which democracy fund proposals to fund via delegated authority to the chief officer. Community champions will ensure an appropriate balance of events across the borough and calendar, taking into account local meetings organised using the ward fund.
13. Events should be relevant to the community and related to council business. The communities division will develop clear criteria for awarding funding, establish an online application process and a procedure for the management of the democracy fund. The first round of the fund will be open in October 2019.
14. The proposed criteria for the democracy fund are listed below and an indicative process is set out in Appendix 1, including:
 - Where possible two months' notice for event
 - Relevant to council business and the local community
 - No similar meetings held in previous 12 months
 - Event open to all
 - Register of attendees and equalities monitoring
 - The event is held in an accessible venue that complies with all relevant legislation and council policy.
15. Community-led area meetings supported by democracy fund grants will increase opportunities for residents to raise and address issues of local concern. They will also encourage community networking. One of the roles of the community champions will be to reduce the risk of such events becoming politicised. Events will not have any constitutional role or represent formal consultation

Community impact statement

16. The new empowering communities programme provides an alternative structures and processes to enable all Southwark residents to participate in discussing matters of interest and concern for their local community, while strengthening the relationship with their elected members.
17. Placing the emphasis on resident led initiatives for smaller areas, will help bring together members of Southwark's diverse local communities, in compliance with the council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 which requires the council to have due regard when taking decisions to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct.
 - b. Advance 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 protected characteristic and those that do not share it.
18. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.
19. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity is further explained by the Act, which states that it involves
 - Removing or minimising disadvantages connected with a relevant protected characteristic.
 - Taking steps to meet the different needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic.
 - Encouraging persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or any other activity in which they are underrepresented.
20. Due consideration was given to this duty during this process and no adverse impact on any group with a protected characteristic was evident.

Resource implications

21. There are no resource implications. The new arrangements will be met within existing resources.

Consultation

22. The constitutional steering panel was consulted and the introduction of the ward fund and democracy fund was recommended to council assembly on 18 May 2019.

Financial Implications

23. There are no financial implications arising from this report although this will be

reviewed after an initial year.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law & Democracy

24. The functions described in this report are executive functions which are the responsibility of the Leader but are able to be delegated to officers in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.
25. The public sector equality duty in section 149 Equality Act 2010 is relevant to this report and is referred to in the community impact statement above. It is noted that no adverse implications for anyone with a particular protected characteristic have been identified...

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

26. The report recommends the approval of the adoption of ward and democracy funds to replace the existing meeting arrangements. Paragraph 21 notes the costings of £66,000 per annum will be met within existing resources as current budgets are repurposed.
27. The report commits to a review of the new arrangements after the first year to consider the financial consequences of the proposed changes.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Council Assembly report – Reform of Community Councils – Empowering Communities Programme	http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s82461/Report%20-%20Reform%20of%20CCs%20-%20empowering%20communities%20programme.pdf	Forid Ahmed - 0207 525 5540

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Democracy Fund Process

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
Report Author	Forid Ahmed – Empowering Communities Team	
Version	Final	
Dated	4 June 2019	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		4 June 2019