

Update for Safer Stronger Select Committee on Next Round of NCIL

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James Lee

Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure

Background

- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy that local authorities can choose to charge on “chargeable” new development in their area. The Levy is collected and monitored by the Council’s planning department.
- An element of these funds is to be spent at a local level and is known as Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL).
- Lewisham’s NCIL strategy was agreed by Mayor and Cabinet on 5 June 2019 and Full Council 24 July 2019.
- The agreed strategy allocates 25% of CIL receipts as NCIL and uses the ward structure as the basis for distribution. A portion of receipts (50%) were to be retained in each ward where they were generated; a portion (25%) redistributed across the wards based on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and a portion set aside for projects that contribute to a borough-wide benefit (borough-wide fund).
- Two separate funds were established: the NCIL borough-wide fund and the NCIL ward fund.

NCIL borough-wide fund & ward fund

- Priorities for borough-wide fund agreed by Mayor and Cabinet in March 2021; the fund was launched on 28th May 2021; on 3rd November 2021 Mayor and Cabinet agreed the allocation of £977,094 towards 25 projects and an Air Quality fund that met the borough-wide priorities
- At its meeting on 14 September 2021 Mayor and Cabinet agreed to top up the NCIL ward fund with NCIL funds collected between 2018 and 2020 (increasing the NCIL ward fund by a further £1,188,483 to £2,931,270)
- M&C also agreed agree an additional overarching Covid-19 recovery priority to be added to all 18 wards.
- The Mayor & Cabinet Meeting of 5th June 2019 agreed NCIL governance arrangements. This included the need to monitor the outcomes of the NCIL process and projects through the Authority Monitoring Report each year which is ongoing
- It also recommended that a holistic review of the NCIL process take place once the programme had been completed (or partially completed) to review what was successful and what was challenging throughout the process with a view of improving the programme for future rounds. The outcome of the review would be presented to Mayor and Cabinet with any recommendations on amendments to the process.

Previous NCIL process agreed by M&C

- Stage 1: Priority setting – NCIL priorities informed by wider public consultation and ratified by ward assemblies (8 weeks)
- Stage 2: Open Call for projects - submitted by community groups/organisations, residents etc (8 weeks)
- Stage 3: Officer evaluation of projects and publish long-list (10 weeks)
- Stage 4: Develop project bank – prioritisation of long-list of projects by ward assemblies (8 weeks)
- Stage 5: Allocate and delivery of projects (2 years)
- Stage 6: Monitoring and evaluation (ongoing)

What was funded

- **NCIL borough-wide fund** - 25 recommended projects which amounted to £877,094. The recommended projects addressed the following agreed priorities:
 - Initiatives that seek to support local community groups to contributing to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
 - Provision of high quality mentoring services and those designed to keep Lewisham's children and young people safe from exploitation, violence and serious youth crime
 - Support for people with learning disabilities and/or issues with mental health to find employment opportunities
 - Projects that will assist in Lewisham's Covid-19 recovery by demonstrating a benefit to Lewisham's communities at a borough-wide level
 - The final £100,000 was allocated to projects which would increase community involvement in projects to improve Air Quality in the borough

What was funded cont.

- **NCIL Ward fund** - 150 projects from 18 wards requesting £2,931,270 were recommended and awarded funding.
- This included a range of capital and revenue projects across the 18 wards
- The priorities for funding were developed using online and face to face consultation and agreed through Local Assemblies

Process of review

- What the programme has delivered (impact)
- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- A proposed process and timeline that builds on what worked
- Funding available and proposed administration

Impact of the programme

- 2-year programme only 14 months into delivery – challenging to take an overall view of impact

However, from the first year of delivery we can see:

- 63 capital projects funded including playgrounds, planting of trees, upgrading community facilities and libraries, improving school green spaces, buying play and gym equipment, developing cycle storage and providing public lighting.
- Approximately 76,000 residents benefitting from NCIL projects
- Only 1 project has not gone ahead (they received alternative funding for the outlined project)
- All other projects on track or have completed delivery on schedule
- Approx. 80% of projects have reported back to Assemblies

Strengths (1):

- Extensive consultation and agreement via Assemblies meant that over 18,000 residents participated in agreeing priorities
- Delivery of significant capital projects across the borough – primarily in parks
- The programme enabled us to fund a significantly larger number of VCS organisations than we have funded before many at a very local level
- Application workshops for residents and community groups were well received – 13 online workshops were delivered over a period of 8 weeks attended by 200 organisations and individuals
- The support programme enabled many smaller organisations who would not otherwise have applied to the NCIL fund, to put in applications, thereby upskilling residents and organisations
- Boroughwide pot allowed a focus on equalities issues

Strengths (2):

- The programme has built in and developed accountability of local, ward level groups and projects to local residents through the Assembly programme – approx. 80% of projects have attended and updated on progress through their local Assembly
- The role of Councillors engaging in the process and bringing their local knowledge to the review of bids was a useful mechanism for linking in existing and emerging needs to the assessment process
- The engagement of different Council teams throughout the process for example for those relating to parks and open spaces and pathways to employment
- The disbursement of approximately £3.7million through NCIL borough-wide and ward funds mitigated the £800k cut to the Main Grants programme – we received very little pushback against the cuts to the MG programme and no appeals

Weaknesses (1)

- Compression of programme during stages 3 to 5 as a result of Covid along with upcoming general and local elections meant pressure on staff to deliver in that compressed timeframe
- Due to the compressed timeframe, the NCIL programme ran concurrently with the Main Grants programme, creating significant additional pressure on resources
- Public not well placed to cost and deliver capital bids which has caused delays and some resentment
- The vast majority of wards selected the same priorities and these had strong read across to the Council's Corporate priorities already agreed through the democratic process
- The Boroughwide projects lacked some focus and were not universally understood

Weaknesses (2)

- Some Councillors felt pressured to endorse bids from local groups they did not know
- Some wards had such small allocations that it was difficult to deliver capital projects
- Cross-ward funding difficult to coordinate
- Some people raised concerns that the use of the Council's consultation platform Common Place and wider online engagement effectively excluded some groups
- Idea that NCIL could be used to support Assemblies is flawed as not all areas have the organisations required to undertake this task

Learning

- Some stages should be made less complicated to reduce pressure on resources
- The Council is best placed to identify and deliver capital projects
- Members should not be put in a position where they feel pressured
- A ward approach has had strengths and weaknesses. Allocating across a larger footprint would allow for the delivery of larger projects and avoid some areas effectively being excluded
- The Boroughwide pot allowed a positive focus on equalities but did not have the same ownership as the local projects
- Online consultation mechanisms should be used with caution
- Not all wards have a local organisations able to help support Assemblies

Next Steps

- Proposals currently being drafted for agreement with lead Cabinet members
- Proposals include
 - Timeframe for potential launch for summer next year taking into account 2 elections
 - Funding administration of the programme
 - A more efficient process taking into account our learning from the previous round
 - Pros and cons of ward boundaries as best option for NCIL grants
 - Ensuring as little cross-over with the re-letting of Main Grants as possible