



---

# London Borough of Lewisham

## Consultation on priorities for, and approach to, the main grants programme

---

May 2021

Community Development Service  
2nd Floor, Laurence House  
1 Catford Road, London SE6 4RU  
[main.grants@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:main.grants@lewisham.gov.uk)

## **Executive Summary**

- ES.1 Due to the impact of COVID and wider financial pressures the Council is having to cut at least £40m from its budget in the next three years (to April 2024) with up to £24m being cut in 2021/22 alone. In this context that the budget for the main grants will be reduced by £800,000 from 1 April 2022. However, support for voluntary and community sector groups remains a core priority for Lewisham Council and, in partnership with the NHS, we will continue to invest £2,361,308 per annum through the main grants programme.
- ES.2 In order to set the priorities for this spend the Council has undertaken a thorough review of all of the available evidence on the impact of COVID and the needs of the Borough during the recovery phase.
- ES.3 As such we are consulting on replacing the current main grants priorities with new ones in line with the Council's overall approach to recovery. The proposed new priorities are:
- **An economically sound future** (specifically Advice Services and Enabling Digital Access for All)
  - **A healthy and well future**
  - **A future we all have a part in**
- ES.4 Overall we propose to focus on supporting the sector as a whole through strong infrastructure, coordination and fundraising services rather than trying to directly fund everything that is needed in the borough. We propose to provide some level of project funding but that greater relative weight is given to services that strengthen the sector and allow it to benefit from the wider funding landscape across London and locally with funding available for borough wide and ward based Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) in Lewisham in the coming months. As previously the vast majority of the funding will be for services for adults.
- ES.5 Lewisham will be London Borough of Culture in 2022 and we feel that the best way to protect investment in our cultural services is to align the current level of funding to these organisations (with a proportionate cut) with the Borough of Culture programme rather than retaining it within the main grants programme.
- ES.6 Taken together we believe that these proposals (the new priorities, the focus on infrastructure and a bespoke approach to London Borough of Culture) will help ensure that the available funding best meets the needs of our Borough over the coming three years (2022-2025) but we are keen to hear the views of the sector and Lewisham residents.
- ES.7 This consultation will run from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 22<sup>th</sup> July. The results and final proposals for the programme will be presented to Mayor and Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> September and the application process launched soon after that. All applicants will be provisionally notified of the outcome before Christmas to allow for a full three months' notice on existing grants.

## **Part 1 – About this Consultation**

### **1. About this consultation**

- 1.1 This consultation is about the proposed priorities for, and approach to, Lewisham Council's main grants programme 2022 - 2025. We want to seek views on the proposed criteria for the grants and the process for letting them.
- 1.2 The consultation takes place in the context of a reduction to the main grants budget which has been agreed as part of a major review of the council's budget in order to make cuts of at least £40m for the next three years (to April 2024) with up to £24m being cut in 2021/22 alone. It has been agreed by Mayor and Cabinet that the budget for the main grants (excluding contribution from the Better Care Fund) will be cut by £800,000 from 1 April 2022. However, with an increased BCF element the overall budget will still remain at £2,361,308 per annum.
- 1.3 The consultation is aimed at voluntary and community organisations that provide services in the borough but also all individual residents. We want their views on our proposals. We would also welcome the views of other public or private sector partners who work with the voluntary and community sector in Lewisham.
- 1.4 The consultation will be open for 8 weeks from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 22<sup>nd</sup> July. The length of this consultation is shorter than the usual 12 weeks but has been shaped by the on-going impact of COVID, the pre-election restrictions relating to the Mayor of London election and the need to ensure that provisional allocations are made before Christmas 2021 to ensure that current grant recipients receive a full 3 months' notice to the changes in funding.
- 1.5 There are several ways to respond to this consultation:
  - Via the online portal (preferred option)
  - By post to: Community Development Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Laurence House, 1 Catford Road, London SE6 4RU
  - By attending an online consultation meeting

There will be consultation meetings via MS Teams on:

- Wednesday 9 June 2:00 – 3:30pm
- Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June 6:00 - 7:30pm

- 1.6 Places at these consultation meetings must be booked in advance by emailing [main.grants@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:main.grants@lewisham.gov.uk).
- 1.7 We want to ensure that this consultation is accessible to all organisations and individuals who want to take part. We will therefore ensure that any residents or representatives of the VCS who need support to fill in the responses can do so by speaking directly with a member of our team. Please e-mail us at [main.grants@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:main.grants@lewisham.gov.uk) or call us on 020 8314 7249 and we will get back to you to arrange a suitable time.
- 1.8 Once the consultation has closed all responses will be considered and a summary of responses collated and included in a report to Mayor and Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021. This report will seek approval for the main grants programme 2022 - 2025 criteria and approach and to invite applications for funding.

## **Part 2 – The Consultation**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Over the past year, the Council's business, and the day to day lives of Lewisham's residents, has been turned on its head. In March 2020, Council activity simultaneously ground to a halt and ramped up in equal measure. With many traditional services wound down almost overnight and a new, urgent focus on critical COVID response services the Council's staff, Councillors and partners faced new demands, challenges, pressures and opportunities.
- 1.2 While we do not yet fully understand what all of the long-term implications of COVID will mean for the borough, there have been many clear and visible impacts of the pandemic on our residents, Lewisham the place and also the Council. We know that coronavirus has disproportionately affected certain population groups in Lewisham, matching patterns that have been identified nationally and internationally: older and disabled residents, residents born in the Americas and the Caribbean, Africa or the Middle East and Asia, and residents in the most deprived areas of the borough have considerably higher death rates. We know that more Lewisham residents are claiming unemployment benefits compared to the beginning of this year and that food insecurity has increased in the borough.
- 1.3 The Council's finances have also been severely affected by the ongoing pandemic. The cost of coronavirus for Lewisham is estimated to be over £60m this year and, with the risk of a return of high levels of infections and further restrictions imposed, the impacts will continue into 2021/22. How these costs will be funded in this financial year (2021/22) and the budget pressures for future years will be met is not clear.
- 1.4 As such, in the midst of the COVID response we have had to begin the long, difficult process of identifying cuts of at least £40m for the next three years (to April 2024) with up to £24m being cut in 2021/22 alone. In this context it has been agreed by Mayor and Cabinet that the budget for the main grants (excluding contribution from the Better Care Fund) will be cut by £800,000 (approximately one third) from 1 April 2022.
- 1.5 We now face the challenge of needing to simultaneously respond to the ongoing impact of the pandemic (and possible future waves), plan for the long-term recovery of the place and set a balanced budget, setting the financial basis for the internal recovery of the Council in the coming years. While it seems clear that the Council will have to rely on its reserves for some of the impact of COVID-19, reserves by their nature are gone once used. They cannot therefore also be relied on to delay or avoid the difficult budget task of bringing spending into line with available resources.
- 1.6 Lewisham's recovery from coronavirus will be underpinned by the following anchoring principles which will be at the heart of all decision-making, planning and action over the coming months:
  - Tackling widening social, economic and health inequalities;
  - Protecting and empowering our most vulnerable residents;
  - Ensuring the Council's continued resilience, stability and sustainability;
  - Enabling residents to make the most of Lewisham the place; and
  - Collaborating and working together with our communities and partnership across the borough.

- 1.7 The recovery is to be driven by the lessons learned from responding to COVID-19, the known and emerging impacts on our communities and the need to deliver transformation at the scale needed to meet the current financial challenge.

## 2. Our Priorities for Recovery

- 2.1 Lewisham Council's Corporate Strategy, developed in 2018, agreed the following priorities for supporting our residents:

- Open Lewisham
- Tackling the housing crisis
- Giving children and young people the best start in life
- Building an inclusive local economy
- Delivering and defending: health, social care and support
- Making Lewisham greener
- Building safer communities

- 2.1 The Council has also reflected on what has worked well and what hasn't worked so well over the pandemic, learning from it, nurturing and developing the new relationships and community networks that have built up and recognising things that stand in the way of a future where we can all benefit equally from what Lewisham and London has to offer.

- 2.2 This has led to the development of four themes which will focus our efforts on building a future for all residents – we are Lewisham, and this is our future. The themes are based on evidence of what our residents need – from all the rich data gathered and analysed during the pandemic, and residents experiences in their own words as part of the Voices of Lewisham project. They are:

- An economically sound future
- A healthy and well future
- A greener future
- A future we all have a part in

- 2.3 We are also proud of our place and our role in London and you can see the Mayor of London's nine recovery missions clearly in our four strategic recovery themes:

Lewisham's recovery focus:  
**An economically sound future**

Lewisham's recovery focus:  
**A healthy and well future**

Lewisham's recovery focus:  
**A green future**

Lewisham's recovery focus:  
**A future we all have a part in**



2.4 The delivery of each of these themes will be supported by the activities of our residents through local community action, both formally organised and otherwise. It is the power of Lewisham's community spirit which makes living and working in the borough so rewarding.

### **3. Lewisham Council's commitment to the Voluntary and Community Sector**

3.1 The last year has presented us with unprecedented challenges but the spirit of Lewisham residents has been more important than ever. Throughout this time, the Council and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners have worked together in close partnership to develop the Community Response Hub, which supported over 11,000 residents through the first lockdown and has continued to re-purpose to meet the needs of residents during subsequent lockdowns. The backbone of this response was the countless hours volunteered by local residents – many of whom had never volunteered before. The wider voluntary sector, alongside mutual aid groups and many of our small, neighbourhood based groups, have been invaluable in providing a safety net for residents during this period.

3.2 The Council recognises the massive contribution that the VCS has made to the lives of residents, and the potential for the sector's significant role in recovery. For this reason, we are committed to maintaining a main grants programme, even with the significant cuts that are proposed. It is recognised that investment in VCS leadership benefits Lewisham as a whole.

3.3 Additionally, we continue to see the value of grants to the VCS for the following reasons:

- The VCS has strong relationships with residents and this is exemplified by the support work that has been undertaken during the Covid-19 crisis. VCS organisations supported local communities to develop mutual aid-based responses to meeting basic residents' needs such as food deliveries, medicine collections and befriending services.
- The sector has reach into diverse communities, and plays a key role in building civic participation, providing a voice for seldom heard residents and providing community intelligence.
- A recognition of the great diversity of the sector and the need to engage with small and emerging groups as well as large established organisations.
- The sector's potential to take risks, innovate and be agile in response to need; qualities that have been critical in supporting residents through the pandemic.

3.4 The Council recognises that demand on the voluntary sector will increase post-Covid and post-Brexit, at the same time that local government faces significant cuts – the time when the Council could expect to directly fund all of the activity that its residents need are long gone. For this reason, we want to design a main grants programme that focuses on infrastructure support to the sector (i.e. fundraising, coordination, the provision of data) to ensure that it is supported to take advantage of the wide range of opportunities that are afforded by Lewisham's place as part of London.

### **4. Current Main Grants Programme**

4.1 The 2019-2021 main grants programme allocation totals £3,064,308 per year made up of £2,636,308 core Council funding and £428,000 from the Better Care Fund (BCF).

- 4.2 The BCF is a joint programme between the NHS and local government which seeks to join-up health and care services, so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. The BCF has been created to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, placing them at the centre of their care and support, and providing them integrated health and social care services, resulting in an improved experience and better quality of life. The use of the BCF must be jointly agreed between the Council and South East London CCG and signed off by the Health and Wellbeing Board. Over the last few years the BCF funds in Lewisham has funded voluntary and community sector providers to support independence in the community and to prevent people from being admitted to hospital.
- 4.3 Following consultation in 2018, the main grants programme retained the 4 themes that had been the basis of the programme in 2015. These are:
- *Strong and Cohesive Communities*
  - *Communities that Care*
  - *Access to Advice Services*
  - *Widening Access to Arts and Sports*
- 4.4 The impact of COVID has been significant and it is likely this impact will continue for several years. We are therefore not proposing to retain the existing criteria as they are. We must put forward criteria based on need that has emerged for residents during the pandemic and evidence for what will be needed going forward. However, we are retaining the focus on services for adults although we do recognise the importance of families and will provide some flexibility to organisations that work across all ages e.g. sports clubs.

## **5. The population of Lewisham and the impact of COVID-19**

- 5.1 Lewisham has a population of more than 305,800 people. Lewisham is densely populated and has the 6th highest rate of household overcrowding in London. Nearly 10% of households in the borough are classed as overcrowded. The borough has a relatively young population profile. Residents aged 0-19 make up nearly 25% of the total population. About 70% of the borough's population is of working age (16-64), whilst older residents, aged 65+, make up about 10% of the population. Lewisham has an ethnically diverse population. 46% of the total population are of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage. This differs with age. Over 65% of Lewisham residents aged 0-19 are from BAME heritage.
- 5.2 There are big variations in life expectancy throughout the borough mirroring deprivation: men in Crofton Park ward can expect to live for 6 years longer than those in New Cross ward, and women in Perry Vale ward can be expected to live 8.5 years more than women in New Cross ward.
- 5.3 18.2% of households in Lewisham are in fuel poverty according to the Government's latest figures.
- 5.4 Population Health Risks and inequalities faced by the borough's residents include:
- The rate of premature death from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases in Lewisham is higher than the average for London and England.
  - Lewisham has a higher proportion of smokers and higher levels of adult obesity than most areas in London.

- Nearly 1 in 10 people in Lewisham are estimated to have diabetes (T1 & T2, including those currently undiagnosed). 58% of our population with type 2 diabetes are estimated to be of ethnic minority origin.
- The rate of hospital admissions for asthma in children aged 18 and under is significantly higher than the average for London and England

- 5.5 The health of Lewisham residents has been significantly impacted by Covid-19. The data on those affected shows the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 of some of our communities in the borough.
- There have been 21,528 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Lewisham residents (up to 31March 2021) with 502 deaths
  - Men and women aged 50 and above have an increased risk of mortality. The gender difference in mortality risk increases with age with the rate of death considerably higher in males aged 75+ than females.
  - Nationally the death rate from COVID-19 were higher amongst Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to White ethnic groups.
  - The pandemic exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting BAME groups.
  - Robust analysis on the rate of death from COVID-19 between those living in the most deprived areas of Lewisham compared to those living in the least deprived areas is hindered by the very small numbers in some areas. Therefore we cannot say with confidence that there is a significant difference.
  - 13% of deaths from COVID-19 were to residents who normally live in care homes.
- 5.6 As well as the direct impacts of the disease on physical health, the lockdown imposed as a result of COVID-19 has also had an impact on mental health and the wider determinants of health such as socio-economic factors and education and developmental impacts for children and young people. The full extent of this impact on the population of Lewisham and the inequalities that are created or exacerbated, will only begin to emerge over the coming months and years.
- 5.7 In addition to what we know already the Council is involved in a range of partnerships to better understand the drivers of inequality and the impact of COVID including:
- Working in partnership with Birmingham City Council we are launching ground-breaking work into the health inequalities of African and Caribbean communities. The programme, which will conclude in Dec 2021, consists of a series of reviews which aim to explore in-depth the inequalities experienced by these ethnic groups and their drivers. The aim is to find approaches to break the decades of inequality in sustainable ways that will lead to better futures for local citizens.
  - We are also working in partnership with public health teams across South East London and colleagues in Kings Health Partnership on an in depth analysis of COVID-19 needs and inequalities across SEL.
- 5.8 The findings from this work will become available through the life of the grants and we expect funded organisations to revise their service models over time in light of emerging data.

## **6. How the VCS has responded to the pandemic and our learning**

- 6.1 The impact of the pandemic was felt across every area of life in Lewisham, and nationally, including the operations of the VCS and those organisations grant funded by the Council.

- 6.2 In mid-March the Council and the VCS worked together to establish our Community Response Hub under the banner of Lewisham Local to identify and address additional support needs arising from the COVID-19 crisis. This demonstrated the power of effectiveness of the partnership structures in the borough and it is this joint working that we are keen to develop further in the coming years.
- 6.3 The work of the hub was evaluated by Goldsmiths University in the report, *Learning from the Lewisham Covid-19 Response Hub* (Kalbir Shukra, December 2020). Key findings from the report were:
- The core partnership was a cross-sector collaboration. Four VCS organisations came together with Lewisham Council to form the Hub.
  - The Hub was a dynamic and evolving partnership. It was based on strong pre-existing relationships between the VCS organisations and their structural links to the Council.
  - The partnership demonstrated strong leadership and initiative in setting up the Hub. A high level of dedication from everyone involved in the delivery process was evidenced.
  - During the crisis, organisational boundaries became temporarily permeable, allowing some staff to be redeployed in support of the Hub. This was especially valuable where people had relevant skills for the role. In addition, organisations embedded in local communities were willing, responsive and agile collaborators, able to mobilise existing networks effectively.
  - The Hub created a valuable new website and a telephone line, which was the single point of entry into the open access system. A one entry system supporting delivery by multiple organisations enabled calls to be triaged and duplication to be minimised. The emergency phone line proved essential in the crisis and some form of open access service continues to be needed for people pending or otherwise unable to secure referral.
  - A large number of volunteer opportunities were generated and there was a surplus of applications from potential volunteers. In the process, the partnership engaged newer communities, received positive feedback from residents, and gained new local information and expertise in managing the complex process at scale.
  - Equalities data to verify how far particular groups were reached was collected part way through the lockdown. The data showed food parcel requests were coming in from areas of the borough characterised by the highest levels of deprivation: Hub partners concluded that they were supporting those most in need.
- 6.4 The report also highlights the importance of partners coming together daily to review data and the importance of this to identifying emerging need and being able to respond quickly. Though this process, the partnership was able to understand and respond to the needs of BAME residents, those with increasing financial need, older and younger people, and to those who were clinically vulnerable.
- 6.5 It is important to acknowledge that there was an overwhelmingly positive response to the pandemic by Lewisham residents and by the community and voluntary sector above and beyond the operations of the hub. This was evidenced by the incredible number of volunteers who came forward to offer support (2,400 in the first few weeks of the pandemic), the number of mutual aid groups who mobilised in local neighbourhoods to support residents, and a wider food network which provided at least 50% of the food need in the borough during the pandemic. This is evidence of the

strong, active community spirit of Lewisham and its ability to mobilise and act in the interest of residents.

- 6.6 It is recognised that the coordination of services and providing people with a clear pathway into the most appropriate service at the most appropriate time has a critical role to play in post COVID recovery taking a pro-active, preventative and predictive data-led approach.
- 6.7 This approach echoes and builds on the developing work related to social prescribing. It has long been recognised that around 20% of patients consult their GP for what is primarily a social problem. In January 2019 NHSE reported that around half of GP appointments are not directly related to medical conditions.
- 6.8 As with the Community Hub, Social Prescribing services provide a way for a coordinating service to give people time, focusing on 'what matters to me' and taking a holistic approach to people's health and wellbeing. They connect people to community groups and statutory services for practical and emotional support.
- 6.9 There is emerging evidence that Social Prescribing can lead to a range of positive health and wellbeing outcomes as well as lead to a reduction in use of NHS services. A review of the evidence showed average reductions following referrals to social prescribing schemes of 28% in GP services, 24% in attendance at A & E and statistically significant drops in referrals to hospital (Polley and Carpenter 2017).
- 6.10 Before the outbreak of COVID-19 social prescribing services in Lewisham provided a vital link to social, emotional and practical support for some of our most vulnerable residents. It was no accident that during the crisis, it was the social prescribing service which was repurposed to act as the main mechanism for residents to access information and the support they needed. The coordination of food, emotional and practical help that social prescribing services provided through the Community Hub, alongside proactive welfare calls and critical help and support for people within primary care, have demonstrated the power of this approach through the pandemic.

## 7. London Borough of Culture

- 7.1 The Council is also well aware that the VCS provides the backbone of Lewisham's Cultural Sector and that we will be London Borough of Culture in 2022 with a long legacy period to follow. Since 2012, the main grants programme has recognised the importance of arts and culture to our residents' lives and has funded the arts sector through the ***Widening Access to Arts and Sports*** theme, enabling Arts and Sports organisations to improve quality of life for residents through increasing participation, particularly by those who are less able to participate due to disability, economic disadvantage and age.
- 7.2 In this next round of the grants programme, we recognise the significance of holding the banner of London Borough of Culture and the incredible opportunity it presents - both for Lewisham residents and the arts sector that has been integral to supporting our residents and their well-being through creativity and cultural expression. We are therefore proposing to separate out a level of funding for the culture sector (based on a proportionate cut to current funding) and run a specific programme directly linked to the Borough of Culture. This approach would allow for greater focus on the cultural sector and by building other opportunities around the main grants budget it will seek to mitigate the impact of the cut.

- 7.3 The budget would be used in a more flexible way as part of an overall support package with a rolling programme of opportunities. The aim would be to work alongside an anchor organisation to bring in other funding so that we can offer more opportunities, for instance - multiple year funding for an arts education programme. What is clear is that Borough of Culture gives us a better chance of pulling in new resources than previously, and we must maximise the opportunity that this offers us for the benefit of Lewisham residents.
- 7.4 Funding for sports organisations will be available under the healthy and well future criteria set out below and there will be some flexibility for those who work with children as well as adults in recognition of the previous funding approach.

## **8. Proposed criteria for grants programme 2022-2025**

- 8.1 As set out in section 2 the Council has reviewed the evidence of the impact of Covid on Lewisham residents, and our learning from the pandemic and developed four themes which will focus our efforts on building a future for all residents. For the main grants programme we propose to target funding in line with three of the four themes:
- An economically sound future
  - A healthy and well future
  - A future we all have a part in
- 8.2 We are not proposing a separate strand of our main grants programme on *A Greener Future*. Instead we will expect that where relevant this is embedded in delivery of the other three strands, since delivering on our environmental ambitions should directly support our aspirations for the local economy, for health and wellbeing and for inclusivity. In addition, Lewisham's Borough of Culture Programme has climate emergency as one of its three main strands, and this will be supported through the specific grants programme linked to the Borough of Culture. The Council will also continue to support the local voluntary and community sector's work on the environment and sustainability through the Lewisham's Greening Fund, NCIL, our fuel poverty advice service and through community energy initiatives including the Mayor of London's as well as building on the legacy of Lewisham's Community Energy Fund in 2020.
- 8.3 Our proposed priorities for the main grants programme are explored in more details below:

### **An economically sound future**

- 8.5 Under this theme we intend to focus on **advice services** and **ensuring digital access for all**.
- 8.6 **Advice Services** - we know that the financial impact on individuals and families has been significant during Covid.
- Lewisham's claimant count is now 21,090 (March 2021), up from 12,800 (April 2020) and 8,400 (March 2020) pre-lockdown.
  - Lewisham has seen a significant increase in food insecurity in the months since the onset of COVID-19. From April 2020 to October 2020 nearly 13,000 requests for food were made and nearly 12,000 food packages were delivered. Additionally six locally based food projects distributed 11,970 food parcels supporting 28,851 beneficiaries (September to March 2021).

- On 23 March 2020 we had 10663 children resident in Lewisham or attending Lewisham schools eligible for Free School Meals. On 27 April 2021 we had 13357 children showing as eligible.
- Both Advice Lewisham and Community Connections phonelines have seen continuing increase in need from March 2020 for support on benefits, debt, employment and housing
- The Council's fuel poverty advice service, delivered as part of the South London Energy Efficiency Partnership led by Lewisham supported over 3,000 households in 2020/21 including 600 in Lewisham working in partnership with community and voluntary partners to access funding from the Greater London Authority, energy suppliers and other funders.
- The GLA's research shows that London-wide, poverty is linked to other forms of inequality. Fifty-four per cent of single parent families, 38% of BAME households and 37% of households with a disabled person live in relative poverty. Migrants are also at much greater risk of experiencing destitution in London than in any other UK region. Supporting those on low incomes is vital to addressing other entrenched inequalities.

### **What we propose to fund:**

- 8.7 We see food and fuel need as symptoms of a wider pattern of financial insecurity. Given the limited funding available, see this need as being most effectively met through the provision of accessible, independent and high quality advice and information rather than direct service delivery. As such, this priority will retain the key elements of our previous priority *Access to Advice Services*, namely:
- The provision of legal advice services in the borough meets the key borough-wide principles of being fully customer-focused and achieving value for money from the resources available
  - Services respond flexibly to the multiple and complex legal advice needs of people who live, work or study in the borough
  - Delivery of services is flexible to ensure increased choice in the way in which clients access services – encompassing direct access, partner referrals, and access and support through digital channels
  - Clients are empowered to address their own advice needs through utilising digital technologies
  - Services are delivered comprehensively and innovatively across the borough, using outreach as required, so that all geographies and groups are served
  - Services are delivered in a joined-up way ensuring effective cross-referral routes support residents with multiple needs.
- 8.8 The Council proposes to fund a mixture of generalist, specialist and client specific legal advice services. Organisations offering basic advice and casework will require or need to be working towards the appropriate Advice Quality Standard (AQS) Advice or Advice and Casework accreditation. Organisations offering more specialist advice, casework and representation will need to employ supervisors and caseworkers who are appropriately qualified and who individually meet the Specialist Quality Mark (SQM) for their area of competence. Where appropriate, organisations may also require the Lexcel quality mark or be registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

- 8.9 We propose that organisations will be required to deliver advice in the following priority areas:
- Welfare rights
  - Debt and money advice (including multiple debts and arrears)
  - Housing advice (including homelessness, repairs, possession proceedings and tenancy issues)
  - Immigration, compliant at OISC Level 1 (Basic Advice);
  - Employment advice
- 8.10 Currently nearly 30% of the main grants funding is allocated to this priority. Due to the potential scale of need, the major impact of financial insecurity on individuals, and the associated impact of financial hardship on existing inequality, we propose that this proportion of funding would be at least matched in the new grants programme.
- 8.11 **Ensuring Digital Access for all** - The Community Connections and Advice Lewisham phonelines have both independently identified that specific communities and groups of residents struggle with digital engagement. They have identified that lack of digital engagement has a significant adverse impact on the individual's ability to access services and opportunities for education, training and employment, and the resulting impact of this in terms of increased isolation and worsening health and well-being. While digital exclusion has long been recognised, Covid-19 has highlighted the impact of this issue due to the reliance on online and web-based mechanisms to support residents.
- 8.12 The Council, NHS and housing sector have also recognised this as a significant issue for delivery of services. As part of the Voices of Lewisham programme, an analysis was undertaken of approximately 3,000 emails sent to the Council's Covid-19 response inbox, thousands of shielding conversations and more than 20 separate consultation and engagement exercises that have taken place across the borough. One of the key issues identified was digital exclusion, specifically that the move to digital service delivery is further exposing digital poverty. This could be exacerbated further for those who do not or cannot access services/ opportunities in this way.
- 8.13 A recent report by Lewisham Speaking Up on Digital Exclusion highlights that many people with learning disabilities in Lewisham do not have access to suitable devices, reliable broadband or support to use digital technology. The report found that people with learning disabilities say they need to use digital technology for a wide range of reasons and that they gain many benefits when using it. But day services, support providers and many carers and family members do not have the capacity in terms of time, adequate training or appropriate devices to support people with learning disabilities to access digital technology (Research on Digital Exclusion since the Covid 19 pandemic 2020, Ramsbottom, Feb 2021).
- 8.14 In response to this need, a VCS-led Digital Poverty Action Alliance has been developed and is beginning to map the need across the borough in terms of communities most in need and appropriate support that could be delivered. It is proposed that this mapping will enable targeting of resources to those who would most benefit from support.

**What we propose to fund:**

- Projects offering training on digital skills and support to those most in need or coordinating the services more effectively

- Innovative projects and schemes that enable communities most in need to become digitally enabled

## **A Healthy and Well Future**

- 8.15 Data from the hub and from the ongoing Community Connections Lewisham phoneline shows that loneliness and isolation were significant needs for Lewisham residents in the last year. We recognise the importance that group and community-based activities can have on individuals' health and well-being and want to ensure that a range of activities are on offer to support the needs of the diverse communities of Lewisham.
- 8.16 The Voices of Lewisham Project, which engaged with residents and community groups over the last six months found that there is deepening inequalities and increasing vulnerability (particularly in relation to "just about managing") – including isolation, mental health, unemployment and debt.
- 8.17 The NHS and Council already directly commissions clinical mental health services which are delivered in Lewisham by SLAM, MIND and a range of other partners. The main grants programme therefore will not fund mental health services of this kind but rather focus on promoting positive mental health and well-being through community engagement and social interactions.
- 8.18 We know that social isolation, lack of opportunities for physical activity, the lack of access to arts and cultural events, and the inability to connect with friends, neighbours and communities of interest, has had a profound effect on the well-being of residents. Due to the significant scale of cuts to the main grants programme, we acknowledge that we cannot fund the range of activities that are needed to support people's health and well-being.

### **What we propose to fund:**

- 8.19 We propose to continue funding social prescribing as the infrastructure offering coordinated support to residents, and to act as a gateway to the wide range of voluntary and community sector activity in the borough. In addition to acting as the 'front door' to accessing a range of preventative community-based support, the funded social prescribing service will provide data and intelligence in relation to demand for services, where and how these have been met, changes in need over time, and identify gaps in services - in terms of communities, issues and geography.
- 8.20 In addition, we propose to fund:
- Projects and activities that connect people to their local community or community of interest and improves physical and mental health and well-being
  - Activities that encourage volunteering and creates a sense of giving back to communities
- 8.21 All activities funded by the programme must prioritise referrals through the social prescribing service and ensure that monitoring data is returned regularly to enable an overview of the impact of social prescribing.

## **A Future we all have a part in**

- 8.22 As our resources as a Local Authority decrease, we recognise the importance of the VCS in continuing to support vulnerable residents. Supporting the resilience and sustainability of the VCS is therefore a key priority over and above funding specific

projects. By supporting the sector in this way we are promoting the future of provision beyond our specific funding round.

- 8.23 Lewisham Local's survey of Lewisham's VCS (October 2020) shows that a third of organisations who responded had lost significant funding during Covid, putting them at risk of closure. Conversely, there is a strong desire by Lewisham residents to help others in their community, as evidenced by the number of volunteers who came forward during the pandemic to volunteer and were mobilised to support residents, alongside the number of mutual aids which mobilised to support residents in their local neighbourhoods.
- 8.24 As identified above, the Hub evidenced the strengths of the voluntary and community sector in responding to the crisis and building on their knowledge and expertise of engaging with and supporting communities.
- 8.25 The picture across London echoes the experience of Lewisham. Around 750,000 people registered to volunteer via the NHS volunteering scheme, with over 90,000 of those volunteers from London; over 700 new Mutual aid groups had set up in London by the end of March 2020; over half of organisations have reported a big drop in the charitable activity they can deliver; almost 90% of BAME-led small organisations have reported that they do not have reserves to last more than three months.
- 8.27 If Lewisham's VCS is to cope with the ever diminishing funding direct from the Council it is vital that it increases its ability to access the full range of funding available from all sources. Lewisham organisations have raised approximately £3,691,201 from external funds through the pandemic to March 2021.
- 8.28 However, compared to other London boroughs with similar demographics and levels of need, Lewisham charities do not attract the same level of funding. We believe that fundraising expertise could help charities develop and submit successful bids individually and in collaboration with others, and significantly increase the level of funding brought in to Lewisham by the VCS.
- 8.29 Finally, the disproportionate impact of COVID has highlighted the importance of addressing equality and equity as a foundation of our work and in allocating resources and the need for a specific infrastructure offer that specifically supports the building and resilience of BAME led organisations for the benefit of our BAME residents.

#### **What we propose to fund:**

- 8.30 We propose to fund up to three community fundraiser posts with a particular focus on:
- a. Equality and Equity including needs of BME communities and needs of disabled communities
  - b. Sports, Arts and Culture - activities and organisations that support health and well-being through sports, arts and culture
  - c. Geographical cold spots in the borough/areas of high deprivation that do not have other sources of income such as NCIL

We propose that the community fundraiser posts are based in the voluntary and community sector. Organisations will be able to bid to house the posts and to provide the collaboration and coordination needed to effectively develop and submit bids.

- 8.31 Beyond these fundraising posts we propose to prioritise bids that provide services to:
- Develop and coordinate networks and collaborations for the benefit of seldom heard voices, and provide effective representation at appropriate levels for the voluntary and community sector working with these communities
  - Deliver specific infrastructure offer that specifically supports the building and resilience of BAME led organisations for the benefit of our BAME residents
  - Promoting and brokering partnerships to maximise access to and cost effective use of both statutory and non-statutory funding
  - Promoting volunteering and providing a brokerage service for community organisations to access volunteers and enabling easier mechanisms for people seeking to volunteer to find the appropriate opportunity
  - Easy access to information about what's available i.e. Community directory of VCS services that is updated regularly and able to be accessed by residents and referral agencies
  - Capacity building that specifically supports the building and resilience of BAME led organisations for the benefit of our BAME residents

## **9. How we propose to fund**

- 9.1 In considering how to set funding priorities for the main grants programme across these priorities we are faced with a choice between:
- spreading grants across a range of themes and the many (800+) valuable, charitable organisations in our borough
  - creating a network and infrastructure that enables our VCS as a whole to survive and thrive beyond this period of recovery and financial hardship
- 9.2 We recognise that in normal times, we would support both a robust infrastructure and provide grant funding to our voluntary and community organisations working with our most vulnerable communities. But with the limited funds available, we need to prioritise – we therefore propose to invest in infrastructure and support that will enable our VCS to be the independent, strong advocate of our residents that they were set up to be, with a legacy that lasts beyond the funding we can provide. The infrastructure that we are choosing to invest in is not the traditional infrastructure offer. Instead, it is an infrastructure that has been tried and tested through the pandemic and we believe will serve the VCS well in the changing times ahead.
- 9.3 Additionally, it is important to note that we will be launching the borough-wide Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) grant programme, to the value of approximately £900,000 in May 2021, and the multi-million pound ward-level NCIL programme later this year, with projects to be mobilised throughout 2022. The ward-based NCIL grants will provide funding opportunities to our locally-based organisations, many of whom have provided critical services during the pandemic. The priorities for this funding are selected locally so this is not a direct replacement for main grant funding but we anticipate there will be significant opportunities for the voluntary sector through these funds.
- 9.4 Through the main grants programme we want to fund organisations with a demonstrable commitment to, and knowledge of, Lewisham and that, wherever possible, call the borough home.
- 9.5 We propose to allocate grants in much the same way as we do now with some larger partnerships grants likely to build on the current partnership approaches to Advice

Services and Social Prescribing with the rest allocated to individual organisations. However, it is our view that in these times of diminishing resources the need for collaboration is greater than ever. Our experience of the community response hub has shown what can be achieved when there is a common purpose, and a system-wide approach that all partners can sign up to. Our intention is to fund organisations that are committed to working with each other, and us, to ensure the best possible outcomes for Lewisham's residents with our shared resources. We are not just looking to fund organisations but to enlist active partners who are as passionate about Lewisham as we are and have the drive and capacity to make a difference to people's lives.

- 9.6 Finally we propose to introduce new 'partnership grants' of £10,000 to organisations who can demonstrate commitment to working in partnership with the Council over the coming years. These funds can be used to support the core activities of organisations who can add value in specific areas of the borough or in specific sectors or thematic areas where we recognise that need is high and infrastructure is needed to meet demand. We are aware that these grants will not be able to fund project delivery but are intended to provide a statement of two way commitment to working in partnership for the benefit of Lewisham residents. This public commitment of support has been valued by the sector and has enabled organisations to lever in additional funding from other sources. While the cuts to the programme make larger partnership grants unfeasible, we recognise that this local authority support is critical to organisations and hard to fundraise without.
- 9.9 With a substantial cut to the main grants programme, we recognise that not all organisations that have been grant recipients and have continued to deliver valuable services will receive funding through the new programme. We also recognise that funding is not the only way we can support the sector – we want to work with the VCS to open up more opportunities for partnership with both Council departments and the larger Lewisham system, including health partners and other anchor institutions; provide more data on the needs of our residents that will enable the sector to work strategically; continue to provide lower cost hire of office space and venues for services; provide favourable agreements for use of our community centres and assets where that is possible; and endorse the work of the VCS to other funders. We are committed to working with existing grant recipients and the wider VCS on mitigating the impact of these cuts.

## **10. Key dates:**

### **10.1 Timeline for re-letting the programme**

27 <sup>th</sup> May	Consultation opens
22 <sup>nd</sup> July	Consultation closes (8 weeks)
TBC	Safer Stronger Select Committee
15 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Mayor and Cabinet
	Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel – potential call in
	Mayor and Cabinet – potential call in
23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept	Programme Launch

18 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Application deadline (8 weeks)
December	Provisional allocation letters sent – notice of change in funding to existing groups
12 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2022	Mayor and Cabinet – recommended allocations for agreement
	Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel – potential call in
1 April 2022	New grants begin