

City of London's Central Grants Programme – Stronger Communities Fund Analysis of Grants Awarded 2020/21 to 2024/25

Key Findings

This paper provides the first comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the Stronger Communities Fund (SCF) over the last five years illustrating the SCF's contribution to delivering both the Department of Community & Children's Service's key strategies and City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. The SCF is delivered across two schemes. The Main Scheme is characterised through its funding of preventative grants which avoid the costly escalation of need due to early intervention. Delivered alongside is the Small Grants Scheme that provides the City's resident-led and grassroots voluntary groups with their first step on the funding ladder. Notable findings of the grant analysis include:

- Over the last five years, 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive, the SCF has distributed £381,520 in 53 grants to 33 unique organisations. 9 organisations received two or more grants each.
- Over the last three years the average value of grant awarded has risen from £5,543 to £7,068 reflecting increases in costs incurred by Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) organisations post-pandemic compounded by the cost-of-living crisis.
- Over the last 4 years (2021/22 to 2024/25) applications to the SCF have trebled and this trend is set to continue with an anticipated further 41% increase in applications in 2025/26 compared to the previous year.
- At the same time as a steep annual increase in the demand for SCF funding, the average value of a SCF grant awarded has increased but the value of funds available has remained more or less constant. Consequently, the annual approval rate has dropped to 20% with 4 out of every 5 applications not being awarded funding.
- Over the last 5 years 53% of SCF grants awarded (£236,438 investment) were of City-wide benefit (62% of the total value of grants awarded), with 47% of SCF grants awarded identified for specific wards/areas representing £145,082 investment (38% of total value of grants awarded) of which £131,954 was for projects delivered in three wards including two of the most deprived wards in the City of London – Aldgate, Cripplegate and Portsoken.
- Over the last five years 80% of grants awarded were to small organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500k with just under half of all grants awarded to 'very small' organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100k such as CoL Residents Associations, gardening clubs and community groups.
- 32% of grants awarded over the last five years have been to organisations/ groups that were user-led (for example led by older people, led by residents of a specific area or those with a particular health issue) representing a £75,210 investment. However, only 2% of grants over the last 5 years (£10,000 investment) were specifically to organisations/groups that were BAME user-led.
- 38% of SCF funded activities over the last 5 years were for general beneficiaries, 32% of all funded projects benefitted older people, 23% benefitted families, 23% benefitted children under the age of 11 and 17% benefitted young people aged 11-25 years.
- Over the last 5 years 34% of all grants awarded were preventative in nature providing activities and services to the community that prevented the escalation of need providing considerable economic and social impact through early investment that reduces incidents of acute need and the resultant high costs of care and intervention.
- The SCF works in synergy with DCCS commissioned funds to deliver against priorities within five key strategies and plans: Children's & Young People's Plan; Carers Strategy; Safer City Partnership Strategy; SEND Strategy for Children and Young People; Strategy for Adult Social Care.
- The SCF delivers against four of the six CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.

City of London Corporation: Central Grants Programme Analysis of Stronger Community Grants awarded 2020/22 to 2024/25

Background

1. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the 'Central Grants Programme: Stronger Communities Fund' over the last five years of awards 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive to illustrate the impact of the fund in delivering both the Department of Community & Children's Service's key strategies and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.
2. The paper analyses the impact and learning from 53 Stronger Community Fund (SCF) grants awarded over 60 months (April 2020 to March 2025 inclusive) by addressing the key learning questions identified for the programme (see **Appendix A**).
3. The SCF is one of a portfolio of four open grant funding programmes that form the City of London Corporation's Central Grants Programme. The SCF opened in October 2016 and a Small Grants Scheme was integrated into the SCF in February 2018.
4. SCF has a rolling deadline with an 8- to 12-week decision turnaround allowing the fund to be responsive to immediate local needs. During 2020/21 and to some extent 2021/22 the SCF was expanded in both value and criteria to respond to the impact of the pandemic on local communities and services. Over the last three years, 2022/23 to 2024/25, the SCF has distributed c.£73,333 each year across two strands – the Small Grants Stream which provides grants from £500 to £3,000 and the Main Grants Stream which funds grants from £3,000+ to a maximum of £10,000. Historically the SCF has awarded grants up to £20,000 for projects taking place over a two-year period, but in recent years the SCF has not been able to support this level of award due to high demand and limited funds.
5. Grants issued through SCF are awarded to projects and services delivered for the benefit of communities or beneficiaries within the City of London and/or the City of London Corporation's Housing Estates across London. Importantly, SCF is the only CoL grant funding programme that supports residents from City of London Corporation run housing estates located outside of the Square Mile (Avondale Square Estate, Dron House, Isleden House, Spitalfields, Holloway Estate, Windsor House, York Way Estate, Southbank Estates, Horace Jones Hoeu, Sydenham Hill Estate, William Blake Estate).
6. Funding for SCF comes from the City's Estate with a budget agreed each year.
7. The SCF provides for activities and initiatives that complement the work of the DCCS, it is not a source of funding that can resource or duplicate statutory activities.
8. SCF applications must meet one or more of the fund's sub-themes – 'developing stronger neighbourhoods and communities by enabling more people to become involved in their communities and encouraging a broader understanding of the diverse needs of these communities' and/or 'promoting community health and wellbeing demonstrating positive outcomes that address the health and wellbeing priorities set out in the 2024-28 Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy'. As such grants awarded through the Stronger Communities Funding Programme contribute to delivering the City of London Corporation's Public Sector Equalities Duty and the City of London Corporation's Equality Objectives.

9. SCF is a key grant funding programme allowing first time applicant organisations to access small grants, pilot community initiatives and grow demand for services. Once experienced in project delivery and grant management, applicants are then well placed to access larger grants from the City of London's Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund or other external funders and charitable trusts. The SCF therefore acts as an entry point and essential 'first rung' in the funding ladder providing a crucial stepping stone to accessing future sources of funding and grow the City of London's voluntary and community sector.
10. In line with embedding EEDI within funding best practice, SCF offers pre-application advice to all applicants helping to support organisations establish connections with key stakeholders, identify potential project partners and liaise with relevant CoL Officers prior to application. The programme's management is reviewed against IVAR's Open and Trusting Grant-Making for Public Agencies with light touch grant reporting in line with Open and Trusting grant-making principles.

Value and distribution of grants over time

11. Over the last five years 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive the SCF has distributed £381,520 in 53 grants. Grants awarded have ranged from £500 to £20,000, however no grants over £10,000 have been awarded since 2023/24. (See **Table 1**).

Table 1			
Financial Year	Number of grants awarded	Value of grants awarded in year	Average value of grant awarded
2020/21	12	£99,189	£8,266
2021/22	7	£66,009	£9,430
2022/23	12	£66,514	£5,543
2023/24	12	£79,128	£6,594
2024/25	10	£70,680	£7,068
Total	53	£381,520	£7,198

12. The average value of grant awarded over the last five years was £7,198. However, the focus and value of grants awarded in 2020/21 and to some extent 2021/22 was atypical as the Department of Community & Children's Services (DCCS) sought to provide support to communities during the pandemic. Over the last three years the average value of SCF grant awarded has risen from £5,543 to £7,068 likely reflecting the known increases in costs incurred by Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) organisations post-pandemic and compounded by the cost-of-living crisis. The annual value of the fund has remained more or less static resulting in an inevitable reduction in the number of grants awarded each year to 10 (2024/25).

Demand for Stronger Communities funding

13. Over the last 5 years there have been a total of 163 applications to the SCF of which on average 40% were rejected, 25% were withdrawn, 2% were lapsed or under assessment and 33% were approved. (See **Table 2**)
14. Over the last 4 years (2021/22 to 2024/25) applications to the SCF have trebled and this trend is set to continue. During the first 5 months of 2025/26 (from April to August 2025) 29 applications have been received. At the current rate of submission c.69 applications to SCF could be received in 2025/26 – a further 41% increase in applications from the previous year. This steep increase in the number of applications to grant funders is being experienced across the sector as charities and VCS organisations whose

reserves were used during the pandemic struggle with increased costs at a time several major charitable funders are realigning their funding priorities or closing.

15. For many applicants, the SCF is the first competitive grant programme to which they have applied. Over the last two years the volume of withdrawn applications to the SCF has increased. These are underdeveloped applications that cannot be improved during the period of assessment and so applicants are encouraged to withdraw and reapply once additional advice and guidance and Departmental Officer support has been sought enabling applicants to reapply on a tighter timeframe than had they received a rejection. A significant number of applicants also misunderstand the geographic area of benefit and are advised to withdraw their application.
16. At the same time as a steep annual increase in the demand for SCF funding, the average value of SCF grant awarded has increased but the value of funds available has remained more or less constant. Consequently, the annual approval rate has dropped to 20% with 4 out of every 5 applications not being awarded funding. This is very low in comparison to other local community funds, for example, Cripplegate Foundation reports 59% success rate for the Islington Council's Community Chest in 2024/25.
17. This is significant because for many grassroots and community organisations the SCF will be their first experience of grant funding and despite Officer efforts to help support the development of strong proposals, due to limited funding the majority of these applicants will be unsuccessful.

Table 2							
Financial Year	Number of apps submitted	Number of Grants awarded/ funded	Number of apps rejected	Number of apps withdrawn	Number of apps lapsed	Number of apps under assessment	Approval rate
2020/21	42	12	28	2	0		29%
2021/22	16	7	7	2	0		44%
2022/23	23	12	7	3	1		52%
2023/24	33	12	8	12	1		36%
2024/25	49	10	15	22	1	1	20%
Total	163	53	65	41	3	1	

18. The SCF has two streams – a Small Grants Scheme awarding grants of up to £3,000 with an 8-week turnaround on decisions and a Main Grants Scheme awarding grants of up to £10,000 with a 12-week turnaround on decisions. Over the last five years 34% of all grants awarded were for £3,000 or less. During the pandemic and immediately post-pandemic larger value grants were distributed. Over the last three years the percentage of larger grants awarded has risen year on year to 70% of the grants awarded in the year and conversely the percentage of smaller grants awarded has reduced from 58% to 30% of all grants awarded. This may reflect the increase in costs of delivering projects and puts further pressure on the limited total value of the fund. (See **Table 3**).

Table 3					
Financial Year	Number of grants awarded	Number of grants awarded £3k or less	% of total grants awarded £3k or less	Number of grants awarded over £3K	% of total grants awarded over £3K
2020/21	12	3	25%	9	75%
2021/22	7	1	14%	6	86%

2022/23	12	7	58%	5	42%
2023/24	12	4	33%	8	67%
2024/25	10	3	30%	7	70%
Total	53	18	34%	35	

19. In line with high quality funding practice CFCMT offers 1:1 tailored pre-application advice calls to all potential applicants. This practice ensures that potential applicants are provided with information, advice and introductions to potential stakeholders to help develop their projects prior to submission. It allows the CFCMT to ensure that those who are furthest from accessing funding are given the support they individually need by removing structural barriers within the funding process. Pre-application calls also enable the team to establish relational grant-making practice from the initial contact with a potential applicant and identify and mitigate common issues experienced by applicants. Most importantly, pre-application advice provides early identification of ineligible applicants and projects, thereby preventing organisations wasting precious time on working up full applications and allowing CFCMT Officers to spend more time on assessing potentially successful applications.
20. Monitoring of pre-application advice began in late 2023. In 2024/25 only 4 organisations requested SCF pre-application advice none of whom then submitted an application. In the first five months of 2025/26 14 organisations have received pre-application advice of which 7 have applied for funding.

Continuation/Repeat Funding

21. Over the five-year period (2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive) 33 unique organisations were supported through the award of SCF grant funding of which 73% of successful applicants were awarded one grant each. (See **Table 4**).

Table 4	
Number of grants awarded over 5 years	Number of organisations
1	24
2	5
3	1
4	0
5	2
6	1
Total	33

22. 9 organisations had two or more grants each. The maximum aggregate grant from the SCF over the last five years to any single organisation was £43,252 and the largest number of continuation grants awarded to the same applicant was 6. (See **Table 5**).

Table 5		
Organisation	Number of grants awarded over 5 years	Value of grants awarded over 5 years
Hoxton Health	5	£43,252
Age UK City of London	5	£41,646
First Love Foundation	2	£30,000
Portoken Activities Group	6	£22,700
Mental Fight Club	2	£20,000
Tower Hamlets Youth Sport	2	£18,600
Society Links Tower Hamlets	2	£13,000

Barbican Tuesday Club	3	£7,000
The Carers Centre Tower Hamlets	2	£5,000

23. Given that the maximum SCF grant award per year was historically £20,000 reducing to £10,000 more recently, these aggregate grant values are fully in line with the fund's criteria. However, due to the high level of demand to the SCF, CFCMT has been working to transition several regular SCF grantees to successfully seek funding from the City of London's Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund (CILNF) – Hoxton Health, Portsoken Activities Group, Mental Fight Club. The CLINF grant programme can offer these applicants the potential of longer-term funding for up to five years to better support their forward planning and service expansion.
24. Unlike the CILNF, the SCF has no limitation on the number or value of continuation grants that can be awarded to an organisation. This is an important policy for the SCF fund which allows it to fund very small grassroots and community organisations over a substantial number of years. Often entirely run by volunteers some of these very small VCS organisations do not want to significantly increase their turnover due to the additional time burden and reporting that this would require. It is important to note that there is no other City of London Corporation grant funding programme available for these very small local organisations such as CoL Residents Associations, gardening clubs and community groups.

Areas/wards specifically benefiting from Stronger Communities grant funding

25. Over the last 5 years 53% of all SCF grants awarded (28 grants) were of City-wide benefit, with 47% of all SCF grants awarded identified for specific wards/areas. This equates to £236,438 investment over the last five years to City-wide projects (62% of the total value of grants awarded) and £145,082 (38% of total value of grants awarded) investment to specific wards/areas. (See **Table 6**).
26. 3% of the total value of the grants awarded over the last 5 years was for projects benefitting residents of housing estates run by the City of London Corporation outside of the City of London.
27. 35% of the total value of SCF grants awarded over the last 5 years (£131,954) was for projects delivered in three wards including two of the City's most deprived wards – Aldgate ward, Cripplegate Ward and Portsoken Ward which experiences significantly higher unemployment, lower household incomes and greater challenges in education and housing compared to its neighbours based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Table 6				
City of London Ward	Number of grants awarded over 5 years	% of grants awarded	Value of grants awarded over 5 years	% value of grants awarded over 5 years
All wards – whole of City of London	28	53%	£236,438	62%
CoL run estates outside City of London	3	6%	£13,128	3%
Aldgate Ward	4	8%	£32,666	9%
Cripplegate Ward	10	19%	£63,710	17%
Portsoken Ward	8	15%	£35,578	9%
Total	53		£381,520	100%

28. With the exception of the grants awarded in response to the pandemic (2020/21 and 2021/22) the percentage of all grants awarded to specific wards/areas has grown over the last three years to 60%. (See **Table 7**).

Table 7						
Financial Year	No Grants to all wards	% Grants to all wards	Grants to specific wards	% Grants to specific wards	Grants to outside of Square Mile	% Grants to outside of Square Mile
2020/21	8	67%	3	25%	1	8%
2021/22	2	29%	4	57%	1	14%
2022/23	7	58%	5	42%	0	0%
2023/24	7	58%	4	33%	1	9%
2024/25	4	40%	6	60%	0	0%
Total	28		22		3	

29. Of the grants awarded to specific wards over the last 5 years 19% were awarded to projects in Aldgate, 36% Portsoken and 45% Cripplegate. (See **Table 8**).

Table 8			
Financial Year	Number of Grants to Aldgate	Number of Grants to Cripplegate	Number of Grants to Portsoken
2020/21	2	1	0
2021/22	1	2	1
2022/23	0	2	3
2023/24	1	2	1
2024/25	0	3	3
Total	4	10	8
	19%	45%	36%

Stronger Communities Fund grantee organisation by type – turnover, user-led, sector

30. As would be expected in relation to the maximum value of the grant (£10,000) available from the SCF, over the last five years 80% of grants awarded were to small organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500k. Just under half (43%) of all SCF grants awarded over the last five years were to 'very small' organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100k. (See **Table 9**).

Table 9		
Annual Turnover of grantee	Number of grants	% of grants
£5m+	2	4%
£1m to £4,999,999	4	8%
£500K to £999,999	4	8%
£100K to £499,999	20	37%
< £100K	23	43%
Total	53	

31. Except for during the pandemic 2020/21 when some larger organisations were supported to deliver key services for the community, over the last five years the SCF has consistently directed its grants to small organisations with a turnover of less than £500k. In the last financial year 2024/25 all grants awarded were to organisations with a turnover of less than £500k. (See **Table 10**).

Table 10			
Financial Year	Number of grants awarded to small orgs turnover less than £500k	% grants awarded in the year to small orgs turnover less than £500k	Total number of grants awarded
2020/21	7	58%	12
2021/22	7	100%	7
2022/23	10	83%	12
2023/24	9	75%	12
2024/25	10	100%	10
Total	43		

32. Of the 23 SCF grants given out to organisations with a turnover of less than £100k over the last 5 years, 74% of grants were awarded to 'very small' constituted voluntary organisations or Resident Associations and 14% were awarded to 'very small' UK registered charities. (See **Table 11**).

Table 11		
Organisations turnover less than £100k		
Organisation type	Number of grants over the last 5 years	% of grants over the last 5 years
Constituted voluntary organisation or Resident Association	17	74%
UK Registered Charity	3	14%
Church	1	4%
Exempt or excepted charity	1	4%
CIC	1	4%
Charitable Incorporated Organisation	0	0%
Charitable Company	0	0%
University	0	0%
Total	23	

33. Looking at the SCF as a whole, over the last 5 years approximately a third of SCF grants were awarded to applicants that were Constituted Voluntary Organisations/Residents Associations (34%) and a further approximate third of grants were awarded to applicants that were UK registered charities (36%). (See **Table 12**).
34. Over the last five years the SCF has increasingly prioritised providing an entry point to grant funding reflected in the percentage of grants awarded per year to Constituted Voluntary organisations/Residents Associations having grown from 17% of grants (in 2020/21) compared to 50% of grants awarded in 2024/25. Conversely in 2020/21 33% of grants were given to UK registered charities compared to 20% of grants given in 2024/25 reflective of the funds move to focus on smaller community organisations and grassroots groups. (See **Table 12**).

Table 12							
Organisation Type	Number of grants	% of grants	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
UK Registered Charity	19	36%	4	4	6	3	2

Constituted voluntary organisation or Resident Association	18	34%	2	2	5	4	5
Charitable Company	6	11%	1	0	0	3	2
CIO	5	9%	1	0	1	2	1
Exempt or excepted charity	1	2%	0	1	0	0	0
CIC	2	4%	2	0	0	0	0
Church	1	2%	1	0	0	0	0
University	1	2%	1	0	0	0	0
Total	53		12	7	12	12	10

35. 32% of grants awarded over the last five years from SCF have been to organisations/ groups that were user-led (for example led by older people, led by residents of a specific area or those with a particular health issue) representing a £75,210 investment. However, only 2% of grants over the last 5 years (£10,000 investment) were specifically to organisations/groups that were BAME user-led perhaps reflecting the lack of formalised groups supporting the City's diverse communities. (See **Table 13**).
36. With the exception of the single award to Halls4Jumuah, SCF grants to user-led organisations have been approximately half the value of the average grant to non-user led organisations. This disparity may be explained by the greater proportion of user-led organisations applying for the Small Grant Scheme – 56% of grants awarded in the Small Grants Scheme were to User-led organisations compared to 20% of grants awarded in the Main Grant Scheme.

Table 13					
Type of user led organisation	Number of grants	% of grants	Value of grants awarded	% of total SCF spend	Average value of grant
BAME user led	1	2%	£10,000	3%	£10,000
Other user led	16	30%	£65,210	17%	£4,076
Not user led	36	68%	£306,310	80%	£8,508
	53	100%	£381,520	100%	

37. As would be expected from the community and health focus of the SCF grant criteria 28% of grants awarded over the last 5 years were to organisations from the Voluntary & Community /Residents Association sector and a further 13% of grants were awarded to organisations in the health sector. (See **Table 14**).
38. The value of the average grant awarded to grantee organisation sector varied with an average grant value of £19,906 for the grant awarded to advice/infrastructure reducing to an average value of grant of £3,864 for organisations working in the VCS/Residents Association sector. This disparity across sectors can be explain by the larger grant having been awarded for advice during the pandemic and the smaller average award to VCS/Residents Associations reflecting their higher application rate to SCF's Small Grant Scheme.

Table 14					
Grantee Organisation Sector	No of grants	% of grants	Value of grants awarded	% value of grants awarded	Average value of grant to sector
Voluntary & Community/ Residents Association	15	28%	£57,955	15%	£3,864
Other	12	23%	£99,466	26%	£8,289
Health	7	13%	£73,252	19%	£10,465
Culture Arts	4	7.5%	£41,378	11%	£10,345
Sports	4	7.5%	£34,388	9%	£8,597
Religious	4	7.5%	£25,580	7%	£6,395
Youth Provision	4	7.5%	£21,640	6%	£5,410
Environment	2	4%	£7,955	2%	£3,978
Infrastructure/Advice	1	2%	£19,906	5%	£19,906
	53		£381,520		

Small Grants Scheme – Funds awarded, grantee organisation by type

39. The SCF is split into a Main Grant Scheme for grants over £3,000 to a maximum effectively of £10,000 and a Small Grants Scheme which has a faster decision turn around and a simpler application form for grants between £500 and £3,000. Over the last 5 years 34% of all the 53 SCF grants awarded were for £3,000 or less with a total aggregate value of £42,771 and an average grant value of £2,376. (See **Table 3**).
40. The smallest grant awarded in the period was £500 and maximum small grant awarded was £3,000 as stipulated by the funding criteria. 39% of the small grants awarded over the last 5 years were at the highest value £3,000.

Table 3			
Financial Year	Number of grants awarded	Number of grants awarded at £3k or less	% of total grants awarded at £3k or less
2020/21	12	3	25%
2021/22	7	1	14%
2022/23	12	7	58%
2023/24	12	4	33%
2024/25	10	3	30%
Total	53	18	

41. In each of the last two years approximately a third of the SCF grants awarded have been to the Small Grants Scheme.
42. 55% of grants awarded over the last 5 years from the SCF Small Grants Scheme were to organisations from the Voluntary & Community/ Residents Association sector. (See **Table 15**). The relatively loose structure of this type of organisation and light touch reporting requirements are well suited to entirely volunteer led groups.

Table 15		
Grantee Organisation Sector	Number of small grants awarded at £3k or less	% of small grants awarded at £3k or less
Voluntary & Community/ Residents Association	10	55%
Other	4	22%
Youth Provision	2	11%

Environment	1	6%
Culture Arts	1	6%
Health	0	0%
Sports	0	0%
Religious	0	0%
Infrastructure/Advice	0	0%
	18	

43. 56% of grantees awarded SCF Small Grants over the last 5 years were user-led organisations compared to 20% of grantees awarded Main Scheme grants.

Meeting Stronger Community Fund Sub-themes

44. The SCF has two sub-themes which operate as the criteria for the fund. To be eligible for funding each application must meet at least one of the following two sub-themes:
- i. Developing stronger neighbourhoods and communities
 - ii. Promoting community health and wellbeing (Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy)
45. Over the last 5 years 77% of grants awarded developed stronger neighbourhoods and communities and 58% of grants awarded promoted community health and wellbeing (Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy) with just under half of all applications meeting both criteria. (See **Table 16**).

Table 16		
Stronger Communities Fund Sub-theme met	Number of grants	% of total grants awarded
Developing stronger neighbourhoods and communities	41	77%
Promoting community health and wellbeing (Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy)	31	58%
Both Sub-themes	21	40%

Preventing escalation of need

46. Over the last 5 years 34% of all grants awarded were preventative in nature providing activities and services to the community that prevented the escalation of need. This type of funding has a considerable economic and social impact through early investment that reduces incidents of acute need and the resultant high costs of care and intervention.
47. For example, within the City of London there is huge disparity in income and pockets of high deprivation including Mansell Street Estate, Middlesex Street Estate and Golden Lane Estate. The Portsoken ward, for example, is in the second quintile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation with 21% of children under-16 and 31% of adults 60+ living in low income households. The Living Wage's Report (London's Low Pay Landscape) identifies that half of low paid Londoners have used a food bank in the past year, with about a quarter visiting one at least once a week and that low income households often face additional, complex challenges such as unemployment/low-paid work, mental health problems, housing insecurity, disabilities/health conditions and social isolation. SCF's two grants to the First Love Foundation ensured emergency advice and food support was available to residents in crisis within the City of London preventing families from sinking deeper into poverty.

48. Falling between health and social care, toenailing cutting is often overlooked as an essential service to maintain independence, particularly for those who live alone or whose partner may also be disabled. Hoxton Health's SCF grant-funded service supports those with arthritis, back pain, lack of strength in hands, blood clotting issues, shaky hands, eyesight issues, obesity and dementia to have their toenails cuts enabling them to put on shoes properly, improve mobility and reduce risk of falls. Thereby creating a significant impact on their wellbeing, physical health and preventing further more complex medical intervention.
49. Mental ill health, especially that caused by isolation, has increased due to the pandemic with depression rates in the UK doubled since the COVID-19 pandemic began (Office for National Statistics, May 2021). Groups disproportionately affected are those burdened by existing inequalities such as young people, women, clinically vulnerable adults, people living with a disability and those living in the most deprived areas. Mental Fight Club's SCF grant-funded Dragon Café in the City is a free, all-day, drop-in creative space, delivered every other Wednesday to support the mental health and wellbeing of City residents and workers, hosted by CoL Library Service in the public open access area of Shoe Lane Library. MFC provides an integrated service to overcome the shame and stigma commonly experienced by people with a mental health diagnosis and works with patrons at all stages of their recovery and management of their illness following a crisis, incident or inpatient stay. The SCF grant-funded programme of artist-led creative activities builds patrons' agency, resilience, confidence, social network and sense of belonging thus preventing their escalation of need and avoiding costly in-patient services.
50. Whilst preventative grants are awarded across both of the SCF schemes, on average across the last 5 years almost half (46%) of the grants issued in the SCF Main Scheme were preventative. (See **Table 17**). This characterises the SCF Main Scheme as investing in early intervention to prevent escalation of need and longer term costs, with the complementary Small Grant Scheme existing in parallel as the only City of London Corporation grant funding programme available to very small grassroots and voluntary groups serving communities in the Square Mile.

Table 17						
Financial Year	Number of Grants awarded in the year	Number of preventative grants awarded	% Preventative grants awarded	Number of Main Grants awarded	Number of Main Scheme preventative grants awarded	% Main Scheme preventative grants awarded
2020/21	12	5	42%	9	5	56%
2021/22	7	3	43%	6	3	50%
2022/23	12	4	33%	5	3	60%
2023/24	12	3	25%	8	2	25%
2024/25	10	3	30%	7	3	43%
Total	53	18	Av 34%	35	16	Av 46%

Delivering key Department of Community & Children's Services Strategies

51. The Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS) has a wide remit and portfolio of key strategies meeting statutory and City of London Corporation duties. The SCF works in synergy with DCCS commissioned funds to deliver against a number of priorities within these key strategies.

52. For example, the SCF awarded a grant of £5,640 to Lifeskills Education Charity for online resources and workbooks for four primary schools, to aid the provision of Life Skills Education in primary schools delivering against the CoL's **Children's & Young People's Plan 2022-25** outcome '*Children and young people have the tools to fulfil their potential and are prepared for success in adulthood*'.
53. CoL carers have reported that caring can have a significant impact on their health and emotional wellbeing. The SCF has directly delivered the CoL's **Carers Strategy 2023-28** Priority Two to support '*The Health and emotional wellbeing of carers*' through the award to The Carers Centre of £2,000 to provide a warm space for carers and those they care for, providing social interaction, healthy refreshments and wellbeing activities, and through the SCF's award of £10,000 to Tavistock Relationships to promote the development of therapeutic support for carers and their loved ones living in the City of London.
54. The SCF has delivered against the **Safer City Partnership Strategy 2022-25** strategic priority to reduce Hate Crime through its grant to Faith Matters for £8,740 for their 'Connecting Communities' programme that reinforced pluralism of communities and support for one another through the COVID crisis.
55. The SCF also provides funding to projects that deliver against the **2020-2024 SEND Strategy for Children and Young People's** outcome 3 '*children and young people with SEND are integral and valued members of the City of London community*' ensuring '*children and young people with SEND are welcomed and supported to participate in the cultural life of the City*' through grants such as the award to Fusion Lifestyle for £9,000 towards sport and physical activity sessions for SEND children living in the City of London and well-being sessions for their parents and carers.
56. The SCF has also evidenced delivery against the **CoL's Strategy for Adult Social Care Living well, Ageing well 2025-29** Commitment One '*Help people meet their own needs and aspirations in a safe and supportive way*' through the award of grants to Hoxton Health to run two monthly foot-health clinics at Portsoken Community Centre and the Neaman GP Practice and carry out home visits to housebound or bedbound residents.

Delivering against City of London Corporate Plan Strategic Outcomes

57. The SCF delivers against four of the six CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. As expected, given the clear and strategic focus of the fund, SCF strongly contributes to creating 'Diverse engaged communities' with 64% of all grants awarded delivering increased community cohesion and 55% of all grants reducing social isolation. (See **Table 18**). For example, grants such as £3,000 to the Barbican Tuesday Club for older residents from the Golden Lane and Barbican Estates actively contributed to reducing social isolation for residents aged from their late 60s to 104 many of whom live alone and 58% of whom have some form of disability.
58. The SCF also strongly contributes to the CoL's Corporate Plan strategic outcome 'Providing excellent services' with 45% of all grants contributing to improving mental or physical health, for example, through SCF's funding for Mental Fight Club to provide Wellness Wednesdays at Shoe Lane Library for residents and City workers experiencing mental health issues.
59. Interestingly, although not a requirement of the funding programme 13% of grants awarded over the last 5 years met the Corporate Strategic outcome to 'Increase participation in co-creating and delivering services - Diverse engaged communities'.

Table 18		
Main grant purpose (outcomes)/ Corporate Plan Strategic Outcome	Number of grants	% of grants
Increased Community Cohesion - 'Diverse engaged communities'	34	64%
Reduced Social Isolation - 'Diverse engaged communities'	29	55%
Improved mental or physical health - 'Providing excellent services'	24	45%
Increased participation in co-creating and delivering services - 'Diverse engaged communities'	7	13%
Climate mitigation - 'Leading Sustainable Environment'	2	4%
Increased Biodiversity - 'Leading Sustainable Environment'	1	2%
Pathways to employment - 'Providing excellent services'	1	2%
Increased weekend footfall - 'Vibrant Thriving Destination'	1	2%

Grant beneficiaries

60. The SCF grant programme delivers activities and services for a wide range of beneficiary groups. Many projects target more than one main beneficiary group. 38% of SCF funded activities over the last 5 years were for general beneficiaries, 32% of all funded projects benefitted older people, 23% benefitted families, 23% benefitted children under the age of 11, and 17% benefitted young people aged 11-25 years. (See **Table 19**).

Table 19			
Main grant beneficiary group/s	Number of grants	% of grants	Example SCF grant funded projects
General beneficiaries/ no specific target groups	20	38%	Golden Lane Estate Residents Association - £2,800 towards the Golden Lane Estate Summer Fair an afternoon with workshops and stalls reconnecting the community and sharing ideas.
Older people	17	32%	Barbican Tuesday Club - £3,000 for a programme of regular weekly events and outings for those over 60 from the Barbican and Golden Lane Estates.
Families	12	23%	Portoken Activities Group – £7,200 to provide community activities for Portoken residents: Eid, Podium Party, seaside coach trips, Family Day & Kids Halloween Party.
Children < 11yr	12	23%	Life Skills Education Charity - £5,640 to provide online resources and workbooks for four primary schools, to aid in the provision of Life Skills Education in primary schools.
Young People/Youth 11-25yr	9	17%	Mer-IT Digital - £10,000 towards the provision of computers, laptops and desktops to schools and low-income residents; Tower Hamlets Youth Sport Foundation - £9,600 to support community cricket provision for children in the City of London and the adjacent areas of Farringdon and Whitechapel.
People living in poverty	8	15%	First Love - £20,000 to provide emergency advice & food support to residents in crisis within the City of London; Bankside Open Spaces Trust - £2,000 to provide a warm hub for local residents.

People from minoritised ethnic groups	7	13%	Halls4Jumuah - £10,000 over 30 weeks to cover the weekly hire of the Dutch Centre in the City for Friday prayers; Age UK City of London - £9,949 to support older BAME women on Mansell Street estate, through regular coffee mornings providing social, cultural and wellbeing activities.
People with physical disabilities	4	8%	Hoxton Health - £10,000 to provide two monthly foot health clinics at Portsoken Community Centre & Neaman GP Practice and carry out home visits to housebound or bedbound residents.
People with learning disabilities	1	2%	Fusion Lifestyle - £9,000 towards the provision of sport and physical activity sessions for SEND children and young people.

Recommendations

61. The primary purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the 'Central Grants Programme: Stronger Communities Fund' over the last five years to illustrate the impact of the fund in delivering both the Department of Community & Children's Service's key strategies and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.
62. Analysis has evidenced the significant contribution of the SCF in delivering a raft of key DCCS strategies and the City of London's Corporate Strategies. This represents excellent value for money given the small value of the fund in relation to its breadth of impacts.
63. Importantly, the SCF's two schemes are mutually reinforcing with the Main Scheme characterised through its funding of preventative grants which avoid the costly escalation of need through early intervention. Delivered alongside is the Small Grants Scheme that provides the City's resident-led and grassroots voluntary groups with their first step on the funding ladder.
64. To further strengthen the SCF and its impact it is recommended that:
 - i. Analysis of the fund is undertaken annually to track trends in funding.
 - ii. Statistics from the SCF analysis are incorporated into assessment report recommendations to provide context and arguments for future investment in sectors where there has been historically low SCF investment, for example grants to BAME-led organisations.
 - iii. Officers consider the support required to remove the barriers to funding for the high percentage of applicants who withdraw their applications through the provision of more detailed pre-application advice, training, signposting and support, including considering whether receipt of pre-application advice should be made mandatory for new applicants to the fund.
 - iv. Officers to review the SCF policy and update the SCF web pages to provide additional pre-application information for potential applicants.
 - v. Officers consider how to better promote the fund to organisations supporting residents in City of London Corporation managed housing estates outside of the City.

- vi. DCCS to seek additional funding to meet increasing demand for SCF support.

Appendix A

Stronger Communities Fund: Sub-themes

- a) Developing stronger neighbourhoods and communities
- b) Promoting community health and wellbeing

Key information and learning questions
What is the total SCF grant allocation/year? Total invested over last 5 years?
How many SCF grants have been awarded/year? Total number of grants awarded?
What is the spread of grants in terms of value & number? How has this changed over time?
What is the demand for SCF funding (total number of applications) and how has this changed over time?
What is the approval rate for SCF grants and how has this changed over time for both small and main scheme grants?
What is the percentage of continuation grants/repeat funding?
What areas/ward within CoL are grants benefitting?
How are SCF grants spread across turnover (size) of grantee?
How are the SCF grants spread across organisation type (constitution)?
To what extent is SCF supporting user-led organisations?
What sectors are SCF grantees working in?
What is the profile of the very small turnover (<£100K) grantees that SCF funds?
What is the profile of the Small Grants Scheme grantees?
To what extent have different SCF sub-themes been met through SCF funding
What are the main outcomes of SCF funded projects/Which CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes does CILNF contribute to delivering?
To what extent is SCF funding activities that are preventative?
Which other key DCCS strategies has SCF funded activity helped to deliver?
Which groups of people benefit from SCF funding?