As at 14.5.26

City of London Corporation Central Grants Programme – Stronger Communities Fund
Analysis of Stronger Community Grants awarded 2020/21 to 2025/26

Executive Summary

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the Stronger Communities Fund (SCF) over the last six years illustrating SCF's contribution to delivering both the Department of Community & Children's Service's (DCCS) key strategies and City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. 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:

- The SCF is vastly over-subscribed. Over the last 5 years (2021/22 to 2025/26) since the pandemic applications to the SCF have quadrupled and this trend is set to continue. This steep increase in the number of applications to grant funders is being experienced across the sector as Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) organisations whose reserves were used during the pandemic struggle with the cost of living crisis and increased costs at a time when several major charitable funders are realigning their funding priorities or closing.
- In line with the steep annual increase in the demand for SCF funding the annual approval rate has dropped to 19% with 1 out of every 5 applications not being awarded funding.
- Over the last six years, 2020/21 to 2025/26, the SCF has distributed £453,494 across 66 grants to 41 unique organisations with an average value of grant awarded (2025/26) reduced to £5,536. Approximately a third of the funds each year are distributed as small grants (<£3k) and two-thirds are grants between £3k to £10k.
- 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 which allows SCF to fund very small, volunteer-run, grassroots and community organisations over a substantial number of years.
- In 2024/25 the number of repeat SCF grant recipients increased to 70% of the grants awarded in year potentially leaving very little capacity to support those new to grant funding or newly established. In response CFCMT has been working with repeat applicants to support them to secure funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund thereby freeing up the SCF to support small, grassroot and newly formed organisations. Consequently in 2025/26 repeat Stronger Community grant recipients dropped back down to 47% with 7 organisations funded for the first time through Stronger Communities including newly formed Golden Lane Estate Events and Urban Tree Festival.
- Over the last six years 51% of SCF grants awarded (£261,308 investment) were of City-wide benefit, with 49% of SCF grants awarded identified for specific wards/areas representing £191,986 investment, of which £178,858 was for projects delivered in three wards (Aldgate, Cripplegate, Portsoken) reflecting investment in services in the City's most deprived wards.
- In the last two financial years 100% of grants awarded through SCF were to organisations with a turnover of less than £500k.
- Over the last six 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 46% of grants awarded in 2025/26 reflecting SCF's move to focus on smaller community organisations and grassroots groups.

- 24% of grants awarded over the last six 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 £107,655 investment.
- SCF grants often span more than one beneficiary group. 39% of SCF funded activities over the last six years were for general beneficiaries, 33% of all funded projects benefitted older people, 24% benefitted families, 24% benefitted children < 11yr and 18% benefitted young people aged 11-25 yrs.
- The SCF has two sub-themes which operate as the criteria for the fund. Over the last six years 80% of SCF grants awarded developed 'stronger neighbourhoods and communities' and 59% of SCF grants awarded 'promoted community health and wellbeing (Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy)' with just under half (42%) of all applications meeting both criteria.
- Over the last six years 30% 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. For example, a grant to 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.
- SCF works in synergy with DCCS commissioned funds to deliver against priorities within five key strategies and plans: Children's & Young People's Plan 2022-25; Carers Strategy 2023-28; Safer City Partnership Strategy; SEND Strategy for Children and Young People; Strategy for Adult Social Care 2025-29.
- Intentionally, the SCF delivers strongly against the CoL's Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-28 Priority Two 'Increasing Social Connection and Reducing Social Isolation'. Social isolation has a profound impact on individuals leading to increased loneliness, depression, anxiety, and other physical health issues, such as heart disease and the risk of early mortality. SCF's focus on supporting hyper-local volunteer-led community and residents' associations to bring communities together for shared celebrations such as Portsoken Activities Group summer trips, Positive Action Through Creativity's Mela in the City and Golden Lane Estate Events' (GLEE) annual programme reduce social isolation, with funded initiatives such as The Jewish Square Mile's 'The Medieval Jewish Kitchen' at the Aldgate Centre forging community cohesion and shared understanding.
- 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 65% of all grants awarded delivering increased community cohesion and 61% of all grants reducing social isolation. For example, the SCF grant to the Barbican Tuesday Club for older Golden Lane and Barbican Estates residents actively contributes to reducing social isolation for residents aged 60+ many of whom live alone and 58% of whom have some form of disability. Similarly, the SCF also strongly contributes to the CoL's Corporate Plan strategic outcome 'Providing excellent services' with 44% 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.

City of London Corporation: Central Grants Programme
Analysis of Stronger Community Grants awarded 2020/21 to 2025/26

Background

1. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the 66 grants awarded by the 'Central Grants Programme: Stronger Communities Fund' (SCF) over the last six years (April 2020 to March 2026 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. The paper addressing the key learning questions identified for the programme is appended to the report (see **Appendix A**).

2. SCF is one of a portfolio of five 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.

3. 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 (CILNF) or other external funders and charitable trusts. 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.

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 four years, 2022/23 to 2025/26, 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 House, Sydenham Hill Estate, William Blake Estate).

6. Funding for SCF comes from the City's Estate with a budget agreed each year. SCF funds activities and initiatives that complement the work of the DCCS, it is not a source of funding that can resource or duplicate statutory activities.

7. 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 SCF contribute to delivering the City of London Corporation's Public Sector Equalities Duty and the City of London Corporation's Equality Objectives.

8. 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

9. Over the last six years, 2020/21 to 2025/26 inclusive, SCF has distributed £453,494 across 66 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
2003/24	12	£79,128	£6,594
2024/25	10	£70,680	£7,068
2025/26	13	£71,974	£5,536
Total	**66**	**£453,494**	**£6,871**

10. The average value of grant awarded over the last six years was £6,871. 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. In the subsequent three years (2022/23 to 2024/25) the average value of SCF grant awarded rose 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. Since the annual value of the fund remained more or less static this resulted in an inevitable reduction in the number of grants awarded each year to 10 (2024/25). In 2025/26 the average value of grant awarded reduced to £5,536 in line with the successful outreach to encourage applications from grassroot and small community organisations.

Demand for Stronger Communities funding

11. Over the last 6 years there have been a total of 231 applications to the SCF. Over the last 5 years (2021/22 to 2025/26) applications to the SCF have quadrupled and this trend is set to continue. 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 the cost of living crisis and increased costs at a time when several major charitable funders are realigning their funding priorities or closing. (See **Table 2**).

12. In order to increase applications from grassroot organisations, residents groups and small local community organisations, CFCMT initiated a programme of outreach in early Spring 2024. Provision of pre-application advice, signposting and application

development has correlated with almost doubling the year on year increase in applications from a 29% increase per year to a 55% increase. (See **Table 2**).

Table 2		
Financial Year	**Number of applications submitted**	**% increase on previous year**
2020/2021	43	n/a
2021/22	17	[39%]
2022/23	24	41%
2023/24	31	29%
2024/25	48	55%
2025/26	68	42%
Total	**231**	

13. For many applicants, the SCF is the first competitive grant programme to which they have applied. Over the last three 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.

14. In line with the steep annual increase in the demand for SCF funding the annual approval rate has dropped to 19% with 1 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. (See **Table 3**).

15. 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 3						
Financial Year	**Number of applics submitted**	**Number of Grants awarded/ funded**	**Number of applics rejected**	**Number of applics withdrawn**	**Number of applics lapsed**	**Approval rate**
2020/21	43	12	28	0	0	28%
2021/22	17	7	6	4	0	41%
2022/23	24	12	7	2	0	50%
2023/24	31	12	5	10	2	39%
2024/25	48	10	10	23	1	21%
2025/26	68	13	16	21	0	19%
Total	**231**	**66**	**72**	**60**	**3**	

16. 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 six years 35% 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 four years the percentage of larger grants awarded has risen to 62% of the grants awarded each year and conversely the percentage of smaller grants awarded has reduced from 58% to 38% 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 4**).

Table 4					
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%
2025/26	13	5	38%	8	62%
Total	**66**	**23**	**35%**	**43**	**65%**

17. In line with funding best 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.

18. In 2024/25 only 4 organisations requested SCF pre-application advice, none of whom then submitted an application. By comparison in 2025/26 36 pre-application advice sessions were delivered in relation to SCF.

Continuation/Repeat Funding

19. Over the six-year period (2020/21 to 2025/26 inclusive) 41 unique organisations were supported through the award of SCF grant funding. 10 organisations had two or more grants each. (See **Table 5**).

Table 5	
Number of grants awarded over last 6 years	**Number of organisations**
1	31
2	5
3	1
4	2
5	0
6	1
7	1
Total	**41**

20. The maximum aggregate grant from SCF over the last six years to any single organisation was £51,625 and the largest number of continuation grants awarded to a single applicant was 7. (See **Table 6**).

Table 6		
Organisation	**Number of grants awarded over 6 years**	**Value of grants awarded over 6 years**
Age UK City of London	6	£51,625
Hoxton Health	4	£43,252
First Love Foundation	2	£30,000
Mental Fight Club	3	£26,600
Portsoken Activities Group	7	£24,700
Tower Hamlets Youth Sport	2	£18,600
Society Links Tower Hamlets	2	£13,000
Barbican Tuesday Club	4	£10,175
The Carers Centre Tower Hamlets	2	£5,000
City Showtunes Orchestra	2	£3,920

21. In 2024/25 the number of repeat SCF grant recipients increased to 70% of the grants awarded in the year leaving very little capacity to support those new to grant funding or newly established. In response CFCMT has been working with repeat applicants to support them to develop and secure funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund (CILNF) thereby freeing up the SCF to support small, grassroot and newly formed organisations. Consequently in 2025/26 repeat SCF grant recipients dropped back down to 47% with 7 organisations funded for the first time through Stronger Communities including newly formed Golden Lane Estate Events and Urban Tree Festival whilst established groups such as Portsoken Activities Group, Mental Fight Club and Hoxton Health secured multi-year funding through CILNF enabling them to better support their forward planning and service expansion.

22. Unlike 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

23. Over the last 6 years 51% of all SCF grants awarded (34 grants) were of City-wide benefit, with 49% of all SCF grants awarded identified for specific wards/areas. This equates to £261,508 investment over the last six years to City-wide projects (58% of the total value of grants awarded) and £191,986 (42% of total value of grants awarded) investment to specific wards/areas. (See **Table 7**).

24. 3% of the total value of the grants awarded over the last six years was for projects benefitting residents of housing estates managed by the City of London Corporation outside of the City of London.

25. 39% of the total value of SCF grants awarded over the last six years (£178,858) was for projects delivered in three wards (Aldgate, Cripplegate, Portsoken) reflecting investment in services in the City's most deprived ward (Portsoken) 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 7				
City of London Ward	**Number of grants awarded over 6 years**	**% of grants awarded**	**Value of grants awarded over 6 years**	**% value of grants awarded over 6 years**
All wards – whole of City of London	34	51%	£261,508	58%
CoL run estates outside City of London	3	5%	£13,128	3%
Aldgate Ward	4	6%	£32,666	7%
Cripplegate Ward	14	21%	£89,885	20%
Portsoken Ward	11	17%	£56,307	12%
Total	**66**		**£453,494**	**100%**

26. 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 been growing slightly over the last two years to 54%. (See **Table 8**).

Table 8						
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%
2025/26	6	46%	7	54%	0	0%
Total	**34**		**29**		**3**	

27. Of the grants awarded to specific wards over the last six years the spread between the number of the projects supported in the East and North of the City has been more or less even with 48% of funded specific ward projects taking place in Cripplegate and 52% of funded specific ward projects taking place in Aldgate or Portsoken. (See **Table 9**).

Table 9			
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
2025/26	0	4	3
Total	**4**	**14**	**11**
	14%	**48%**	**38%**

Stronger Communities Fund grantee organisation by turnover

28. As would be expected in relation to the effective maximum value of the grant (£10,000) available from SCF, over the last six years 84% of grants awarded were to small organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500k. Just under half (48%) 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 10**).

Table 10		
Annual Turnover of grantee	**Number of grants awarded over last 6 years**	**% of grants awarded over last 6 years**
£5m+	2	3%
£1m to £4,999,999	4	6%
£500K to £999,999	4	6%
£100K to £499,999	24	36%
< £100K	32	48%
Total	**66**	

29. Except for during the pandemic (2020/21) when some larger organisations were supported to deliver key services for the community, over the last six years SCF has consistently directed its grants to small organisations with a turnover of less than £500k. In the last two financial years (2024/25 and 2025/26) all grants awarded through SCF were to organisations with a turnover of less than £500k. (See **Table 11**).

Table 11			
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
2025/26	13	100%	13
Total	**56**		**66**

30. Of the 32 SCF grants given out to organisations with a turnover of less than £100k over the last 6 years, 69% of grants were awarded to 'very small' constituted voluntary organisations or Resident Associations and 16% were awarded to 'very small' UK registered charities. (See **Table 12**).

Table 12 Organisations turnover less than £100k		
Organisation type	**Number of grants over the last 6 years**	**% of grants over the last 6 years**
Constituted voluntary organisation or Resident Association	22	69%
UK Registered Charity	5	16%
Church	1	3%
Exempt or excepted charity	1	3%
CIC	3	9%
Charitable Incorporated Organisation	0	0%
Charitable Company	0	0%

University	0	0%
Total	**32**	

Stronger Communities Fund grantee organisation by type

31. Looking at SCF as a whole, over the last six years over a third of SCF grants were awarded to applicants that were Constituted Voluntary Organisations/Residents Associations (34%) and a further third of grants were awarded to applicants that were UK registered charities (36%). (See **Table 13**).

32. Over the last six years 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 46% of grants awarded in 2025/26 reflecting SCF's move to focus on smaller community organisations and grassroots groups. (See **Table 13**).

Table 13							
Organisation Type	**% of grants**	**2020/ 2021**	**2021/ 2022**	**2022/ 2023**	**2023/ 2024**	**2024/ 2025**	**2025/ 2026**
UK Registered Charity	36%	4	4	6	3	2	4
Constituted voluntary organisation or Resident Association	34%	2	2	5	4	5	6
Charitable Company	11%	1	0	0	3	2	0
CIO	9%	1	0	1	2	1	1
Exempt or excepted charity	2%	0	1	0	0	0	
CIC	4%	2	0	0	0	0	2
Church	2%	1	0	0	0	0	0
University	2%	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total		**12**	**7**	**12**	**12**	**10**	**13**

Stronger Communities Fund grantee organisation by leadership (user-led)

33. 24% of grants awarded over the last six years from SCF have been to organisations/ groups that were user-led (for example led by older people, led by residents from a specific community or those with a particular health issue) representing a £107,655 investment. However, only 2% of grants over the last six 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 14**).

34. With the exception of the single award to Halls4jumuah, SCF average grants to user-led organisations (£4,069) have been approximately half the value of the average grant to non-user led organisations (£8,435). This disparity may be explained by the greater proportion of user-led organisations applying for the Small Grant Scheme – 61% of grants awarded in the Small Grants Scheme were to user-led organisations compared to 26% of grants awarded in the Main Grant Scheme.

Table 14					
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	%	£10,000	2%	£10,000

Other user led	24	%	£97,655	22%	£4,069
Not user led	41	%	£345,839	76%	£8,435
	66	**100%**	**£453,494**	**100%**	

Stronger Communities Fund grantee organisation by sector

35. As would be expected from SCF's community and health focused grant criteria, 33% of grants awarded over the last six years were to organisations from the Voluntary & Community /Residents Association sector and a further 11% of grants were awarded to organisations in the health sector. (See **Table 15**).

36. The value of the average grant awarded to each 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 £3,031 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 15					
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	22	33%	£99,058	22%	£4,503
Health	11	17%	£104,949	23%	£9,541
Culture Arts	7	11%	£56,048	12%	£8,007
Sports	8	12%	£64,620	14%	£8,078
Other	6	9%	£52,600	12%	£8,767
Religious	4	6%	£25,580	6%	£6,395
Youth Provision	4	6%	£21,640	5%	£5,410
Environment	3	4%	£9,093	2%	£3,031
Infrastructure/Advice	1	2%	£19,906	4%	£19,906
	66		**£453,494**		

Small Grants Scheme – Funds awarded

37. 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 six years 35% of all the 66 SCF grants awarded were for £3,000 or less with a total aggregate value of £52,579 and an average grant value of £2,286. (See **Table 16**).

38. The smallest grant awarded in the period was £500 and maximum small grant awarded was £3,000 as stipulated by the funding criteria. 35% of the small grants awarded over the last six years were at the highest value £3,000.

Table 16			
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%
2025/26	13	5	38%
Total	**66**	**23**	

39. In each of the last three years approximately a third of the SCF grants awarded have been through the Small Grants Scheme. (See **Table 16**).

40. 57% of grants awarded over the last six years from the SCF Small Grants Scheme were to organisations from the Voluntary & Community/ Residents Association sector. (See **Table 17**). The relatively loose structure of this type of organisation and light touch reporting requirements are well suited to entirely volunteer led groups.

Table 17 Small Grants Scheme		
Grantee Organisation Sector	**Number of small grants awarded at £3k or less**	**% of small grants awarded at £3k or less**
Voluntary & Community/ Residents Association	13	57%
Other	2	9%
Youth Provision	2	9%
Environment	2	9%
Culture Arts	2	9%
Health	1	4%
Sports	1	4%
Religious	0	0%
Infrastructure/Advice	0	0%
	23	

41. 61% of grantees awarded SCF Small Grants over the last six years were user-led organisations, illustrating the SCF Small Grants scheme's importance in supporting hyper-local user-led community and grassroot voluntary groups.

Meeting Stronger Community Fund Sub-themes

42. 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 and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-28)

43. Over the last six years 80% of SCF grants awarded developed 'stronger neighbourhoods and communities' and 59% of SCF grants awarded 'promoted community health and wellbeing (Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy)' with just under half (42%) of all applications meeting both criteria. (See **Table 18**).

Table 18		
Stronger Communities Fund Sub-theme met	**Number of grants**	**% of total grants awarded**
Developing stronger neighbourhoods and communities	53	80%
Promoting community health and wellbeing (Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy)	39	59%
Both Sub-themes	28	42%

Preventing escalation of need

44. Over the last six years almost a third (30%) of all SCF 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.

45. For example, within the City of London there is huge disparity in income and pockets of depravation including low income households within Mansell Street Estate, Middlesex Street Estate and Golden Lane Estate. 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.

46. Falling between health and social care, toenail 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 has supported those with arthritis, back pain, lack of strength in hands, blood clotting issues, shaky hands, eyesight issues, obesity and dementia to have their toenails cut - 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 the need for further more complex medical intervention.

47. Mental ill health, especially that caused by isolation, has increased due to the pandemic with depression rates in the UK doubling since the COVID-19 pandemic began (Office for National Statistics, May 2021). Groups disproportionately affected are those affected 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 has provided 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. The SCF grant-funded programme of artist-led creative activities builds patrons' agency, resilience, confidence, social network and sense of belonging thus preventing escalation of need and avoiding costly in-patient services.

48. Whilst preventative grants are awarded across both SCF schemes, on average across the last six years almost half (42%) of the grants issued in the SCF Main Scheme were preventative. (See **Table 19**). 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 19

Financial Year	Number of Grants awarded	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%
2025/26	13	2	15%	8	2	25%
Total	**66**	**20**	**Av 30%**	**43**	**18**	**Av 42%**

Delivering key Department of Community & Children's Services Strategies

49. 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. SCF works in synergy with DCCS commissioned funds to deliver against a number of priorities within these key strategies.

50. 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*'.

51. CoL carers have reported that caring can have a significant impact on their health and emotional wellbeing. 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 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.

52. 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.

53. 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 session's for SEND children living in the City of London and well-being sessions for their parents and carers.

54. 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.

55. Intentionally, SCF delivers strongly against the **CoL's Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-28 Priority Two** 'Increasing Social Connection and Reducing Social Isolation'. Social isolation and lack of social connection has a profound impact on individuals leading to increased loneliness, depression, anxiety, and other physical health issues, such as heart disease and the risk of early mortality. The World Health

Organisation estimates that one in four older people experience social isolation and states that the effects of social isolation are comparable to well-established risk factors such as smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity. SCF's focus on supporting hyper-local volunteer-led community and residents' associations to bring communities together for shared celebrations such as Portsoken Activities Group summer trips, Positive Action Through Creativity's Mela in the City and Golden Lane Estate Events' (GLEE) annual programme reduce social isolation with funded initiatives such as The Jewish Square Mile's 'The Medieval Jewish Kitchen' at the Aldgate Centre forging community cohesion and shared understanding.

Delivering against City of London Corporate Plan Strategic Outcomes

56. 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 65% of all grants awarded delivering increased community cohesion and 61% of all grants reducing social isolation. (See **Table 20**). 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 60+ many of whom live alone and 58% of whom have some form of disability.

57. The SCF also strongly contributes to the CoL's Corporate Plan strategic outcome 'Providing excellent services' with 44% 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.

58. Interestingly, although not a requirement of the funding programme, 15% of grants awarded over the last six years met the Corporate Strategic outcome to 'Increase participation in co-creating and delivering services - Diverse engaged communities'.

Table 20

Main grant purpose (outcomes)/ Corporate Plan Strategic Outcome	Number of grants	% of grants
Increased Community Cohesion - 'Diverse engaged communities'	43	65%
Reduced Social Isolation - 'Diverse engaged communities'	40	61%
Improved mental or physical health - 'Providing excellent services'	29	44%
Increased participation in co-creating and delivering services - 'Diverse engaged communities'	10	15%
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

59. The SCF grant programme supports activities and services for a wide range of beneficiary groups. Many projects target more than one main beneficiary group. 39% of SCF funded activities over the last six years were for general beneficiaries, 33% of all funded projects benefitted older people, 24% benefitted families, 24% benefitted children under the age of 11, and 18% benefitted young people aged 11-25 years. (See **Table 21**).

Table 21			
Main grant beneficiary group/s	**Number of grants**	**% of grants**	**Example SCF grant funded projects**
General beneficiaries/ no specific target groups	26	39%	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	22	33%	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	16	24%	Portsoken Activities Group – £7,200 to provide community activities for Portsoken residents: Eid, Podium Party, seaside coach trips, Family Day & Kids Halloween Party.
Children < 11yr	16	24%	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	12	18%	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	10	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 global majority communities	11	17%	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	5	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

60. 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 six 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.

61. Analysis has evidenced the significant contribution of 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.

62. Importantly, 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 this is the Small Grants Scheme that provides the City's resident-led and grassroots voluntary groups with their first step on the funding ladder.

63. 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 the SCF Officers Panel 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 how to reduce 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, provision of City specific data and contextual information in relation to existing provision and potential demand.

    iv. Officers review the SCF policy and update the SCF web pages to better promote CFCMT's pre-application offer to potential applicants.

    v. Maximum SCF grant to be limited to £10,000 given the demand on the Fund and limited resources.

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 it 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?