City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Community and Children Services Committee	**Dated:** 30/6/2026
Subject: Stronger Communities Fund analysis and funding policy update	**Public:** For Decision
This proposal: • **delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes**	**Diverse Engaged Communities; Vibrant Thriving Destination**
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Simon Latham, Interim Managing Director, City Bridge Foundation
Report author:	Jack Joslin, Head of Funding and Charity Management Team

Summary

The Central Funding & Charity Management Team (CFCMT), formerly the Central Grants Unit, manages a portfolio of five funding programmes that support the delivery of activities and services primarily within the Square Mile. The ColC's Stronger Communities Fund (SCF), managed on behalf of the Department of Community & Children's Services (DCCS) by CFCMT, opened in October 2016 and the integration of the Small Grants Scheme into the SCF took place in February 2018. This report provides an overview of projects and services funded through the SCF in 2025/26 alongside a comprehensive analysis of SCF's grants awarded over the last six years and the fund's contribution to delivering both DCCS key strategies and City of London's Corporate Plan Strategic Outcomes. Members are also requested to approve a reduction in the maximum grant available, an updated SCF Policy and the SCF Officer Panel Terms of Reference.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. Note the recent grants awarded from the Stronger Communities Fund 2025/26 at **Appendix 2.**
2. Note the analysis of the Stronger Communities Fund over the last six years, and its impact for City of London communities at **Appendix 3**.
3. Approve a reduction in the maximum SCF grant available from £15,000 to £10,000.

4. Approve the updated Stronger Communities Fund Policy at **Appendix 4** and the SCF Officer Panel Terms of Reference at **Appendix 5.**

Main Report

Background

1. The Stronger Communities Fund (SCF) is one of a portfolio of four open grant funding programmes that form the City of London Corporation's (CoLC's) Central Grants Programme (CGP). The SCF opened in October 2016 and in February 2018 the Community and Children's Services Committee (CCSC) agreed to add Small Grants Scheme to the SCP, as there was no longer resource in the DCCS to deliver a Small Grants Scheme independently. The CCSC delegates the award of grants to Officers of the Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS).

2. The SCF awards grants to projects and services that are being delivered for the benefit of communities or beneficiaries within the City of London and/or its housing estates across London. 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'. (See **Appendix 1**).

3. A comprehensive grant management service for SCF and other City of London grant funding programmes is delivered by the CFCMT drawing on the team's expertise in the field of grant-making and in line with 'Open and Trusting' grant making practice. The CFCMT is a City of London-wide resource managing a number of other grant programmes on behalf of departments across the City of London including the Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund.

4. Management of the SCF process is aligned with the City's existing grant allocation process through the CFCMT. Applications to the SCF undergo a process of due diligence, assessment and financial review by Funding Managers before sign off by a Senior CFCMT Officer. Eligible applications are then presented to the SCF Officer Panel for delegated decision. The SCF Officer Panel comprises of three Senior DCCS Officers and is chaired by the Director – Commissioning & Partnerships. At the Officer Panel consideration is given to each proposal's alignment with the SCF criteria, outputs and outcomes, value for money in terms of social, environmental as well as financial value and equality considerations, levels of existing service provision and anticipated demand.

5. CFCMT Officers offer pre-application advice to potential applicants including those identified through proactive outreach. This successful outreach is reflected in the significant year-on-year increase in the number of applications in each of the last two years (average 49%).

Increase in applications for grants	2023/ 2024	2024/ 2025	2025/ 2026
Stronger Communities Fund	31	48	68
% increase in applications on previous year		**55%**	**42%**

Stronger Communities Fund Analysis of Grants Awarded over the last 6 years

6. **Appendix 3** provides a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the Stronger Communities Fund (SCF) over the last six years (2020-26) illustrating the contribution of the SCF in delivering both DCCS's key strategies and City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.

7. 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.

8. The SCF is vastly over-subscribed. Over the last 5 years since the pandemic applications to the SCF have quadrupled and this trend is set to continue. 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. A large proportion of these are ineligible and others do not meet the funding criteria or are not sufficiently evidenced in the they claims they make in relation to participation and partnerships.

9. Over the last six years, 2020-26, the SCF has distributed £453,494 across 66 grants to 41 unique organisations with an average value of grant awarded reduced to £5,536 (2025/26). Approximately a third of the funds each year are distributed as small grants (<£3k) and two-thirds are grants of up 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 the last two financial years 100% of grants awarded through SCF were to organisations with a turnover of less than £500k.

10. 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 worked with repeat applicants to support them to secure funding from the 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.

11. 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, grants to First Love Foundation ensured emergency advice and food support was available to City residents in crisis preventing families from sinking deeper into poverty.

12. 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 2022-25; Carers Strategy 2023-28; Safer City Partnership Strategy; SEND Strategy for Children and Young People; Strategy for Adult Social Care 2025-29.

13. 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 physical health issues such as heart disease. SCF's focus on supporting hyper-local volunteer-led community and residents' associations to bring communities together for shared celebrations reduce social isolation (such as in 2025/26 Portsoken Activities Group summer trips, Positive Action Through Creativity's Mela in the City and Golden Lane Estate Events' annual programme) with funded initiatives such as The Jewish Square Mile's 'Medieval Jewish Kitchen' at the Aldgate Centre forging community cohesion and shared understanding.

14. The SCF delivers against four CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. As expected, given the strategic focus of the fund, SCF strongly contributes to creating 'Diverse engaged communities' with 65% of 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 2025/26 funding for Mental Fight Club to deliver 'Sounds of Frustration' for residents and City workers experiencing mental health issues.

15. 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. 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.

Supporting strategic DCCS programmes through Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund (CILNF) grant funding

16. More than just an effective distributor of grant funding, the CFCMT has an increasingly important role in the support and development of the City's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). CoL's communities face unique challenges stemming from the scale and extensiveness of development locally

such as: the cost of private services, a lack of awareness of available support, distrust of statutory services, poor inter-locality mobility and a small VCS. Through CFCMT's programme of outreach, pre-application advice, information library, signposting and growing 'funder plus' offer, the team support VCS organisations delivering in the City to become better connected, collaborate more and secure the funding they need to provide local services.

17. In line with increasing demands on limited available City Fund and City Estate resources and reduction in commissioned funds, CFCMT has been actively working with DCCS and other CoLC Departments to identify gaps in service provision that can be met by grant-funding, working with external third parties to develop bespoke applications to meet this demand.

18. For example, in collaboration with DCCS, the Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund has funded Family Action to expand its City Food Club (£162,184), Hackney CVS (£76,565) to provide organisational development for the City's voluntary and community sector and Volunteer Centre Hackney (£246,479) to establish a Befriending Service and Volunteer Brokerage Service for the City. CFCMT has also worked with CoL Teams to CILNF-fund additional community infrastructure: Middlesex Street Estate podium & Community Room (£390,419); CoL Circular Economy Team's Library of Things (£88,469) providing low-cost tool rental; Barbican Library's Community Room (£449,550).

19. CFCMT is also working closely with DCCS to target CILNF grant-funding to ensure the ongoing provision of established community services adversely affected by reductions in commissioned funding: Society Links has been CILNF-funded (£90,238) to provide sports sessions in addition to its DCCS commissioned Youth Services; MRS Independent Living has been CILNF-funded (£37,415) to continue its Falls Prevention programme in the absence of available health service funding; Toynbee Hall has been funded (£499,955) to reinstate its 'CityAdvice' service for hidden City workers; Age UK Camden has been awarded CILNF funding (£371,591) to ensure the ongoing provision of activities for the City's large older population including new requested services (Handy Person service, Digital Connection home visits & Food Home Delivery).

Stronger Communities Fund Policy and management

20. Current SCF policy (**Appendix 1**) states that 'A Main Grants scheme is available for requests up to £10,000' however 'Grants of up to £20,000 will be considered in exceptional circumstances if the project takes place over a two-year period'. Due to the limited value of the fund (c.£73,333/year) in practice no grants of over £10,000 have been awarded since 2023/24. In response to growing demand and limited resources, Members are recommended to set the maximum grant awarded by SCF to £10,000. This will also better align the SCF with the CILNF (minimum grant £10,000) creating a coherent transition for organisations from one fund to another as their services grow.

21. To align the management of the SCF with other open funding programmes members are also requested to approve an updated SCF Policy (**Appendix 4**) which includes more specific details in relation to eligibility and exclusions and approve for the SCF Officer Panel Terms of Reference (**Appendix 5**).

Corporate & Strategic Implications

22. **Financial implications** – CFCMT Officer time to manage the SCF will be met by City Estate.

23. **Resource implications** – Officer time to manage the SCF and review its impact will be provided by the CFCMT as part of its management responsibility for CGP.

24. **Legal implications** – None.

25. **Strategic implications** – The delivery of the SCF providing support and services for communities in the City of London and City of London Corporation Housing Estates aligns to DCCS key strategies and to the City Corporation's Corporate Plan and stated aims of providing excellent services and creating diverse engaged communities.

26. **Risk implications** – All SCF grants are managed and monitored by CFCMT to mitigate risks in project delivery through provision of ongoing advice and support.

27. **Climate implications** – None.

28. **Equalities implications** – The purpose of the SCF is to fund 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 which either 'develop stronger neighbourhoods and communities' and/or 'promote 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'. Health inequalities disproportionally impact individuals and households from target equality groups, including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, older households, and those with disabilities. The delivery of the SCF contributes to tackling these inequalities.

29. **Security implications** – None.

Conclusion

30. The SCF is a highly impactful grant funding programme that contributes to the delivery of both the DCCS's key strategies and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. The SCF 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. The SCF remains the only City of London Corporation grant funding programme open to very small and grassroots organisations.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 –Stronger Communities Fund Policy July 2020 (current)
- Appendix 2 – Stronger Communities Fund – Grants awarded 2025/26
- Appendix 3 – Stronger Communities Fund Analysis of Grants 2020-26
- Appendix 4 – Stronger Communities Fund Policy June 2026 (updated)

- Appendix 5 – Stronger Communities Fund Officer Panel Terms of Reference

Background papers

None

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