

CIL Spending Panel – Tuesday 21 September 2021

Consideration of ‘lessons learnt’ from the first round of grant applications for CIL funding.

Report of the Planning Policy Manager

Summary

A successful exercise took place to distribute CIL funds to various types of infrastructure project in line with criteria agreed by Cabinet in the CIL Governance document. A second round is proposed. Consideration is given to a number of small changes to streamline the application processes.

Recommendation

That Cabinet is recommended to make changes to the CIL Spending - Application process as set out in Section 3 of this report.

Reason for Decision

To ensure an efficient process for applicants and promote the provision of infrastructure for the growing needs of the Borough through use of CIL.

1. Background

1.1 We sought applications for CIL funding from community organisations in January this year and applications closed 3 months later in April. Some 70+ applications were made, and ultimately decisions were made about all 58 of the valid application, at the 22 July meeting of the Panel. This was the first time the Borough Council had undertaken such an exercise, and it is appropriate to undertake an assessment of how it went and consider if changes are required for the next round.

2. Reviewing the process

2.1 Appendix 1 gives a number of discussion points reflecting experience of the various stages and elements of the CIL spending processes during the first round, and pre and post application. Members may wish to use this list to highlight other issues not discussed in detail below.

2.2 In general terms the application process went well, and a significant number of applications were actually made, and some £1,414,211.14 was supported / committed to projects.

3. Discussion of specific items recommended for amendment

- **Combination of the ‘Local’ and ‘Community’ categories** – These were originally differentiated to allow a relatively small amount of grant to be given. However, the categories of allowable projects in each category proved confusing for applicants. Many lower value schemes, found difficulty in

expressing how they were meeting the relevant criteria, but would have qualified if they had applied for more money (i.e. the next £ banding).

Members took a pragmatic view, but the initial analysis seemed too harsh.

- The wider set of projects that would be allowed for applications up to £50K will make applying a more straightforward affair. In essence these are all relatively small projects and the totality did not cause any financial stress on the fund.
- This leaves the £50K plus element of the fund (strategic projects) as it was, and criteria unchanged.
- The combined categories (renamed as 'Local Community' projects), are outlined in Appendix 2.
- **Timing and notice of the application period / notification of outcome** – The 3 month period for which the applications were open proved useful in giving time to prepare the relevant submission material, however it also meant a long wait for decisions on the projects for some applicants. The important consideration is applicants knowing when applications would be accepted and having time to prepare.
- The recommendation is that we set a more definite timetable so that applicants can prepare submissions and have less time waiting to hear the outcomes.
- It is proposed that we announce at the beginning of November that applications will be invited during January, with an outcome / offer letter and acceptance paperwork sent by the 01 May, following a meeting of the CIL Spending Panel (and other BC internal meetings) in March / April.

Other issues

- There were teething troubles with the administration of the process due to the fact it was the first ever round of our CIL application funding. Systems were new and officers and members were getting used to the procedures. A smoother process can be anticipated next time.

4. Options

4.1 The options above offer a modest adjustment to the CIL funding scheme to make it easier for communities to engage and apply so as to add to or improve infrastructure for a growing area.

4.2 Other more radical options could be to:

- Completely re-design the scheme. This is not felt appropriate as we are only in Year 1 and have not fully evaluated all the categories of spend, and the current priorities still reflect corporate priorities.
- No changes – This would fail to respond to the difficulties for applicants, and not help a more efficient processing for officers / time saving.

5. Policy implications

5.1 None as the broad direction is still the same. We are fulfilling the commitment to communities to engage and apply so as to add to or improve infrastructure for a growing area.

6. Financial implications

6.1 There is sufficient funding available to fund further applications, and the scoring mechanism provides a possibility of prioritizing bids should the scheme be over subscribed.

7. Personnel implications

7.1 None specifically, but it should enable officer time to be more efficiently used.

8. Statutory implications

8.1 Our spending and governance needs to conform to the relevant Regulations.

9. Risk Management implications

9.1 None specifically. Monitoring of spending and more particularly delivery is important to ensure money is directed to improved infrastructure in the Borough.

10. Corporate priorities

10.1 The proposals in the document are firmly referenced back to the Corporate priorities.

11. Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

(Pre-screening report template attached)

12. Declarations of Interest/Dispensations Granted

12.1. None.

13. Conclusion

Some modest changes to the application categories (although not the criteria) are proposed to aid the application process, and a clearer timetable for the next round will be set out.

Background papers

None specifically, although the grant applications and the outcomes referred to are contained in the CIL Spending Panel meeting notes for 22 July 2021

Appendix 1

CIL Spending – Notes on recent grant applications processes / potential action points

Subject / aspect of the process	Comment / Issues ?	Action <i>(Highlighted points discussed in main report)</i>
Application submission Streamlining the application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We clearly set out categories of projects, but some applications didn't reflect the right categories. Could we simplify advice on how to apply? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we simplify / streamline the application process? • Combine some categories to simplify the application process.
Post application submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great deal of telephone / email traffic on needing help to apply / fill in forms. Time consuming to service. • Pressure from applicants on needing a decision for projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced use of the website
CIL Spending Panel / internal processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIL Spending Panel consideration of grant applications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentation of material was clear / comprehensive ○ Decision making straightforward. ○ More clarity for subsequent internal BC processes. ○ Post decision processes took longer than anticipated given first time nature of the exercise. One off. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we simplify / streamline? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reporting ○ Agreement details. ○ communicating to applicants • As above combine categories
Communications on outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very important to ensure clear communications. • There was press coverage post Spending Panel meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Comms engaged early.
Grant categories / priorities – new /	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • x3 levels of projects, with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we simplify criteria?

flexibility of spending ideas / priorities	<p>different criteria for each. People didn't always read the guidance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are priorities still relevant? • Are there other potential categories? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should criteria be expanded? • Categories themselves are quite wide already, suggest no change but continue to monitor types of applications. • Combining categories outlined above.
Next round – when, whom, how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipated that we would undertake x2 rounds each year. • The number of applications was surprising and a challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce towards the end of the year?
Timeframes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last time we gave 3 months for applicants to apply, would a shorter period be appropriate? • Another round when? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest another 3 months period? • Include an announcement
Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious about the officer effort required to launch another round of bids / application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how to ensure internally that sufficient time is available to service the grant applications / spending / implementation.

Appendix 2

Local Community Projects

The current list of projects eligible for funding and the eligibility criteria are:

Education - Improving social mobility and inclusion to work with partners to improve education attainment levels and the skills of local people.

Health - Improving social mobility and inclusion by continuing to assist our residents to maximise their opportunities by accessing the support and services they are entitled to.

Economic Development - Delivering growth in the economy and with local housing to promote the borough as a vibrant place in which to live, to do business and as a leading visitor and cultural destination.

Community Facilities - Creating and maintaining good quality places that make a positive difference to people's lives to maintain accessible, clean, pleasant and safe public places and communities.

Green Infrastructure - Helping to improve the health and well-being of our communities by supporting our local communities to be healthy and more active

Open Space and Leisure - Creating and maintaining good quality places that make a positive difference to people's lives to maintain accessible, clean, pleasant and safe public places and communities and help to improve the health and well-being of our communities

Community Transport - Creating and maintaining good quality places that make a positive difference to people's lives and helping to improve the health and well-being of our communities by providing early help and support to communities and individuals who are vulnerable.

Applications for funding up to a CIL contribution limit of £50K