

For general release

REPORT TO:	SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE 22 March 2016
AGENDA ITEM:	7
SUBJECT:	STRONGER COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP
LEAD OFFICER:	Sarah Ireland Director of Strategy, Communities and Commissioning
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Mark Watson, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Justice
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Sharon Godman, Head of Strategy and Communities

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item is contained in the Committee's work programme
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	<p>At its meeting in January 2015, the Committee heard that the Stronger Communities Partnership had just been launched with a view to bringing a wide range of organisations together to build community cohesion in the borough.</p> <p>12-months on, the Committee aims to review progress on delivery against the objectives of the Partnership.</p> <p>In addition, the Committee would like to consider matters relating to the Active Communities Fund including assessing the number, impact and reach of the grants awarded to date.</p>

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made by the Stronger Communities Partnership Board since February 2015. It also sets out the forthcoming work programme of the board as well as detailing the links to the Prevent programme.

1.2 Following on from this, the report looks at the Active Communities Fund and sets out how many and what types of projects have been supported and how much funding has been awarded. Finally, the report looks at the proposed changes to the Active Communities Fund to ensure it best meets the needs of potential applicants.

2. STRONGER COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP

2.1 The Stronger Communities Partnership Board was established in November 2014 to oversee and co-ordinate the development of Croydon’s communities agenda and has met five times.

2.2 The board has considered a wide range of issues in this time. The main agenda items considered so far include; the Opportunity and Fairness Commission, priorities for the Stronger Communities Partnership Board, Stop and Search, Preventing Extremism, developing a new Stronger Communities Plan and the New Community Fund.

2.3 The table below sets out details of just some of the actions that have been undertaken in response to these priorities.

Draft Priority	What action has been taken?	Next Steps
Make Croydon a place of opportunity and fairness by tackling inequality, disadvantage and exclusion.	Established the Opportunity and Fairness Commission which has recently published its final report.	The Opportunity and Fairness Commission report will inform the development of the Stronger Communities Plan due to be presented at Cabinet in June 2016.
Foster community relations, activity and integration by providing opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together in meaningful interaction.	The Council and its partners have organised and hosted a whole range of events designed to foster community relations and integration (e.g. Faith events; Diwali celebration, Big Lunch, Black History Month Launch, the first	There is a comprehensive schedule of events to organise and deliver in 2016. The Board is exploring new ways to work with the community to deliver events that build cohesion and promote equality such as ‘LGBT Big Night Out’ and

	Croydon Craft Beer Festival, interfaith Eid celebration and London Rd Carnival).	'Interfaith Week.
Promote a thriving, active and joined-up community, faith and voluntary sector that works in partnership with the public and private sector to improve outcomes for local people.	<p>Extended the current commissioning arrangements to wait for the Opportunity and Fairness Commission.</p> <p>Reviewed the current commissioning arrangements and engaging with the voluntary sector.</p>	<p>Launch the new community fund prospectus at the end of March 2016.</p> <p>Deliver a programme of commissioning support activity.</p> <p>Outcomes of the community fund commissioning will be reported back to the Stronger Communities Board and regularly thereafter.</p> <p>New small grants programme to be reported to the stronger communities board.</p>
Promote active communities so that local people can do things that matter most to them and their neighbourhoods.	The Council and CVA worked on the development of the Big Local initiative – in Broad Green. The community-based governance is in place.	<p>Big Local – An action plan is currently being drafted for consideration at the end of March.</p> <p>Progress will be reported back to the Stronger Communities Board and regularly thereafter.</p>
Encourage community empowerment and engagement across all our communities so that they can participate and influence local priorities.	Implemented community ward budgets comprising £6k for each ward in the borough.	<p>Review the community ward budgets presenting an update report at cabinet in June and a full report in September 2016</p> <p>Progress will be reported back to the Stronger</p>

		Communities Board and regularly thereafter.
Encourage a greater community response to tough issues so that together we can change attitudes and behaviors.	Held a meeting with key members of the Muslim community. The meeting was led by one of the Stronger Community Partnership Board's faith representatives and included presentations from Croydon Mosque, the Met Police's Muslim Contact Unit and the Council's Director of safety.	Established a community cohesion group to explore activity and information to promote better community relations working closely with the Safer Croydon Partnership Board that leads on Hate Crime and Preventing Extremism. Invite the Muslim Contact Unit to host a Met-P event in Croydon.

2.4 **Next steps**

The Board is on the process of reviewing its membership because some members have moved away from Croydon and been replaced by another representative from the organisation or sector, the recent Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance elections have identified eight new members to replace those that served their year, and the Residents Association Forum has not taken up their allotted places and therefore, alternative attendees from local businesses/community have been invited to join.

2.5 The Board is in the process of developing its Stronger Communities Plan 2016 – 2019 and in doing so has considered a range of evidence drawn from the Borough Profile, Index of Multiple Deprivation as well as the Opportunity and Fairness Commission. Its proposed outcomes for 2016 – 19 are that Croydon is a place:

- Of opportunity and fairness where people are empowered to participate and influence local priorities, addressing the conditions that lead to inequality, disadvantage and exclusion;
- Where people from different backgrounds get on well together and play an active role in their neighbourhoods and communities doing the things that matter most to them;
- That encourages a thriving and vibrant community, faith and voluntary sector.

2.6 Key activities involve undertaking reviews of volunteering in the borough, interfaith activity and dialogue active community fund, as well as exploring opportunities presented through national cohesive communities programme and any associated funding.

2.7 The Board is in the process of establishing two sub groups to help deliver its objectives. The first, an officer-level external funding sub group, will help to leverage more funding to the community and voluntary sector. The second is the Community Cohesion Sub Group. The initial meeting has taken place although membership and terms of reference for this latter sub group are still to be finalised.

3.0 **PREVENT PROGRAMME**

3.1 Responsibility for the Prevent programme falls with the Safer Croydon Partnership Board. However, the Community Cohesion Sub Group will have a role to play in developing the community response to this issue. The sub group has representation from the Safer Croydon Partnership Board as well as the Stronger Communities Partnership Board. This will ensure that actions are joined up and complementary.

4. **ACTIVE COMMUNITIES FUND – CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS**

4.1 The aim of the small grants programme is to create an environment for a vibrant and thriving community, faith and voluntary sector. Since its inception in 2011, the Active Community Fund, comprising 'Micro Grants' (up to £1,000) and 'Small Grants' (up to £5,000) has funded 127 projects with a total value of £468,210. Projects are assessed by council officers alongside a panel made up of representatives from the community and voluntary sector, private sector and youth parliament.

4.2 Both the geographic reach and the sectors supported are broad. For example, the 17 projects supported by the Panel in March 2015, included borough-wide activities as well as others based in Crystal Palace, South Norwood, central Croydon, Thornton Heath, Shirley and Old Coulsdon. Some projects were aimed at the wider population, whilst others supported specific sectors such as older people, young people, people affected by welfare reforms, BME women and the Asperger's Community.

4.3 A wide variety of outcomes have been enabled, for example;

- £4,770 to the SAVVY Theatre, to explore the topic of Hidden Disabilities with 20-30 adults with learning disabilities.
- £5,000 to the Friends of Grange Park, Old Coulsdon as match funding for playground improvements.
- £2,000 to St Giles School, to provide raised beds and outdoor shelter to provide gardening activities for children aged 4-19 years old with learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

5. ACTIVE COMMUNITIES FUND – PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The Active Community Fund (small grants) is an important way the council supports creating an environment for a vibrant and thriving community, faith and voluntary sector. It has been running for five years and has had periodic reviews following feedback from the community. Whilst the fund has been well received and valued by the community, faith and voluntary sector, there are concerns about the process. These primarily relate to lead-in time for applications, the length/complexity of the application process, and a lack of new or innovative ideas. To help address these concerns and to ensure it best meets the needs of potential applicants, a new approach is being developed. The proposed options for change are set out below.
- 5.2 Timescales – currently, Small Grants are invited twice a year and applications need to be in approximately 7 months before the proposed event/project start. Micro grants are invited every 2 months and need to be applied for approximately 4 months before the event/project start. One way to speed up the process could be to invite applications on a monthly basis. This would mean applicants would need to apply approximately 3 months before the event/project start.
- 5.3 Grant Types – The council working would seek to design a new application process that makes the fund more responsive and less bureaucratic, removes the need to have two types of grant. There will be just one application process that covers all applications up to £5,000.
- 5.4 Application routes – An option is to establish a two part application process involving submitting either a a brief, one side of A4 project overview or a 5 minute maximum video setting out their idea which is considered by officers before any further work is undertaken by the community or voluntary sector group. If the idea meets the outcomes the fund is seeking to address then it can be taken forward then the second process would involve meeting with officers to develop an application to the fund.
- 5.6 Faster process – The shift from the current arrangements that centre on a bi-annual, panel approach to a new more ‘fleet of foot’ model will mean it is not feasible to run the ideas past a collective in this way. Therefore, a new model will rely upon officer recommendations to senior officers in consultation with the cabinet member.
- 5.7 Evaluation– It is proposed reports are produced for the stronger communities board outlining projects in the pipeline, projects that receive funding as well as an annual report outlining the outcomes of the fund.
- 5.8 Improved communication and publication - The council will seek to promote the new Fund as widely as possible and as a condition of grant ensure recipients publicise the project and the outcome. For example, a festival that receives funding from the council’ Fund would be expected to display the logo and website details on their website, posters and flyers.



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