Item 6 (a)

17th September 2024

Glasgow Community Planning Partnership
Southside Central Area Partnership

Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, Regeneration & Sustainability & Head of Communities

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Neighbourhood Infrastructure Fund – progress update

Purpose of Report:

To provide the Area Partnership with a progress update in relation to the process to support the Neighbourhood Infrastructure Fund, a summary of commitments to date, and highlight the criteria for further spending of the fund.

Recommendations:

The Area Partnership is asked to note the contents of the report and advise of any approved spend to allow this to be programmed and actioned.

1. Introduction and progress to date

1.1 The Neighbourhood Infrastructure Fund provides an opportunity to implement participatory budgeting (see here for background on Participatory Budgeting) at scale with an approved budget set in 2021/22 of £23million, which carries into 2026. The budget assigned the decision making in relation to this fund to Area Partnerships, with £1million allocated to each ward. This report provides an update regarding the Area Partnership's position in relation to this.

1.2 In parallel, the Centre of Civic Innovation within NRS developed a citizen engagement model to support the NIIF decision-making process as well as assist with future initiatives. An update in relation to this work is provided below.

1.3 It is worth noting that this funding is capital expenditure and therefore can be carried forward to be spent in future financial years, though funding should be fully committed by March 2027.

2. Criteria for the fund

2.1 As stated above, the £1 million is designated for **capital expenditure**, which means it must be spent on Council infrastructure i.e., physical things in Council ownership. The funding was not intended to replicate Grant Funding for other bodies. The early pilots identified several themes to help communities come up with ideas and think about the kind of things that the money can be used to improve. These are:

- Open and green spaces, including specific tree projects
- Spaces for leisure and play, including community buildings
- Street furniture
- Street lighting and CCTV
- Condition of roads
- Condition of pavements
- Road safety and crossings
- Impact of flooding
- General improvements to the environment

2.2 The fund is not intended to be used for consultancy work, for example, the carrying out of community engagement work to find out what projects the community are interested in. It may, in circumstances where Council services require external assistance, be used for technical consultancy fees which are required to develop and deliver a capital project, such as architects or streetscape designers to help communities redesign civic spaces.

2.3 Following discussion with Area Partnership Chairs, and the need to ensure appropriate governance for public funding, criteria for NIIF funding decisions was reviewed by senior officers within the Council, including Internal Audit and Corporate Finance. The objective was to ensure the use of funds was in keeping with the Council decision in February 2022 (https://onlineservices.glasgow.gov.uk/councillorsandcommittees/Agenda.asp?meetingid=17982). This process was also set to ensure that all NIIF decisions are aligned to external audit requirements.

2.4 The original budget option was for £1m, approved at the 2022/23 Budget Council meeting on 17 February 2022 under Capital Investment. The wording was:

"22NR59 - Provide £1million to each Area Partnership to support infrastructure improvements within neighbourhoods. Each AP will be presented with options for investment, examples of which could include pothole and pavement repairs, improving street lighting, new street furniture such as benches or bollards, and improved traffic signals and pedestrian crossings."

2.5 The review concluded that the Council decision requires the fund to be used to improve spaces that are the responsibility of the Council, such as those outlined in the list in 2.1 above.

2.6 In terms of geographic priorities within the Ward, the Area Partnership shall determine where the greatest need lies. This need may be informed by a variety of factors, such as neighbourhoods lacking in greenspaces or play areas, places that people feel unsafe in, or areas with very poor roads or pavements. The Area Partnership can also use their local knowledge to prioritise ideas that have already been identified through recent, robust community engagement activity, or consider opportunities to add value to wider, planned capital projects in the ward. For example, Area Partnerships may consider ideas which have grown from recent Liveable Neighbourhoods consultations, or from communities developing Locality Plans or Local Place Plans. In some cases, the Ward may be benefitting from larger local developments such as those via Levelling Up funding or Clyde Gateway and Area Partnerships could direct the NIIF to enhance and complement these developments. NIIF can also be aligned with wider Council policies and strategies, enhancing strategic commitments within a Ward.

2,7 To further support this, NRS will bring their programme of annual works to the Area Partnership each May. This will help avoid duplication and allow for the possibility of developing projects that complement planned work.

2.8 Whatever is proposed must be informed by community engagement, even if the Area Partnership is not following a full participatory budgeting process. (See separate report on community engagement).

2.9 *As a minimum*, community representatives on the Area Partnership need to go back to their own community organisations to discuss ideas relating to the options in section 2.1 and potentially create a set of priorities for capital projects for their area. This would take place at their community council, or other community led organisation. The content of wider community dialogue on priorities will be brought to the Area Partnership for the funding meetings, but Partnerships should be mindful that this may not cover all areas of the ward. For example, some community councils are inactive. Consideration should be given by the AP as to how this gap might be filled, and support will be given by the Senior Officer (Communities) and other colleagues in the Communities Team and beyond to make this engagement happen.

2.10 In addition, the Area Partnerships should give special consideration to engagement with groups that may not be typically represented via community structures, such as disabled people, who may have additional mobility and other needs that are pertinent to projects in the local environment. Again, support will be given from the Senior Officer (Communities) and other colleagues in relation to this.

3. Progress Update of Fund (See Appendix 1)

4. Managing expectations

4.1 The NIIF project has meant an increase in the workload of the existing teams within the Communities Team and the project delivery teams within NRS. Participatory budgeting at scale has resulted in a large volume of requests, many at low level, that have required a significant investment of resources to understand the request, build a specification and in some cases visit the sites, provide costings, and then build into the already challenging infrastructure delivery plans. All of which must be carried out with due diligence by the Council. This equally applies to the Area Partnerships that have used a more traditional method of allocating funds so far. All this has meant that the actual delivery of the funded projects has been slower than some Area Partnerships might like.

4.2 The process is new for the Council, and we are all learning as we go, particularly from the first two pilots. This learning and evaluation has led to agreed funding for an officer within NRS to oversee the project process. This means that some of the frustrations felt by Area Partnerships and officers who are working hard to support the process, across various teams, should be resolved in future.

4.3 A simple process has now been developed for ideas to be submitted, listed, costed and submitted back to APs for approval, which involves the Communities Team and the NRS Governance team, who will liaise with the various officers across the Council (mostly NRS) that require to input to the process. This should lead to an improvement in relation to this, as well as better tracking of requests, commitments, and approvals.

5. Recommendations

The Area Partnership is asked to note the contents of the report and advise of any approved spend to allow this to be programmed and actioned.