



Glasgow City Council

City Administration Committee

Report by Susan Aitken, Leader of the Council and Convener for City and City Region Economy and Just Transition

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Item 2

4th June 2026

SOCIAL INNOVATION CHALLENGE FUND

Purpose of Report:

To seek committee approval for funding of the Social Innovation Challenge Fund for 2026-2027

Recommendations:

Committee is asked to:

- Approve the 2026-2027 programme as outlined in this report; and
- Note that progress updates will be provided to the Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee.

Ward No(s):

Citywide: ✓

Local member(s) advised: Yes No consulted: Yes No

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Social Innovation Challenge Fund is designed to support underrepresented groups in Glasgow, by breaking down the systemic barriers they face in accessing business support and starting small businesses.
- 1.2 Organisations are encouraged to co-design and deliver interventions for groups such as female or minority ethnic community entrepreneurs, or to act as a bridge to existing support services.
- 1.3 The first iteration of the Challenge Fund ran in Financial Year 25/26 and concluded in March 2026.
- 1.4 It is proposed that the Challenge Fund continues into Financial Year 2026/27, to build on last year's successes, and continue to support the development of innovative efforts to tackle the entrenched barriers faced by underrepresented groups. The fund is valued at £250,000, which is sourced from Glasgow's Business Loans Scotland budget. Drawdown of this budget was approved by committee on the 24th October 2024.

2 Background

- 2.1 Between 2022 and 2023, Glasgow participated in the Harvard Bloomberg Innovation Track 6, a cohort-based training model designed to support cities to adopt a design-based innovation approach to solving challenges in new ways.
- 2.2 Glasgow identified barriers to entrepreneurship as our challenge to explore, with it quickly becoming clear that these exist in particular for women, minority ethnic communities, and younger and older people from areas with high levels of social deprivation.
- 2.3 One recommendation to address these issues was the creation of the Social Innovation Challenge Fund, with the aim of empowering organisations with lived experience of these barriers to work collaboratively with GCC Economic Development team to create new services, broaden existing programmes of support, catalyse innovation, and stimulate entrepreneurship.

3 2025-2026 Programmes

- 3.1 Following a robust engagement and application process, four organisations were awarded funding totalling £230,907.

Community Renewal Trust

Approved Project	Roma Entrepreneurship Programme
Project Overview	Delivery focused in Govanhill, aimed at engaging with participants from the Roma Community. The project delivered one-to-one mentoring, business training, financial

	literacy support and access to funding opportunities, ensuring culturally tailored, multilingual business support.
Funding awarded	£69,262

Collective Communities CIC

Approved Project	Collective Communities Circle
Project Overview	Delivery took place in the Glasgow Collective in the Calton ward, with participants drawn from across the city supported to access a thriving local business community network and access a rolling programme of tailored business guidance, start up support and peer mentorship.
Funding awarded	£60,431

West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC)

Approved Project	Bridge to Business – Minority Ethnic Pathway to Progress
Project Overview	Delivery was based within the Canal ward of the city, supporting participants from across Glasgow to access bilingual and culturally sensitive support, training, and mentorship to help individuals gain the knowledge and confidence needed to start businesses and support to enhance entrepreneurial skills.
Funding awarded	£51,216

Gilded Lily Inspiring Enterprise CIC

Approved Project	Her Future Enterprise
Project Overview	Based in the Govan ward, the programme offered dedicated support to trauma-experienced women, with support delivered in a safe, women-only space. The programme provided training, mentorship, and access to resources to help aspiring entrepreneurs turn their ideas into viable enterprises, and also made direct links to female advisers within Glasgow City Council.
Funding awarded	£49,998

3.2 Across the four programmes, outputs achieved to date include:

- Over 100 participants successfully engaged,

- More than 25 people were referred into and are engaging with GCC Business Growth Team,
- 7 new businesses registered and trading,
- 39 new community partners engaged with.

Outputs are anticipated to increase as final programme monitoring is shared and participants now engaging with GCC are supported to start their business.

4 Social Innovation Challenge Fund 2026-2027

4.1 The Social Innovation Challenge Fund 2026-2027 looks to build on the success of last year's programme. The key addition to eligibility for this year's fund is that sole traders were also invited to apply to collaborate on programmes of support.

4.2 **Engagement and Application Process.** The Business Growth team hosted two information sessions in December 2025, to outline the aims, objectives, and eligibility criteria of the fund. These sessions attracted registrations from 104 unique organisations, with further information sent to 12 additional organisations who were unable to attend.

4.3 **Expression of Interest.** Interested organisations were invited to submit an Expression of Interest, outlining their proposed programme delivery and associated costs. The Expression of Interest period was open between the 1st of December 2025 and the 9th of January 2026.

4.4 52 EOIs were received, reviewed and, where appropriate, further developed with input from the Business Growth team. This allowed innovative ideas to be transformed into viable applications and facilitated engagement between applicants, with the potential for future collaborations to be developed.

4.5 **Formal Applications** were due by 1.00 pm on 12th February 2025, with a total of 32 applications received. These applications were reviewed for eligibility, alignment to the fund's aims, objectives and themes, and on deliverability.

4.6 The highest scoring 14 applications were passed to the Expert Advisory Group, made up of individuals with lived experience of the systemic barriers the fund aims to overcome.

4.7 Top Scoring Applications

Community Renewal Trust

Approved Project	Roma Start Ups – Inclusive Enterprise Pathways
Project Overview	This programme aims to deliver culturally competent enterprise support for Roma adults, women, and young people in Govanhill. It focuses on empowering local communities and also acts as a trusted bridge into Glasgow

	<p>City Council and partner business support services, widening access to the city's enterprise ecosystem.</p> <p>Delivery will be within the Southside Central Ward, with a focus on Govanhill, aiming to engage with 35-40 participants. The project will deliver one-to-one mentoring, business training, financial literacy support, and access to funding opportunities, ensuring culturally tailored, multilingual business support.</p>
Funding requested	£76,637

Gilded Lily Inspiring Enterprise CIC

Approved Project	Her Future Enterprise
Project Overview	<p>This initiative seeks to provide grassroots enterprise support for female entrepreneurs to start or scale their own business. It provides training, mentorship, and access to resources to help aspiring entrepreneurs turn their ideas into viable enterprises. Participants will be drawn from a trauma-experienced background.</p> <p>Delivery will be based in the Govan ward, and aim to engage with 24 participants, supporting a minimum of 6 to establish Ethnic Minority, female-led businesses.</p>
Funding requested	£49,994

Collective Communities CIC

Approved Project	Rolling Circle
Project Overview	<p>This initiative will deliver an enhanced, evidence-led version of the Collective Communities Circle, supporting up to 45 underrepresented early-stage entrepreneurs through a rolling, place-based cohort model. Three cohorts of up to 15 participants will complete a 12-week programme of six structured sessions covering idea development, peer support, ecosystem navigation, business planning, funding, and marketing, followed by continued access to the workspace, peer networks and cross-cohort activity over 12 months.</p>
Funding requested	£68,328

Strange Field

Approved Project	Subtle Systems: Event Enterprise Development Programme
Project Overview	<p>This initiative seeks to support 30 underrepresented young adults aged 18-30 from areas with high levels of social deprivation in Glasgow, to establish freelance businesses at live events. The 12 week programme combines technical training with enterprise development, such as sole trader registration, pricing, contracts and business planning.</p> <p>The programme will be based within the Calton ward and draw participants from across the city, and aim to engage with 30 participants.</p>
Funding requested	£60,553

5 Social Innovation Challenge Fund 2026/27

- 5.1 It is proposed that the 4 top scoring applications are awarded funding noted above totalling £255,512 which would utilise the full 2026/67 budget and also draw upon a small underspend from the 25/26 budget.
- 5.2 Successful applicants for funding will be subject to three, six and twelve-monthly monitoring reviews to gauge progress and the impact funding has had in relation to fund outcomes.
- 5.3 It is proposed that 40% of funding is awarded at the beginning of each programme, 40% after three months upon meeting of initial project milestones, 20% after six months, provided milestones have been met.
- 5.4 All proposed activity must be delivered, and all project costs incurred by 31st March 2027.

6 Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

- Financial:* Outcomes will be maximised through targeted use of resources and joint working and resourcing with partners.
- Legal:* There will be no new legal issues presented by the fund.
- Personnel:* The input by the Council into the preparation, deliverance and monitoring of the Challenge Fund will be carried out by existing staff.
- Procurement:* There are no procurement implications.

Council Strategic Plan: *Grand Challenge 1: Reduce Poverty and inequality in our communities.*
Grand Challenge 2: Increase opportunity and prosperity for all our citizens
Grand Challenge 4: Enable staff to deliver essential services in a sustainable, innovative, and efficient way for our communities.

Economic Strategy 2022-2030:

- Supporting the themes:
 - “Growing our Economy” – promoting entrepreneurship in the city.
 - “Innovation” – social innovation and engaging communities.
 - “A Fairer Glasgow” – working with diverse and community wealth building.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council’s Equality Outcomes 2025-29

The project specifically looks to focus on supporting the entry and progression of under-represented groups in entrepreneurship.

The proposal has the potential to impact on the council Equality Outcomes in relation to the following improvement aims:
Improve economic outcomes for people with Protected Characteristics; and
Improve access to council Family services by people with protected characteristics.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

Positive impacts through a focus on lack of opportunities available to ethnic minority groups and under-represented groups when seeking to start a business.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio economic disadvantage.

The immediate benefits will lead to people from underrepresented groups taking the first steps to becoming successful entrepreneurs. They will be provided with advice and support through the Business Glasgow team, in collaboration with our partner organisations, and through local community groups. This will lead to skills, training and employment for local communities.

Climate Impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:

This process will widen access to the city's SME base who will be signposted to available Green Business Support programmes.

What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?

Reduction in CO2 emissions for the business sector through organisations and new business's supporting innovation for cleaner and greener processes.

Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?

Yes, by working towards reducing the carbon footprint of successful organisations who are awarded funding and the resulting start-up businesses.

Privacy and Data Protection impacts:

This report has no impacts upon privacy or data protection.

7 Recommendations

7.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Approve the 2026-2027 programme as outlined in this report; and
- Note that progress updates will be provided to the Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee.