

Communities Scrutiny Commission

20 November 2023



Report of: Hugh Evans

Title: Community Resilience Fund participatory decision making

Ward: Citywide

Officer(s) Presenting Report: Ellie Stevens, Community Resources Manager

Recommendation: To consider the impact and learning resulting from the CRF process of participatory decision making and opportunities to build on this

The significant issues in the report are:

Bristol City Council (BCC) is investing £4m capital funding in 53 community and voluntary sector projects in the most deprived areas of Bristol, and in citywide equality groups.

The decisions about how the funding will be allocated were made by groups of citizens, community and voluntary sector groups and elected ward councillors. This was an action learning process.



1. Summary

Community Resilience Fund (CRF) is a £4,000,000 capital grant fund to invest in the recovery and resilience of the Voluntary and Community Sector from April 2023 to March 2026, and in doing so grow the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequity.

100 citizens as well as community and voluntary groups and ward councilors worked together in facilitated meetings to consider 116 applications and make decisions about the priorities in their communities.

2. Purpose

To share the process, impact and learning from CRF.

2.1 Why CRF?

The Community Resilience Fund is a one-off capital grant fund established in response to the recommendations of the report *Designing a New Social Reality* (Black South-West Network, in partnership with Voscur and Locality) which considered the impact of the COVID pandemic on the community and voluntary sector and as part of an overall goal to build city resilience by growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality.

The community resilience fund was developed for the following reasons:

- a. In recognition of the impact of the COVID pandemic on community spaces, which are so important for community life. The importance of these spaces was seen in the community response to the cost of living crisis. The CRF supports communities to develop practical projects which will grow self-sufficiency through increasing the ability of voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) to generate income, save money and continue to connect people in well maintained, accessible community spaces.
- b. As part of our commitment to respond positively to the challenge and recommendations set out in *Designing a New Social Reality*:
 - To create more capital, allowing revenue streams to be re-established and assets to be managed effectively
 - To fund equitably and for the long term
 - To find more collaborative ways of working
 - To build community agency and community wealth
- c. To take learning from Port Community Resilience Fund, the Bristol Citizen's Assembly, and the approach to distributing the devolved Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and continue building participatory approaches to decision making.

2.2 Who could apply?

The capital fund is for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations which:

- Meet BCC baseline standards
- Are able to spend the grant by September 2025

2.3 Where is funding allocated?

The funding is allocated to areas and communities experiencing the greatest inequity. The neighbourhood fund is worth £3,200,000 and is allocated to organisations and projects in areas which fall within the 30% most deprived in Bristol. The equalities fund is worth £800,000 and is allocated to equalities organisations or projects which are demonstrably run by members of the communities they represent and work with (Organisations 'of').

2.4 CRF priorities

There are six priorities of the CRF:

1. Environmental sustainability
2. Financial security
3. Accessibility

Accessibility includes physical access for Disabled people. Broader accessibility concerns are also given consideration, for example, how a community facility can appeal to people of different ages and different cultures.

4. Digital infrastructure
5. Equipment which contributes to any of the above
6. Other (allowing for community identified priorities)

2.5 CRF process

The CRF participatory process happened as follows:

Stage 0: Co-design of the decision-making process, working with 25 organisations and 32 ward councillors over a period on six months. This was facilitated by TPX Impact who provided expertise about deliberative democracy- why do it, how to do it, important values and principles and other considerations. The CRF project team and TPX Impact worked closely with 8 VCSE partners who formed a 'Design Team'. After considering various options for participatory decision making, including voting, it was agreed to take a consensus-based approach to decision making.

Stage 1: Community/neighbourhood-level conversations were led by VCSE organisations, to understand the opportunities and priorities for capital investment. This generated a long list of outline proposals for projects. VCSE organisations were paid for their work on this research and engagement stage. In early discussion with VCSE partners this stage was felt to be important to ensure small, volunteer-led groups did not miss out.

Stage 2: 100 residents from diverse backgrounds, 22 ward councillors from across political parties and VCSE representatives took part in decision making. They considered proposals from 116 organisations with a total request of £12million. Discussions were facilitated, resources and expertise were made available to help the decision-making process. For example, advice on access for Disabled people, or on environmental sustainability.

To support the governance there was an Oversight Group made up of expert partners from across the VCSE sector, infrastructure organisations and the council. There is now a Capital

Working Group of the same make up, whose purpose is to support the next phase of the CRF programme and wider support to the sector around assets and capital projects.

2.6 Impact of process and grant

53 projects were awarded funding (40 neighbourhood-based, and 13 citywide, equalities-based). 29 facilitators from VCSE organisations and the council were trained to facilitate participatory and deliberative processes. As a result of the conversations CRF facilitated, we have greater clarity concerning the need for capital investment in VCSE infrastructure and assets. Connections have developed between experts in the city and VCSEs. Trust and mutual understanding has been built between participants. The Council and the VCSE sector together developed resources and skills to support participatory decision making.

2.7 Participation

It is important that the people involved in decision making reflect the diversity of Bristol. 230 expressions of interest were received from residents who wanted to take part in the CRF process in one month. We ran an open process with basic eligibility criteria (over 16, Bristol resident, living in most deprived area or part of an equality community). We used social media advertising as part of a network approach to recruiting participants. We also worked with partner organisations and community development colleagues to reach people. We had an intended participant profile for each decision making group. We then used a random sampling method to select anonymised participants whose demographics fit our intended profile. Where there were gaps in representation, we did intentional work to fill them.

Of the 100 participants:

- 29% were over 55 (Bristol average 22%)
- 13% were young people (Bristol average 15%)
- 68% were women (Bristol average 50%)
- 28% were Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people (Bristol average 15%)
- 25% were Disabled people (Bristol average 9.3%)
- 18% were LGBT people (Bristol average 11%)
- 24% were social renters (Bristol average 15%)

Resident participants gave more than 1,313 hours of their time. The cost of paying for their participation was £13,379.10 + £870.99 of expenses to enable participation (e.g. childcare, travel, personal assistance for Disabled people).

2.8 Resident responses

All participants in the decision making were invited to complete a survey at the end of the process. Resident response to the process was very positive. 84% of people said they would take part again. 60% of people gained confidence, and 81% of people made new connections.

2.9 Costs

All grant funds have associated management costs. The most resource intensive aspects of grant management are the process of assessment, decision-making and performance management.

Bristol City Council has two full time staff working on CRF.

Grant programmes have different purposes. The associated costs and decision making process reflect the purpose and value of the fund. CRF is a significant one-off capital investment in communities impacted by inequity and involving people from those communities in how this funding should be allocated.

There are three key differences with CRF which impact on the overall cost:

1. Participatory and deliberative decision making across all areas of multiple deprivation
2. Capital investment in community spaces which is for buildings and infrastructure
3. Involving a wide group of people in shaping the process

Costs included:

Collaborating on the design of the process

Expertise about participatory decision making to develop our skills and understanding

Community and voluntary sector groups reaching out in their communities to identify priorities for capital funding

Involving residents from the priority communities in the decision-making

Making expertise available to help the decision-making process

Making expertise available to the applicants to help them with their proposals

Support for co-production of the process and initial technical support cost £250,000.

Grant management and programme management support cost £100,00 per annum.

We estimate a total spend of 14% on programme management over the course of the 4 year programme.

2.10 Key reflections

These reflections draw on the draft CRF evaluation, participant survey responses, a retrospective session with TPX Impact and reflections of the BCC CRF project team:

- Co-design and participation build capacity over time
- Strong, confident facilitation is key
- Importance of participants from diverse backgrounds
- Committed and engaged participants
- Building trust and confidence
- Access to information and expertise

There is a summary of learning in appendix A

3. Policy

- ‘Development and Delivery’, ‘Equity and Inclusion’ and ‘Resilience’ are three of the five building blocks underpinning the 2022-2027 Corporate Strategy. The CRF process and outcomes builds

on each of these priorities.

- The Marmot Review identifies participation in community life as part of the wider determinants of health and important for addressing health equity, which is also an underpinning of the corporate strategy.
- The corporate strategy outlines an objective to make “significant investments in community-based organisations and local infrastructure to strengthen the role of VCSE partners to build community capacity, support sustainability of their business models, and to enable equitable access to funding opportunities”. This proposal responds directly to the objective.
- Community participation is a theme within the corporate strategy: “Build the power of individuals, communities and partners to play a greater role in managing social, cultural and community assets. Enable and encourage civic, political and democratic participation.”

4. Consultation

CRF is a collaborative process between BCC and communities that goes beyond consultation through delegating power to communities to make decisions about their own priorities and how to fund them.

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

5.1 Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:

- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.

5.2 A core objective of CRF is to **build city resilience by growing the power of communities**

experiencing the greatest inequality. To achieve this we took the following actions:

- Targeted funding to the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in Bristol, and ringfenced £800k of budget for citywide equalities communities.
- Made ‘accessibility’ a funding priority and included a video about accessibility ([link](#)) to ensure decision makers understood its importance.
- Focused on equity throughout the decision-making process by:
 - showing an introductory video on equity ([link](#)) and engaging participants in active conversation about the importance of equity.
 - including ‘elevating equalities communities’ as a key consideration against which all CRF project proposals were assessed.
- Recruited participants consciously to reflect the Bristol population, ensuring diversity of the decision making groups.
- Put inclusivity and access at the heart of the participatory process, responding to access needs to ensure anyone could take part.

[Link to equalities impact assessment](#)

Appendices:

Appendix A: Overview of learning from the Community Resilience Fund participatory process

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

1. [Community Resilience Fund approach to recruitment \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)
2. Cabinet paper February 2022, Item 12: [ModernGov - bristol.gov.uk](#)
3. CRF film: [Bristol City Council – Community Resilience Fund - YouTube](#)