

Bristol Impact Fund 3 Consultation – Background document

In developing BIF 3 we have considered:

- The strategic context – national and local
- One City Plan, BCC Corporate Strategy, Director of Public Health Report, intelligence from Bristol Funders Network
- Learning from the Covid 19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis response and the ‘One City Many Communities’ model that emerged from these
 - Impact of BIF 2 mid-term evaluation report

1. The strategic context – national & local

- [Bristol’s One City Plan](#) (4th iteration, 2023) sets out a path to a 2050 Bristol that is a ‘fair, healthy and sustainable city, a city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share in its success.’ It highlights the importance of partnership, co-design and collaboration in meeting city-wide challenges. It has six themes, one of which is Homes and Communities. One of the goals is that ‘Everyone can play their part in powerful, connected, inclusive neighbourhoods with access to the things needed for a good life’. A number of important strategies sit under the One City Plan, including the [Bristol Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025](#) (2023 update), [One City Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy](#), the [One City Climate Strategy](#) and the [Bristol Fuel Poverty Action Plan](#).
- Closely linked to the One City Plan, [Bristol City Council’s Corporate Strategy](#) 2022 – 2027 sets out the council’s priorities and contributions to the city’s long-term aims. It notes that Bristol is a city of contrasts, with inequity and deprivation continuing to affect people’s experience in multiple ways. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic followed by the cost-of-living crisis has further reinforced entrenched inequalities. Health, wealth and wellbeing are intimately connected; those already disadvantaged have been hit hardest. Several key ‘building blocks’ underpin the strategy, including Development and Delivery, Equality and Inclusion, and Resilience. Recognising the need to become an organisation that is better at enabling and developing others, the Council will tap into the expertise and resources of empowered communities, individuals and community groups to help shape and deliver city priorities. The Council will pro-actively and intentionally improve equity and inclusion across the city by designing it into everything we do. Building resilience is a focus, through early intervention, learning from our past, taking a preventative approach and planning for long-term outcomes that support resilience. Under goal HC5 Community Participation, the Council aims to build the power of individuals, communities and partners to play a greater role in managing social, cultural and community assets, as well as enable and encourage civic, political and democratic participation.
- Bristol’s [One City Climate Strategy](#) commits the city to becoming carbon neutral and climate resilient by 2030. The [Keep Bristol Cool Framework](#) is the beginning of putting the strategy into action to meet the key target that the city is a safe place for citizens during climate change induced extreme heat conditions. As with many other issues relating to the Climate Emergency and inequality in general, there is key

correlation between the most deprived neighbourhoods and citizens being at the largest risk of the hazards relating to sustained hot weather and its consequences.

- The recent report by the Director of Public Health (DPH), Christina Gray, [The Power of Us](#), sets out the evidence base for investing in communities and how building social capital is vital for health and wellbeing, community resilience and community wealth building. The report summarises the 'One City, Many Communities' approach which grew out of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis, and represents a commitment to collaborating, sharing resources and leadership, and building community power over the long term. The ability to respond quickly in a crisis and the ability to achieve things like local energy production and housing, all depend on a long-term commitment to community building, community action and community leadership.
- The 23/24 DPH report builds on an earlier one, [Investing in Bristol's mental wealth: The theory and practice of Thrive-o-nomics](#) which articulated how building community capacity and power is a major contribution to the mental health of the city.
- Off the back of a cost of living and Inequalities Conference hosted by Voscur in 2023, a [Cost of Living Manifesto](#) was created for funders, commissioners and sector. It contains a number of 'asks' of funders, including developing a more joined up approach, allowing organisations to rebuild their reserves, investing in partnerships and committing to longer-term funding. In return, VCSE organisations commit to further streamlining operations, increasing efficiency and reducing costs to enable a continued joint response to increasing levels of poverty and inequity.
- [Community Power: The Evidence](#) by New Local provides a comprehensive overview of what community power looks like, and highlights six benefits from community power: 1) improved individual health and wellbeing; 2) strengthened community wellbeing and resilience; 3) enhance democratic participation and trust; 4) increased community cohesion; 5) embedding prevention and early intervention in public services; and 6) financial savings. For community power to flourish, the report makes a number of recommendations including that practitioners should collaborate to share learning and build a stronger evidence-led case for the impact of community power approaches. It also explores the 'evidence paradox' that is holding back community power and makes suggestions for how to overhaul the way we measure success.
- [Everybody needs good neighbourhoods](#) by Local Trust explores the impact of resident-led neighbourhood-based initiatives in deprived communities and finds a number of positive impacts compared to areas with no evidence of neighbourhood-based working, such as lower overall levels of crime and stronger local social relationships.

2. Learning from COVID-19 & the cost-of-living crisis response

Bristol demonstrated a strong community response to the challenges of the Covid-19 emergency, followed by the cost-of-living crisis. During the pandemic, many communities sprang into action spontaneously, setting up local networks and mutual aid groups. The council built a partnership with

community groups across the city to recruit volunteers and deliver support to people needing it. This collaborative effort was built on when cost of living pressures started to mount and Bristolians were facing a stark winter in 2022. There was a fast, community-led response. City partners, community organisations, places of worship and the public sector worked together to supply the most suitable and impactful response to citizens. This joint effort from different partners was supported through new ways of working, new partnerships, and a network of 105 welcoming spaces, which in turn supported nearly 5,000 citizens per week on average to connect socially and access Wi-Fi, food, hot drinks, financial and other advice, and emotional wellbeing support.

At the same time, we saw systemic inequity more clearly: communities which have missed out on investment and therefore don't have the same connections, resources and power are more vulnerable to the health, economic and psychological impacts of crises and are likely to suffer the greatest long-term impacts.

As outlined in the [One City Cost-of-Living crisis response learning report](#), inequality and poverty are expected to increase across Bristol as communities continue to be affected by the cost of living. Energy, housing, and food prices are forecast to continue to rise so money doesn't go as far, increasing debt. Interest rates remain high, as do levels of unemployment. All these factors will contribute to a worse living standard. Some communities will continue to be affected more, including people on the lowest incomes; parents and young families; social and private renters; Disabled people; Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic groups; women; carers; and neighbourhoods experiencing deprivation

In April 2023, VCSE organisations and One City partners adopted a '*One City, Many Communities*' approach developed through strong collaboration over the past four years. They committed to keeping a focus on equity, social justice and wellbeing to:

- find sustainable ways forward, supporting people most impacted by low income, poverty and inequity;
- continue to build community power and community wealth for the long term.

The 23/24 DPH report [The Power of Us draws on](#) learning from the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis to highlight a number of essential conditions that need to be nurtured to support community resilience:

- bringing together public sector, business, and communities (to build better understanding and trust)
- supporting communities to grow their own capacity in social action and leadership
- freeing communities to have greater control over resources and enabling people to participate in decision making and leadership roles
- a commitment to learning together about what works.

Voscur's [Pulse Survey reports](#) outline the current challenges facing the VCSE sector in Bristol. VCSE respondents are facing a cost-of-living crisis that affects their ability to deliver high-quality services to the community. The key message is: "demand is up, money is down". In the most recent survey

(December 2023), almost half of VCSE organisations and groups said that they would be forced to put on hold certain services or projects if key challenges were not resolved.

As pointed out in [Understanding the needs of Disabled people's organisations in England](#) by Inclusion London, Disabled People have been hit by a combination of structural inequality, rising poverty and Covid-19. Things are getting worse not better for the majority of Disabled people with rising rates of poverty, exclusion, poorer life outcomes and increasing discrimination all well documented. At the same time, many Disabled People's Organisation (DPOs) have closed or lost funding and many say they are more disconnected from funders and decision makers. Greater investment in DPO infrastructure support is needed at regional and local levels.

3. Bristol Impact Fund 2 Interim Evaluation Report, April 2024

The Bristol Impact Fund 2 (BIF2) has invested £6.78 million over four and a half years to “Grow the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequity”. The original BIF2 budget was £6.4million, and a 10% uplift of medium and large grants was applied from October 2023-March 2026, to reflect in significant increase in cost of living. Taking an asset-based approach (focusing on what is strong, not what is wrong), BIF2 has four anticipated impacts:

Communities experiencing the greatest inequity will be in a position to:

- 1) Access trusted, empowering support;
- 2) Self-organise and pursue collective priorities;
- 3) Build strong organisations taking forward community priorities and;
- 4) Collaborate and bring about meaningful change.

An independent evaluation of the first two years of BIF2 concluded that “the Bristol Impact Fund is a crucial programme for empowering local communities to self-organise to support themselves. ... there is strong evidence of impact on the quality of life of the individuals that these organisations work with, for whom there are often no other forms of support.”

It is noted that BIF2 is about more than grants. The support for organisational development which is provided is transformational for some funded groups, giving them more confidence and ‘voice’, which in turn strengthens the VCSE sector.

The interim evaluation highlighted the following positive impacts from the first two years of the programme:

- Funding has significantly benefitted people in the poorest areas of the city, notably parts of Ashley, Lawrence Hill and Filwood, and people from equality communities, in particular women, Disabled people, Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and other, trans people, and people from Black and Minoritised Ethnic communities.
- Increased funding to equalities-led groups particularly to Black and Minoritised Ethnic-led organisations
- The BIF 2 funded organisations are having the greatest effect on Connectedness, Wellbeing and Agency for the individuals they are working with

- Reported wellbeing outcomes are significantly higher than the number planned. 100% of organisations measuring wellbeing report a positive impact, and these represent 50% of all funded organisations.
- Added value: £5.2m additional funding was levered into the city by BIF-funded organisations and engaged over 3,100 volunteers providing over 1 million hours, worth £15.3 million to community organisations
- Some organisations have been on a real journey. New roles funded by BIF grants have enabled development of skills and partnerships. There is evidence of this resulting in organisations reaching more people as well as building their own capacity

The following learning and recommendations have informed the direction of BIF 3:

- The 7 Ways of Working underpin all the funded activities. So far, *inclusive, relational and place-based* approaches have been most central to success. These ways of working have allowed funded organisations to reach into and engage with diverse communities, build accessible and inclusive environments, develop initiatives that are grounded in and cater for community needs and foster strong trust-based relationships.
- The way funding decisions are made intentionally to support equity is a critical success factor. A proactive approach to reaching and funding organisations that are ‘of their community’, especially Black, Asian and Minoritised ethnic-led and Disabled people-led organisations, has been crucial in strengthening the diversity of the sector.
- Some of the most successful aspects of the delivery of the BIF programme lie in building better relationships with the Council, supporting organisational confidence, skills and facilitating peer sharing.
- Without continued investment and support from the Council and sector development organisations, we would not see the progress demonstrated in the interim evaluation report.
- Consider the benefits of commissioning a whole programme Social Return on Investment study as an alternative to future evaluations to provide a value ratio that justifies the programme investment.
- Factor in additional and ongoing one-to-one or small group support and resources for some organisations.

4. The funding environment

Bristol Impact Fund is just one grant fund for VCSE organisations. The city council is having to make very difficult financial decisions. We know we cannot fund everything and everyone – we have to be targeted. We want our grant funding to be part of a working relationship with the VCSE sector to strengthen its capacity and impact.

Bristol City Council is part of the [Bristol Funders Network](#). We are committed to working with other funders to find ways to align our approaches, learn from VCSE partners and each other. For example, we have shown the success of sharing applications between funders in the network, which meant 50% more small grant proposals could be funded in the first round of BIF2 small grants in 2022.

We see BIF 3: One City Many Communities as part of a series of actions to support the VCSE which includes:

- BCC Cultural Investment Funding
- Youth & Play sector funding
- Community Resilience Fund
- Enabling the VCSE sector grant
- Other BCC grant funding opportunities
- Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 monies
- Community Asset Transfers and leases
- Informing supplier social value contributions
- Commitment to widen access to council procurement opportunities to the VCSE sector

Please visit Bristol City Council [Grants for voluntary and community organisations \(bristol.gov.uk\)](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/grants-for-voluntary-and-community-organisations) to find out more about available grant funding

5. What do we mean by ‘Growing the Power of Communities’?

We know that communities, and the people within them, are rich in knowledge, skills and assets- this is their power. Growing this power involves recognising and nurturing these strengths, enabling citizens and communities to be connected, have a voice and to act on things that matter to them.

The report [Community Power: The Evidence](#) recognises that growing community power encompasses a wide range of approaches, which might:

- **Increase community decision-making** – for example, by using participatory tools to involve communities in local decision-making
- **Foster collaboration with communities** – for example, by involving communities in the design and delivery of public services
- **Build community assets** – for example, by strengthening community knowledge, skills, connections and resources

The resulting impacts can include improved health and wellbeing, strengthened community resilience and cohesion, and enhanced democratic participation.

Equipping communities with the resources they need to build on their strengths, connect and genuinely participate in local action is central to the work of BIF3.

As discussed in [The Power of Us: One City Many Communities](#) annual Public Health report 2023, measuring the effectiveness of this community power approach can be difficult: communities are complex, dynamic and multi-layered, and change can’t always be measured using specific outputs or metrics. The Bristol Impact Fund recognises that effective community building takes time and is often best understood through the stories communities tell about their experiences. Measuring the effectiveness of organisations’ work will involve sharing learning and building a strong evidence-led case for the practice of growing community power.

6. What do we mean by communities experiencing the greatest inequity?

There are structures, systems and processes we all have to navigate in life: accessing jobs or education, healthcare and transport, building relationships and connections, voting and influencing decision making, taking part in leisure activities, banking or starting a pension, applying for money (grants, benefits, loans) as an individual, a business or organisation. Some people have less power and face more barriers or discrimination doing these everyday things. This is structural inequity.

There are real consequences of discrimination. It leads to whole communities of people dying earlier, being poor and being excluded from decisions that affect them. This hugely impacts on quality of life and wellbeing.

In the run up to BIF2 we saw some hard-hitting outcomes of discrimination and inequity: the Black Lives Matter movement and higher severity of impacts of COVID-19 on communities experiencing inequity are just two examples². Now, as we think about BIF3, we have new examples of structural inequity and what it means in Bristol. The cost-of-living crisis had a bigger impact on older people, young people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, Disabled People and in poorer, more deprived neighbourhoods, with an increased demand for advice and guidance and pressure on foodbanks³. Costs may continue to rise or remain high, meaning poverty levels will increase. We are still seeing increased incidence of hate crime year on year⁴.

Equalities Communities

The council is proposing that BIF3 will prioritise its funding to support the self-organisation, capacity and resilience of equalities groups: those communities which experience racism; disablism; homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism; ageism; sexism; and inequity rooted in class, poverty and low income.

Through BIF2 we intentionally directed more funding to these equalities groups (15 of 30 projects funded through the medium and large grants were led by equalities communities), having learned during the Covid-19 pandemic that our connections with Black and Minority Ethnic, Disabled people's and LGBT+ communities was not as strong as our place-based connections. More funding than ever (37% of medium and large grant funding) was awarded to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic-led organisations. 15% was awarded to Disabled people's organisations (we use a social model which means Disabled people are people who experience institutionalised discrimination on the grounds of emotional or mental distress, learning difficulties, physical and/or sensory impairment). This included £200,000 to support the development of an organisation led by and for adults with learning difficulties, as no applications were received from organisations led by adults with learning difficulties.

Funding and capacity building support as part of the BIF2 programme is intended to build the capacity and strength of equalities organisations. We know we need to continue to take this thoughtful and targeted approach to funding equalities organisations in BIF3, looking for the communities who have missed out on funding in the past and supporting organisations through the application process to give them the best chance of success. This will not only build our connections but strengthen the sector as a whole.

Communities in Neighbourhoods

Bristol can be described as a thriving, successful place, but there are many neighbourhood communities which experience persistent inequity and multiple disadvantages as identified in the [Indices of Deprivation for England report 2019](#). The mapping in the report shows the neighbourhoods (electoral wards) where disadvantage and inequity is seen the most. Place-based deprivation is often used as a way of describing poverty. Some people might use 'working class' as a term to describe a neighbourhood with high levels of deprivation. Poverty is more likely to be experienced by equalities communities and so areas of deprivation tend to be places where there are higher concentrations of people from equalities communities.

BIF2 invested in the neighbourhoods which are 20% most deprived according to the index of multiple deprivation. Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston, Lawrence Hill, Easton, Hartcliffe and Withywood and Filwood received the biggest share of the medium and large grant funding. Through small grants, we were able to target neighbourhood communities with high levels of deprivation which were not represented in the medium and large grant allocation. BIF3 will continue to focus on strengthening voluntary and community groups working in areas of deprivation, especially those which are rooted in and led by the communities themselves.