

GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL

27 JULY 2004

Chair: * Councillor Harrison

Councillors: * Arnold * Mrs Joyce Nickolay
 * Nana Asante * Omar (1)
 * Marilyn Ashton * Anjana Patel
 * Bluston * Thammaiah

* Denotes Member present
 (1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**126. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Mrs R Shah

Councillor Omar

127. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.

128. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

129. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

130. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

131. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

132. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

133. **Strategic Review of Grants - Update:**

The Panel received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy which updated the meeting on the progress of the Strategic Review of Grants.

Officers informed the meeting that MORI had carried out all of the recent survey of community groups. Officers explained that late circulation of the survey results had been unavoidable, as the compilation of the results had only just been completed. Officers suggested that further discussions take place at the September meeting to allow further consideration of the results. The survey sought across the board views on the community strategy and also teased out further information and demographic information.

The results of the survey highlighted several key issues:

- The voluntary sector had little knowledge of the Grants process
- Voluntary organisations were not in favour of annual themes
- Voluntary organisations were not keen to increase emphasis on standards/awards such as Chartermarks
- They supported the idea of three year funding
- They felt the Council had a lack of knowledge of the voluntary sector

Officers commented that there appeared to be three questions where respondents had not been supportive of the suggestions made. These were the questions relating to the idea of a yearly theme, increased emphasis on certain standards and the change to a grants-based system for the use of the community premises.

In response to questions from Members, officers explained that the Grants Unit had one part-time member of staff and were struggling for resources. The Portfolio Holder had given authority to employ MORI, who officers judged had the expertise to tease out the necessary information.

In response to comments from a Member, officers agreed that they were a little disappointed with the low response rates from organisations. Because of this, officers had requested that MORI carry out further in-depth interviews with voluntary groups. In addition, umbrella groups such as HAVS were extensively consulted.

A Member noted that he was concerned that some organisations may not have understood the consultation, and therefore not returned it. In response to further questions, officers confirmed that the questionnaire had been sent to groups already in receipt of funding. A Member noted that Stanmore did not appear as a geographic area in the report.

A Member commented that he thought the survey had been a valuable exercise, although he would like to reserve detailed opinion for the next meeting, to allow Members more time to read the report. He requested that officers provide benchmarking information on the amount paid in grants to voluntary organisations by other London Boroughs for the next meeting. He added that there were also several other sources of funding for these organisations, and suggested that officers and organisations should work closer together to take advantage of that.

Members commented that they felt that the Grants Unit was under-staffed, and that although Harrow was generally a good grants authority, it had poor lines of communication with the voluntary sector. Members also discussed the merits of the 80% rule for funding.

Members agreed that Harrow needed to be more imaginative when applying for grants. A Member confirmed that in previous applications for London-wide grants, she had been informed that Harrow did not apply well for grants.

The Chair commented that he was concerned that one part time officer could not monitor the grants awarded effectively.

During discussion of the use of community premises, Members commented that it would be useful to compare the services provided in Harrow with other boroughs. Members suggested that both qualitative and quantitative information should be provided to the Panel on the use of the community premises.

A Member reminded the Panel that Harrow had a wide range of voluntary groups with a variety of sizes. He suggested that smaller organisations might not have the resources to complete the forms sent to them.

A Member reminded the Panel that the ALG were currently reviewing their grants scheme, and that several Harrow organisations had previously received funding. A Member added that smaller organisations faced difficulties in freeing the necessary time and resources to complete funding bids.

A Member commented that voluntary organisations needed the knowledge of where to apply for grants and technical assistance in completing the funding application forms. She added that voluntary organisations were unhappy with parts of the service that the Council provided, and that some of these had been long-standing issues. Members highlighted the increasing importance of ICT links for voluntary organisations and the opportunities that such links could create.

In response to a question from a Member, officers confirmed that MORI had not yet

contacted any of the groups that had failed to respond to the survey. Officers informed the meeting that MORI had almost exclusively used their own premises to carry out the work.

In discussion of the staffing structure, the Chair commented that it was unrealistic to expect one part-time member of staff to monitor and administer the grants budget. Officers confirmed that the planned new structure would offer more support to voluntary organisations, with a service manager responsible for building relationships with the community. It was also acknowledged that the Grants Unit required short-term administrative support to assist with the processing of grant applications.

Following discussion, the meeting agreed that the suggestion of an annual theme should be dropped, as it clearly lacked support. Members also agreed that there needed to be a review of the use of community premises, and that officers should look at further support in terms of accommodation that could be offered to voluntary organisations. Members noted that it was important to ascertain the views of voluntary groups on how the community premises should be run.

A Member commented that it was very important to get through the cynicism that many organisations felt toward the Council. Following discussions on the possibility of holding a meeting with voluntary organisations, it was agreed that Members of the Panel should go out and visit the organisations to get a feel for the views and an idea of their wants. It was felt that this would be less bureaucratic than a formal meeting and would tease out more in-depth information.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted; and

(2) a further report be submitted to the Grants Advisory Panel on 13 September 2004.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.50 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR CYRIL HARRISON
Chair*

*[Note: The Chair of the Grants Advisory Panel for the Municipal Year 2004/05 was appointed at the Cabinet meeting of 20 May 2004 (Resolution 513)].