

GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL MINUTES

2 DECEMBER 2010

- Chairman:** * Councillor Nana Asante
- Councillors:** * Sue Anderson * Mrs Vina Mithani
* Nizam Ismail * Chris Mote
* Manji Kara * Joyce Nickolay
Kairul Kareema Marikar (2) * Sasi Suresh
- Adviser:** * Deven Pillay, Representative, Voluntary and Community Sector

- * Denotes Member present
† Denotes apologies received

21. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Krishna James

Councillor Kairul Kareema Marikar

22. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

Agenda Item 10 – INFORMATION REPORT – Harrow Association of Voluntary Services Update

Councillor Nana Asante declared a personal interest in that she belonged to an organisation which was a member of the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS). She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Joyce Nickolay declared a personal interest in that she was a HAVS trustee. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Nizam Isamil declared a personal interest in that he was Chairman of the Harrow Muslim Council. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Deven Pillay, Adviser to the Panel, declared a personal interest in that he belonged to an organisation which was a member of HAVS. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

23. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

24. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

25. Delivery of Council's Main Grant Programme for 2011/12 and Review of Support to the Voluntary Sector

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, this item was admitted late to the agenda to allow Members to consider interim arrangements for the delivery of the Council's main grant programme. Members also received a copy of a consultation questionnaire which formed part of the Council's review into support offered to the Voluntary and Community Sector. These documents had not been available at the time the agenda was dispatched and circulated as they were still being consulted on.

An officer stated that due to the current economic climate there was a need to ensure that all Council budgets were used effectively. The Council was therefore undertaking a review of the support it offered to the Voluntary and Community Sector and was in the process of seeking the views of relevant stakeholders. The review would also consider other support offered to the Voluntary and Community Sector such as Community Lettings and Community Premises. The officer stated that, in light of the review, the Panel was being asked to determine how to manage the grant application process for 2011/12. She added that all voluntary organisations in Harrow had been informed of the review and were aware that transitional arrangements would be required.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, officers stated that:

- in the future, any consultation forms would be agreed with the Grants Advisory Panel;
- in relation to Community Lettings, a full breakdown would be provided to Members detailing income received by the Council, payments made to schools and any associated staff and other costs;
- approval of Option D would extend all existing grant agreements for one additional month. If agreed, the extension would exclude any top-up funding received in 2010/11;
- the main risk associated with pursuing Option D was a reduced timescale which had the potential to put significant pressure on officers. However, officers were confident that deadlines would be met;
- in relation to Community Lettings, it would not be possible to provide a breakdown of bookings made by hirers directly with schools as this information was held by individual schools;
- any voluntary organisation eligible under the Council's Grants Criteria was able to apply for Community Lettings;
- in 2010/11, 28% of the grants budget had been allocated to small and medium grants. However, approximately 80% of the administrative work undertaken by officers related to small and medium grants.

A Member stated that, in principle, she agreed with Option D. However, she would prefer the top-up funding to be taken into account when calculating the month extension. The Chairman stated she did not favour this as the additional money offered in 2010/11 had been taken from the reserves held by the Council.

A Member reminded Members that some organisations only received money in 2010/11 due to top-up funding. If Option D was agreed with top-up funding excluded from the calculation, these organisations would receive no funding for the additional month. The Panel's Adviser was of the view that most voluntary organisations in Harrow would prefer Option D, as it provided the most stability and was fairer.

The Chairman stated that the officer's report indicated that 26 organisations were currently registered with Community Premises and that the annual cost to the Council was £105,000. She stated that in 2005, the annual cost of Community Premises was in the region of £80 000 and requested that officers provide the Panel with a full breakdown of costs. Officers agreed to look into the matter.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That authority be delegated to the Corporate Director for Community and Environment to make decisions on extending individual grant agreements,

subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 2.2.2 and option D as referred to in the report.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services) That

- (1) all grant agreements be extended for one additional month to 30 April 2011, subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 2.2.2 of the report, to enable the development and implementation of a revised grants process for 2012/13 and delivery of a grants programme for 2011/12; the grant extension to not take into account any top-up funding received in 2010/11 and to be calculated using each organisations base grant;
- (2) the consultation questionnaire be noted;
- (3) the Panel be provided with a breakdown of income received by the Council in relation to Community Lettings, the data to include all money received by the Council, payments made to schools and any associated staff and others costs;
- (4) the Panel be provided with the cost of Community Premises;
- (5) the Panel be provided with a full breakdown of money received through Community Lettings, including details of income received by the Council, payments made to schools and any associated staff and other costs.

Reason for Decision: To enable the Council to undertake and implement a review of its support to the Voluntary and Community Sector and deliver a grants programme for 2011/12.

26. Update on Community Premises

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment which provided an update on Community Premises. An officer explained that the Panel was requested to recommend to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services that authority be delegated to the Head of Service for Community Development to approve new applications for Community Premises. The officer stated that the report also provided Members with usage and monitoring information, details of changes to application forms and other documentation, and an update on the issue of public liability insurance for voluntary organisations. The officer drew the Panel's attention to the relevant sections of the report.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, the officer stated that:

- officers were considering whether it would be possible to establish a group liability insurance policy for voluntary organisations in Harrow. The Council was exploring possibilities with relevant stakeholders to ensure that any proposals were in line with the requirements of the voluntary sector;

- it was accepted that some of the monitoring data provided in the report required further analysis. This would be provided in future updates to the Panel;
- in cases where voluntary organisations did not meet the Council's eligibility criteria, officers could provide guidance to help organisations put the required policies and procedures in place. At the request of Members, this would be explained on the application form for Community Premises;
- in relation to Community Premises, there was currently no capacity to offer individual offices to community groups. However, no requests for separate office space had been received by the Council;
- the phrasing of question C in section 5 of the Community Premises application form needed to be changed.

In noting the issue concerning insurance premium payments by voluntary organisations, some Members expressed the view that the implications of a previous decision in not permitting grants money to be utilised for this type of spend had not been fully realised with regard to potential impacts on voluntary organisations.

The Chairman stated that whilst she did not oppose the requested delegation of authority to the Head of Service for Community Development, she would like the Panel to monitor performance with respect to speed of decisions, if agreed by the Portfolio Holder. If the Panel remained happy with performance, it would recommend that the delegation be extended beyond 2010/11.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services) That

- (1) authority be delegated to the Head of Service for Community Development to approve all new eligible applications for Community Premises for 2010/11, subject to consultation with the Grants Advisory Panel;
- (2) the usage and monitoring information presented in the report be noted;
- (3) the updated application pack consisting of the application form and qualifying conditions be noted;
- (4) the updated Facilities Use Agreement in respect of all categories of accommodation, including organisations using Community Premises for postal address only, be noted;
- (5) the increase in access times during the probationary period for new users be noted;

- (6) the advice given by the Council's insurance department regarding public liability insurance for organisations based at Community Premises be noted;
- (7) if approved by the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services, the Panel monitor the efficiency of the new Community Premises application arrangements;
- (8) the Panel be provided with a full analysis of the monitoring data contained within the report at a future meeting.

Reason for Recommendation: To streamline the application process and reduce delay. Continuation of this delegation would ensure that this system continues into all future years, improving the experience for new organisations.

RESOLVED ITEMS

27. INFORMATION REPORT - Grant Appeals

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment, which set out action taken by the Council to address the appeals outstanding from the 2010/11 grants programme. An officer explained that in order to resolve the situation, the Council would appoint an independent adviser to review the outstanding grant appeals. The report of the independent adviser would then be presented to Cabinet for a final decision.

Following questions from Members, an officer stated that:

- the independent review would take the form of a desktop exercise with all documentation re-examined. It was not expected that the independent adviser would undertake interviews with the voluntary organisations involved;
- no exact timescales had yet been agreed, although once the independent adviser had been appointed it was not expected that the review would take long to complete;
- the Panel would be provided with a copy of the final report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Panel provided with a copy of the independent adviser's final report.

28. INFORMATION REPORT - Harrow Association of Voluntary Services Update

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment which set out the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) investigation into Harrow Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS) and the Council's initial response to the report. An officer drew the Panel's attention

to the relevant sections of the report and informed Members that all grant funding to HAVS had been put on hold.

During discussion of the report, Members made the following comments:

- the report stated that PwC had discovered malpractice, particularly in relation to completion of monitoring reports. However, the PwC report stated that an allegation of malpractice had been made and as investigations were still ongoing, it was too early to say whether malpractice had occurred;
- officers should look into the possibility of rolling withheld grant money into the 2011/12 grants budget;
- despite the serious issues identified by PwC, the Voluntary and Community Sector still felt there was a need for an umbrella organisation such as HAVS. It was hoped that the review and subsequent changes would help create a more robust organisation;
- officers should consider how the Voluntary and Community Sector could help develop HAVS.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.25 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR NANA ASANTE
Chairman