

GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL

MINUTES

13 JUNE 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Nana Asante

Councillors: * Sue Anderson * Mrs Vina Mithani
* Nizam Ismail * Chris Mote
* Krishna James * Joyce Nickolay
* Manji Kara * Sasi Suresh

Adviser: * Deven Pillay, Representative, Voluntary and Community Sector

In attendance: Paul Osborn
(Councillors) David Perry

* Denotes Member present

50. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

51. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani as Vice-Chairman of the Panel for the 2011/2012 Municipal Year.

52. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: That

- (a) the following personal interests were declared and that all Members remained in the room during the discussion and voting:

Item 9: Information Report - Update on Grant Appeals 2011/12

Councillor Sasi Suresh

- Harrow Tamil Association
- Girl Guiding Middlesex

Councillor Sue Anderson

- Harrow Mencap
- Harrow Association of Disabled People
- Harrow and Wealdstone Shop Mobility
- Harrow Nature Conservation

Councillor Joyce Nickolay

- Harrow in Europe

Councillor Manji Kara

- Harrow in Europe
- Bentley Priory

Councillor Nana Asante

- Harrow MENCAP
- Harrow in Europe
- Voluntary and Community Sector Forum
- Flash Musicals
- Girl Guiding Middlesex
- Harrow and Wealdstone Shop Mobility
- Harrow Association of Disabled People
- Harrow Bengali Association
- Refugee Forum

Councillor Krishna James

- Harrow Association of Disabled People
- Sangat Advice Centre

Deven Pillay

- Harrow Mencap

- (b) the following prejudicial interests were declared and Councillors would leave the room should the relevant organisation be discussed:

Item 9: Information Report – Update on Grant Appeals 2011/12

Councillor Nizam Ismail

- Harrow Muslim Council

Councillor Chris Mote

- Harrow and Wealdstone Swimming Club

Councillor Joyce Nickolay

- Harrow Association of Voluntary Services
- Weldon Activity Group

Deven Pillay

- Harrow Mencap

53. Minutes

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the minutes of the first special meeting held on 30 March 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:
 - Minute 42, paragraph 2, the first paragraph be amended to read: “Councillor Sue Anderson declared a personal interest in that she had been a Member of the Scrutiny Challenge Panel that had considered the audit report”;
 - Minute 52, a final sentence be added to the final paragraph, to read: “The Adviser to the Panel stated that Members would also need to consider the issue of the Compact at the same time”;
 - Minute 45, an additional paragraph be added, to read: “Following a query from the Adviser to the Panel, the Chairman stated that many of the recommendations outlined in the report had already been incorporated into the grant giving process”.
- (2) the minutes of the second special meeting held on 30 March 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:
 - Minute 47, a prejudicial declaration of interest be added for Deven Pillay in relation to Harrow Mencap;
 - Minute 47, all references to “Councillor Susan Anderson” be changed to read “Councillor Sue Anderson”;

- Minute 49, a final sentence be added to the final paragraph, to read: “The Adviser to the Panel stated that officers needed to ensure that the first stage of the grant application process was as robust as possible”;
- Minute 49, recommendation 7 be changed to read: “prior to the decision to release funds, officers carry out an equalities impact assessment to assess the potential impact of grant decisions on local residents, taking into account potential gaps in service delivery.

54. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

55. Consultation on Draft Proposals to Contribute to the Development of a Third Sector Investment Plan

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment, which set out draft proposals for the development of a Third Sector Investment Plan to replace the current main grants programme. An officer explained that the Third Sector Investment Plan would provide a strategic framework for the future delivery of support to the third sector from 2012/13 onwards. Members of the Grants Advisory Panel were requested to consider and provide feedback on the proposals to inform the development of the Plan.

An officer stated that the Council had held workshops with a variety of internal and external stakeholders at which the following key points had been raised:

- the application form needed to be shorter;
- if the Council decided to move to an electronic application process, it would need to ensure that groups were properly supported during the application process, particularly those that had not previously submitted electronic applications;
- the language used in Council documentation needed to be clear and free of jargon;
- consideration could be given to merging the Small Projects Programme and the Edward Harvist Trust Grants Programme.

A Member stated that it was important that the Council supported voluntary organisations that were interested in commissioning. The Chairman disagreed, stating that any organisations wishing to provide services on behalf of the Council had to be of a professional standard and should not expect

extensive guidance. However, it was in the Council's interest to facilitate and make the process as clear as possible.

An officer outlined the draft key principles as follows:

- resources would be allocated to organisations that operated on a not-for-profit basis only;
- resources would be allocated where they were used for the benefit of people living, working or schooling in Harrow;
- resources would be allocated where they helped the Council deliver its priorities;
- the allocation of resources would be matched to the delivery of specified outcomes;
- resources would be allocated where they achieved good value for money and delivered measurable added value;
- resources would be allocated where they provided benefit to the protected equality groups under the Equalities Act 2010 and furthered the public sector duty on equalities.

In response, Members made the following comments:

- the Council needed to ensure that it maintained local focus when commissioning services;
- Members and officers needed to distinguish between the third sector and the voluntary and community sector, as the terms were not interchangeable;
- some of the draft definitions needed to be tightened-up to avoid ambiguity. Phrases such as reasonable costs were subjective and open to challenge.

In response to the commissioning proposals detailed in section 2.3.5 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- it would be beneficial for the Grants Advisory Panel to be involved in the commissioning process;
- there should be Member involvement in the drafting of service specifications for commissioned services;
- service managers and Directors might be better placed than Members to make decisions in relation to the commissioning of services;
- there needed to be a proper debate over which services should be commissioned;

- to ensure stability and continuation of service, the Council needed to consider putting in place longer contracts for organisations providing services. This would be in line with the recommendations of a 2008 Scrutiny review that had considered ways in which the Council could strengthen the voluntary and community sector;
- there was a danger that the Council would only focus on its statutory obligations when commissioning services, with organisations that provided other services marginalised. This could result in a lack of innovation.

In response to the draft commissioning principles detailed in section 2.3.6 of the report, Members stated that the inclusion of “culturally specific services” in the draft commissioning principles was important and should remain.

In response to the draft timetable for commissioning of services detailed in section 2.3.7 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- the proposed timetable was unrealistic given the short timescales involved;
- the timetable should include provision for the training of officers to ensure they fully understood the commissioning process and could properly support third sector organisations;
- the development of service specifications in August and September would limit the extent to which Members could be involved. The schedule needed to allow the Grants Advisory Panel to engage with the process;
- the new commissioning model would be a big change for the third sector and the process needed to be clear;
- it was essential that any organisation interested in providing services attended the training sessions.

An officer informed Members that the tendering evaluation panels would have access to legal and financial advice when making decisions in relation to commissioning.

In response to the proposals for the delivery of the Small Projects Programme and the Edward Harvist Trust detailed in section 2.3.8 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- there was a danger that limiting small grants to organisations with an annual income of £50,000 or under would exclude experienced organisations;

- the Council had to make sure organisations understood that they were not entitled to grant funding on the basis that it had been provided in previous years;
- without knowing exactly which organisations would be eligible for small grant funding, it was not possible to determine whether the proposals were appropriate;
- the Edward Harvist Trust grant programme should remain separate from the Small Grant Programme, although both processes should occur in close proximity to each other. There was general support for maintaining the current Edward Harvist Trust grant limit of £2000.

Due to time constraints, an officer suggested that the remaining proposals detailed in the report be considered at a Members' workshop. The Panel agreed to the proposal.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) a Members' workshop be arranged to allow a full discussion of the proposals, with all Members of the Grants Advisory Panel invited to attend;
- (2) Members be provided with a breakdown of organisations that would be eligible under the proposed Small Grants Programme;
- (3) following the Members' workshop, feedback be provided to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services.

56. INFORMATION REPORT - Update on Grant Appeals 2011/12

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment, which provided an update on the progress of the Grant Appeal process, agreed by Cabinet on 7 April 2011.

An officer stated that 33 appeals had been received by the deadline of 26 May 2011, with a combined value of £670,326. 7 appeals had subsequently been granted and 38 organisations were now eligible for grant funding. The cost of fully funding successful organisations would be £809,113. The total budget available for allocation was £585,930. The Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services was currently considering the matter and would confirm final grant awards by 17 June 2011.

Following questions from Members, an officer clarified the following points:

- the equality assessment had been carried out on the grant application process, not the outcome. This decision had been based on advice from Internal Audit and Legal;
- Lisa Greenhill had acted as the Independent Adviser to the Appeal Panel.

Members of the Grants Advisory Panel made the following comments:

- the success of 7 appeals would have a significant impact on the funding of all eligible organisations;
- it would have been beneficial to hold the Appeal Panel in a public setting to ensure transparency;
- it was important that any future equality assessment considered both the grant application process and the outcome.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

57. INFORMATION REPORT - Update on London Councils

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment which provided an update on the current position relating to the London Borough Grants Scheme.

An officer informed the Panel that as a result of a judicial review taken against London Councils by clients of the Roma Support Group, London Councils had reconsidered the categorisation of all funded services, with some organisations becoming ineligible for funding. As a result of this, it was expected that some groups would approach Harrow Council for funding.

Members raised concern that, given the current financial situation, the Council would be unable to support these additional organisations. A Member stated that the Council would need to carefully consider whether the services offered by these organisations were essential before any funding was offered. The Adviser to the Panel stated that there was the possibility that the changes could be beneficial to Harrow, particularly if additional grant money was made available for local dissemination.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.08 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR NANA ASANTE
Chairman