

**REPORT FOR: GRANTS ADVISORY
PANEL**

Date of Meeting:	11 th September 2012
Subject:	Application assessment process
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek, Corporate Director Community Health and Well-Being
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor David Perry, Portfolio Holder Community and Cultural Services
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	Appendix 1a: Outcomes Based Grants application form Appendix 1b: OBG Guidance to applicants Appendix 2: Outcomes Based Grants assessment sheet Appendix 3: Small Grants Assessment sheet Appendix 4: Guidance notes for Observers Appendix 5: Feedback form for Observers

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the proposed format for the assessment of Small Grant and Outcomes Based grant applications in 2013-14.

Recommendations:

The Grants Advisory Panel (GAP) is requested to:

1. Recommend to Cabinet the adoption of the proposed assessment process for Small Grant and Outcomes Based Grant applications.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To have a robust and transparent assessment process in place for assessing grant applications.

Section 2 – Report

2.1 Introductory paragraph

2.1.1 The decision sought will help the Council ensure that a robust and transparent process is in place for the assessment of applications to the Small Grants and Outcomes Based Grants (OBG) programme.

2.1.2 GAP recommended the approval of the Small Grants application form and draft timetable at its meeting of the 30th July 2012. GAP also provided their comments on the proposed OBG funding programme. This report presents the new Outcomes Based Grants application form (Appendix 1) and sets out the proposed assessment process for both grant programmes.

2.2 Options considered

2.2.1 At their meeting of the 30th July 2012 GAP discussed the application and assessment process. The panel were concerned to ensure that the scoring of applications is undertaken consistently. The options that have been considered in order to achieve this are:

Option 1: Recruit an independent body, from outside of the borough to undertake all of the assessments.

Advantages:

- The assessments may be seen to be more objective.

- An outside body would have no previous knowledge of local groups and assessments would be based on the information contained in the application form only.

Disadvantages:

- This option would come at an additional cost to the Council which has not been included in the budget.
- The assessment of applications would be undertaken without reference or awareness of local organisations and the local context.

Option 2: That a single panel, made up of the same officers assess all applications that are received.

Advantages:

- This could lead to more consistent scoring.
- The number and range of officers involved would be reduced.

Disadvantages:

- This approach would restrict the involvement of a wide range of officers that may bring useful knowledge to the process.
- This approach reverts to the system previously used which could be seen to be too insular.

Option 3: Retain the current system, with improved consistency of panel members ie. Consistent panel chair for all applications and one nominated member from the relevant service area for all service-specific applications.

Advantages;

- Panel members would be drawn from officers that have been previously involved in the assessments and who have now gained experience of assessing applications and using the scoring system.
- A consistent Chair should achieve consistent scoring.

Disadvantages;

- The potential risk of inconsistent scoring remains although this should be minimised.
- A reduced number of panel members may limit the opportunity for peer challenge.

2.2.2 In evaluating these options, consideration is also given to the need to allocate staff resources proportionately given the relatively small amounts of funding being awarded under the Small Grants programme, as well as the resources that will be needed to administer the new Outcomes Based grants programme. It is therefore recommended that the assessment process for both programmes is based on option three, as follows;

- Assessments for small grants to be undertaken by two officers rather than three, with one lead officer allocated from the Community Development team who would assess all applications with one other officer from a relevant service area.
- Assessments for the OBG programme to be undertaken by three officers, with two officers from Community Development that would

assess all applications with one officer from a relevant service area.

- Service areas will be asked to nominate one officer to join the assessment of all service-specific applications.
- The scoring system will be the same as that used last year; 0 – not met; 1 - barely met; 2 – partially met; 3 – fully met. Any additional relevant information provided by the applicant in question 7e of the Small Grants form and question 11 on the OBG form will be used by the panel to award additional scores in any section of the assessment as appropriate (assessments sheets for small grants and OBG are attached at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).
- A weighting will applied to question 3d in the OBG application form ie. 'How will this project/activity address the core outcome selected?' The panel will assess this question using a scoring range of 1 – 5 (1 - poor; 2 - fair; 3 – good; 4 – very good; 5 – excellent) to assess the extent to which the applicant has demonstrated that the project or activity addresses the core outcome selected. The application of this weighting will help to ensure that funding decisions achieve the stated aim of this programme which is to award funds to services that support the delivery of core outcomes.
- Applications serving similar client groups or providing similar types of projects/activities will be assessed together, so that activities and costs across similar projects can be compared.
- Once 10%-20% of assessments (depending on number of applications received) an independent officer will review assessments to check for consistency. If inconsistencies are identified all assessments will be reconsidered. This process will be repeated until the independent officer is satisfied that assessments are consistent.
- A scoring guide will be provided to panels as a guide for awarding scores.
- Voluntary sector representatives from organisations that have not submitted an application to either of the grant programmes will be invited to observe assessment panels and provide their feedback. The proposed Guidance Notes for Observers is attached at Appendix 4 and the proposed feedback form for observers is attached at Appendix 5.

2.3 Background

2.3.1 A scoring system for assessing grant applications was introduced as part of the grants administration process in 2009. This system was introduced in response to concerns about the transparency of the process. At the end of each application round since 2009 the scoring system has been reviewed in light of feedback received from the voluntary sector, Members and Officers involved in the panels. It is recognised that this is not a scientific process and the aim of the

annual reviews is to continually improve the process based on lessons learned each year.

- 2.3.2 The proposed assessment process for 2013-14 is based on the existing system and aims to take in to account feedback received, whilst balancing the need to manage Council resources across the two grant programmes.

2.4 Current situation

- 2.4.1 The assessment process in 2012-13 involved 24 panels of three officers each. Each panel was chaired by a Service Manager and panels spent approximately 45 minutes per application. The membership of panels was drawn from a range of officers from various Council departments.
- 2.4.2 Officers involved in assessment panels received a briefing on the Compact and Chairs of panels met at the beginning of the process to agree the process for scoring. Guidance on scoring was issued to panel members. The assessment process in 2012-13 was observed for the first time by voluntary sector representatives who provided their feedback on the process.

2.5 Why a change is needed

- 2.5.1 The current assessment process is resource intensive involving a significant amount of officer time and administration. The feedback from voluntary sector observers for the 2012-13 process was positive however concerns have been raised by GAP Members about the consistency of scoring.
- 2.5.2 In 2013-14 the Council will be introducing two grant programmes, one for small grants and a new Outcomes Based Programme. The assessment and administration of both programmes will require significant levels of staff resources. The proposed recommendation will assist in managing the level of resources required for both programmes and aims to achieve more consistency in the assessment of applications.

2.6 Implications of the Recommendation

2.7 Staffing/workforce

- 2.7.1 The delivery of a Small Grants programme alongside an Outcomes Based grants process will require some changes to roles and responsibilities for staff involved in the administration of grants. Any changes will be undertaken with due regard to the organisations Protocol for Managing Change.

2.8 Legal comments

2.8.1 The Council may distribute grants in accordance with its agreed criteria. Due weight must be given in terms of equalities duties, procedural fairness and the statement of intention of the Compact with the voluntary and community sector. Should the Council distribute funds not in accordance with these principles, then it could be at risk of legal challenge.

2.9 Financial Implications

2.9.1 The budget for the Main Grants programme was £669,360 in 2012-13. The report to GAP on the 30th July 2012 proposed that this budget would be ring-fenced subject to the Council's annual budget planning processes. This budget will be divided between the Small Grants and OBG programme.

2.10 Risk Management Implications

2.10.1 The risks associated with these proposals are;

a) *Reputational risk to the Council if the assessment process is not delivered as planned.*

The proposal to use an amended version of the current system that also aims to manage resources effectively should mitigate against this risk as the Council has experience of delivering this process in previous years.

b) *A lack of confidence in the process by Voluntary sector organisations.*

Voluntary sector representatives provided their feedback on the process last year which was positive. The amendments to the process are based on feedback from the voluntary sector, Members and officers involved in assessments so should therefore increase confidence in the process. Voluntary sector observers will be invited to observe the process again in 2013-14. These actions should help mitigate against the risk that the sector does not have confidence in the process.

2.11 Equalities implications

2.11.1 An equality impact assessment of the proposed process does not identify any potential for an adverse impact on any of the protected characteristics.

2.12 Corporate Priorities

2.12.1 Grant applicants are asked to indicate which corporate priority their application relates to. An analysis of applications against the corporate priorities is provided to GAP each year. This report therefore incorporates all of the corporate priorities listed below:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

- Supporting our town centre, our local shopping centres and businesses.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Roger Hampson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 31 August 2012		
Name: Sarah Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 31 August 2012		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Kashmir Takhar, Head of Community Development, 020 8420 9331

Background Papers:

GAP report: Small grant application form and draft timetable, 30th July 2012

<http://www2.harrow.gov.uk/documents/g61311/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Monday%2030-Jul-2012%2019.30,%20Grants%20Advisory%20Panel.pdf?T=10>