

Meeting: Cabinet
Date: 23 June 2005
Subject: Distribution of Funds Raised For Tsunami Disaster Relief
Responsible Officer: Paul Najsarek
Contact Officer: Bindu Arjoon
Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Business Connections and Performance
Key Decision: No
Status: Part 1

Section 1: Summary

Following the tsunami disaster on 26 December 2004, Harrow Council offered to collect funds donated by the public and Harrow Council staff. Public donations total £16,138; Council staff donations total £3,575. These funds are currently held in a temporary internal investment account of Harrow Council. No decision was made when establishing this account on how the funds would be disbursed or who would make this decision. A Steering Group has been established to oversee local relief efforts. The membership of the Harrow Tsunami Relief Steering Group appears at **Appendix 1**.

Decision Required

Cabinet is asked to remit the Harrow Tsunami Relief Steering Group with the responsibility for the placement of funds raised locally for tsunami disaster relief.

Reason for report

To ensure the effective distribution of funds raised locally, with due regard to probity and transparency.

Benefits

- To respond to the wish by local residents and Harrow Council staff to contribute to international relief efforts that are connected with Harrow communities.
- Decision making is delegated to a specific group comprising community

representatives and elected members who have been involved in relief efforts and who have direct connections with affected areas.

- To promote solidarity across local communities and give the use of funds a Harrow focus.

Cost of Proposals

There is no additional cost associated with the proposal.

The council has facilitated public collections towards the tsunami disaster relief:

Public donations = £16,138
Staff donations = £3,575

This proposal seeks a decision only to allocate these funds to the Tsunami Relief Steering Group to then distribute.

Risks

- Donated funds are not distributed and held by the council.
- Decision on use of funds is further delayed

Implications if recommendations rejected

- Possible further delay in passing on funds intended for tsunami disaster relief (clarity needed on where decision making lies)
- Possible concern and frustrations amongst the community and staff that Harrow Council is retaining funds intended for disaster relief.
- Possible concern that relief funds are not targeted on a project connected with Harrow local communities

Section 2: Report

Brief History

As part of its commitment to strengthening local communities, Harrow Council has undertaken to support communities affected by the tsunami disaster, and to help co-ordinate local relief efforts. To facilitate this the council established the “Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster Relief Fund” to enable donations via the Harrow Council website and in reception (donations to date £16,138). The council also enabled staff to make contributions internally via payroll (£3,575). At the time of arranging the donations to be collected, the council made no decision on who would decide how the funds would be spent.

Harrow Council held a memorial service and community conference on 22 February 2005. At this conference, councillors and community representatives volunteered to form a steering group to take fundraising and relief efforts forward together.

The Tsunami Relief Steering Group met on 23 March 2005 (see list of members in Appendix 1) and established the following Terms of Reference:

1. To co-ordinate local relief efforts
2. To advise groups seeking to provide support to the affected areas through direct donations to projects or fund raising programmes
3. To use links in affected areas to appraise and update local knowledge, related to the needs or survivors and affected areas
4. To champion medium and longer term local interest and support for the affected regions
5. To bring together information about various projects being undertaken by groups in Harrow
6. To assist in the identification of support required from local statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

The steering group has met once. The next steering group meeting is at the end of June 2005. At the first meeting the steering group agreed to establish a project group to explore and take forward a specific relief project with a view of long-term development (see members of the project group in Appendix 2). It was decided the project group should have the final say on work, while the steering group would act to provide advice and address 'blockages'.

The project group has met twice, and is in the process of establishing itself as a registered charity in support of a long-term development project. They will present progress made to the next steering group meeting. No funds have so far been committed for this project.

To ensure due probity and transparency in the decision-making process of the allocation of the funds, Cabinet is asked to delegate this decision to the steering group. The steering group would ensure that projects allocated funds had a clear connection to a Harrow based agency or group, and so retain a local focus to the fundraising efforts.

If Cabinet agrees with this proposal, it is also intended that Harrow council staff be consulted on whether they would want their contributions to go towards supporting the project selected by the project group. This consultation will be done via the Intranet and internal newsletters.

Options considered

Another option considered was to transfer the donated funds to the Disaster Emergency Committee. This option is not being recommended as community representatives on the steering group have indicated a wish to focus their relief efforts on Sri Lanka specifically.

Consultation

Consultation has taken place with the Chair of the steering group, Cllr Dighé, and the project group. The views of the project group have been incorporated in this submission.

Financial Implications

The sums collected, which are not Council monies, are held on a temporary internal investment account pending agreed disbursement. Authority will be required to release the sums held. Currently, with interest, the total sum is £19,920 (including staff donations and wider public donations).

The Council account for public donations is still open and the steering group should now consider agreeing closure and open a bank account if donations are to continue.

Legal Implications

None

Equalities Impact

Support to communities who have been affected by the tsunami disaster whether directly or indirectly speaks directly to the council's priority of strengthening communities.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Appendix 1 – membership of Harrow Tsunami Relief Steering Group

Appendix 2 - membership of Harrow Tsunami Project Group

Available on the council website: Information on Harrow Council support for local relief efforts; notes from the Memorial service/community conference of 22 February. Any additional information on the Steering Group or Project Group (including minutes) available from Jenny Aulin, Community Support Officer ext 7697

Appendix 1

Harrow Tsunami Relief Steering Group

Membership¹

Harrow Council Representatives

Cllr Dighé (Chair)
Cllr Idaikkadar
Cllr Ismail
Cllr Lyne
Cllr Mithani
Cllr Patel
Cllr Ray
Cllr Stephenson

Officer Support: Jenny Aulin- Policy & Partnership Service

Community Representatives

Tracy Coleman- Church of Scientology
Dr Kathirgamanathan
Ela Ray- Resident

¹ As of May 2005

Appendix 2

Harrow Tsunami Project Group

Membership²

Harrow Council Representatives

Cllr Idaikkadar (Acting Chair)
Cllr Ismail (Acting Vice-chair)

Officer Support: Jenny Aulin- Policy & Partnership Service

Community Representatives

Berjis Daver (MP)
Mr Gopi Gobiratnam – Tamil Community Centre
Mrs Aravintha Jananayagam – Middlesex Tamil Academy
Mr Suresh Krishna – resident
Mr Nimalan Seevaratnam - resident

Note: membership is open to anyone individual or organization in agreement with the group's charitable aims. Members are currently looking to involve more representatives from Sri Lankan community groups and schools

² As of May 2005