

Meeting:	Grants Advisory Panel
Date:	2 July 2009
Subject:	Review of the Grants Application Process
Key Decision: (Executive side only)	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Brendon Hills – Corporate Director (Community & Environment)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Chris Mote, Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 – Revised application form

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report sets out proposed changes to the current grants application and assessment process for 2010/11.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Grants Advisory Panel is requested to agree to make the following recommendations to the Leader of the Council for approval:

1. The application process is revised in line with the recommendations of this report. See paragraph 2.4.3.2 for details.
2. Grant applications are presented to the panel in January and recommendations made to Cabinet in February subject to budget decisions for 2010/11. See paragraph 2.4.4.2 for details.
3. The application timescale is shortened. See paragraph 2.4.4.3 for details.
4. The appeals process is abolished. See paragraph 2.5.3 for details.

REASON:

1. To address concerns raised by the voluntary and community sector through the Overview and Scrutiny Review about the current grants application process
2. To clarify and improve the application and assessment process
3. To give applicants an indication before the end of the financial year and within a shorter timescale what the funding arrangements for the following year might be, subject to budget decisions for 2010/11.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

2.1 Introductory Paragraph

2.1.1.1 This report sets out proposed changes to the current grants application process and timescale for 2010/11. It will also review the appeals process and make recommendations for change.

2.2 Brief Background

2.2.1 Grant Application Process: The current grants application process was last reviewed and revised in July 2006 for the 2007/08 grants round.

2.3 Current Situation

2.3.1 During 2008, Harrow Council undertook a scrutiny review to examine its relationship with the voluntary and community sector. Through this review, a number of concerns were raised about the current grants process. The scrutiny review made a number of recommendations, some of which will be further explored through the development of a Third Sector Strategy. The scrutiny review also recommended a review of current grant criteria to be made in the interim to the grants process for the 2010/2011 round.

2.4 Why a change is needed

2.4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Review found that there was a lack of confidence and trust in the current grant arrangements; and expressed a number of concerns about the grants programme that relate to the application process.

2.4.2 **Application Form** - The revised application form, which can be found in Appendix 1, has been divided into 10 sections. Each section has been designed to obtain, as much information as possible from applicants, particularly if supporting documents will not be available to officers and the panel for consultation at this stage. Guidance on how to complete the application form will be given via briefing sessions and guidance notes during the next funding round.

2.4.3.1 **Section 1 - Organisation Contact Details**
Section 2 - About the organisation – applicants are asked to state their **legal status** and to describe the activities of the organisation
Section 3 - Policies and procedures – if the proposed changes to the conditions of grant approval are agreed, applicants will be asked to confirm that they have the required **policies and procedures** in place and are informed that they will be expected to submit this evidence if a grant is agreed.
Sections 4 - About the proposed project/service - applicants are asked to describe the proposed project and to demonstrate how it meets council priorities and local needs.
Section 5 - Project Delivery – applicants are asked to state how and where the project will be delivered and how it will address the needs of Harrow's diverse community
Section 6 - Who will benefit from the project? – applicants are asked to state how many users they anticipate and how they will benefit from the project.
Section 7 - Project Cost – applicants are asked to provide a proposed budget breakdown and to state the outcome of their fund-raising efforts.
Section 8 - Professional references – applicants are asked to provide the contact details of two referees.

Section 9 - Future of the Project – applicants are asked to explain how they plan to continue the project once the funding has ceased.

Section 10 - Declaration - If there is no longer a requirement for applicants to submit supporting documents with the application form, it will be even more important for applicants to sign a declaration to confirm that the information provided 'is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge'.

2.4.3.2 It is recommended that the panel agrees for the revised application form to be used during grants round 2010/11.

2.4.4 The Application Timescale

2.4.4.1 For the last few years the grants application round has opened at the beginning of July and has closed at the end of September. However, the panel do not make their recommendations to Cabinet until March as the budget for the coming year is not agreed until February. As the 3-year service level agreements (SLAs) of 15 organisations expire in March 2010, it is imperative that the panel give an indication of what the funding arrangements will be for the next year at least 3 months in advance of this date, so that these organisations can plan effectively. Although the Council's budgets will not be agreed by Cabinet until February, organisations may need assistance in making the necessary arrangements to meet their legal obligations, and therefore **it is recommended that:**

2.4.4.2 Grant recommendations be brought forward to the GAP meeting in January, subject to budget decisions for 2010/11. This would mean that organisations would have an indication of potential funding and the likely implication that this may have on them in the following year, albeit subject to budget decisions at the Cabinet meeting in February. This proposal would also have financial implications because if recommendations for funding are not made until January, SLA may need to be extended for another month until April 2010 to meet the 3 months notice requirement.

2.4.4.2 Recent grants rounds have been too long, lasting 9 months from the beginning of the process to the date when recommendations are made to Cabinet. If the panel were to support this recommendation, the **grants round timescale would be reduced** from 9 to 5 months from start to finish.

Proposed grants programme timescale:

Mid August	Grants application round launched
Mid October	Grants application round closing date
Mid October – End of November	Applications assessed and draft report completed
Early to mid December	Copy of draft report sent out to applicants for comments
Early January	Report deadline

2.4.4.3 It is hoped that the proposed changes to the application form and the conditions of grant approval (see results of interim grants review consultation report) will simplify the application process thus making it more manageable for officers and the panel to assess applications forms within a shorter timescale. Therefore it is recommended that the above proposed timescale is adopted for grants round 2010/11.

2.5 Appeals Process

2.5.1 At the moment the officer's report is sent to applicants for information only, before it is presented to the Panel. Although comments are not invited, a small number of applicants comment on the content of the report and occasionally send in additional information, if they feel that the officer's report doesn't adequately represent their proposal.

2.5.2 In September 2008, a Compact Monitoring Form was received from AWIND “relating to the way in which their grant application and a subsequent appeal against the Council’s decision were handled”. The organisation appealed against the panel’s decision not to award them funding for 2008/09. However the panel upheld their original decision, as the organisation did not meet the grounds for appeal, which was that: “the information contained in the officer’s report submitted to the Panel was incorrect or incomplete, and therefore had a material affect on the decision”. Their complaint was investigated by a council officer and it was noted that there were some discrepancies in the officer’s report that were not acknowledged through the appeals process. As a consequence it was recommended that: “summary reports are sent to applicants for comments before submission to the Grants Advisory Panel and that any comments are included in the final report to that Panel”.

2.5.3 Therefore, it is recommended that

- (a) Applicants are formally invited to comment on the accuracy of the officer’s report and provide additional information before it is submitted to the Panel. Once the Panel has agreed their recommendations for funding, applicants will not be able to appeals on the grounds that: “the information contained in the officer’s report submitted to the Panel was incorrect or incomplete, and therefore had a material affect on the decision”.
- (b) As there is currently only one ground for appeal, and applicants cannot appeal against the Panel’s recommendations or subsequent Cabinet decisions; the above proposal (if agreed) negates the need for an appeals process. It is therefore recommended that the appeals process be abolished. This proposal would be in line with other council’s grant programmes and large funding bodies, who do not operate an appeals process.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Staffing/workforce

3.1.2 The aim is to provide improved clarity and transparency in the grants process that will lead to better use of existing resources. For example, if officers are no longer required to gather and collate supporting documents as part of the first stage assessment, they will have more time to ensure that each application is assessed against the criteria and funding priorities.

3.2 Equalities Impact

3.2.1 See Equality Impact Assessment for details.

3.3 Legal Implications

3.3.1 The Council is empowered to make grants to voluntary organisations under Section 48 of the Local Government Act 1985 as well as under other legislation. Having an approved process will ensure that the Council can comply with its legal duties and its statement of intention of the Compact with the voluntary sector.

3.4 Community Safety

3.4.1 There are no community safety implications for the Council in relation to this report.

3.5 Financial Implications

3.5.1 There could be a financial implication if the panel agrees to recommend grant awards in advance of the Cabinet agreeing the budget for 2010/11, particularly if it is below the 2009/10 funding level.

3.7 Performance Issues

3.7.1 National Indicator (NI) number 7, which relates to creating an environment in which the voluntary and community sector can thrive, has been included within Harrow's Local Area Agreement. Results from the first national Third Sector Survey indicate that Harrow's performance against this indicator is 10.4%. Harrow will be aiming to improve performance by a statistically significant amount, now agreed as an increase of 4.4%.

The recommendations in this report have the potential to contribute to improving performance against this indicator by:

- Encouraging innovation within the sector.
- Clarifying the eligibility criteria;
- Improving the application process so that it is clear, transparent and easier to access;
- Improving the speed and effectiveness of the grant decision-making process

The provision of grant funding to voluntary and community sector organisations has the potential to contribute to NI 1 '% of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area'. Current performance against this indicator is 49% and target performance is 61%. This will be achieved by encouraging grant applications from all sections of the wide and diverse voluntary and community sector, so that:

- Different sections of the community can identify and address their own needs, in line with the Harrow Strategy Partnership priorities
- Community cohesion can be developed amongst the same and different communities.

The provision of grant funding to voluntary and community sector organisations has the potential to contribute to NI 6 'Participation in regular volunteering'. The target increase in numbers volunteering is 300 for 'socially excluded' volunteers and 1,200 for other volunteers. The current position is an achievement against target on 'socially excluded' volunteers and a slight under-achievement against 'other volunteers'.

3.7 Environmental Impact

3.7.1 There are no environmental impacts for the Council related to this report.

3.8 Risk Management Implications

3.8.1 There are no risks management implications in relation to this report.

Risk included on Directorate risk register? **No**

Separate risk register in place? **No**

SECTION 4 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Name: Sheela Thakrar	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 22 nd June 2009		
Name: Jessica Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 22 nd June 2009		

Section 5 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Alex Dewsnap



Divisional Director
(Partnership Development and
Performance)

Date: 22nd June 2009

Section 6 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards



Divisional Director
(Environmental Services)

Date: 22nd June 2009

SECTION 7 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact:

Audrey Salmon, Interim Service Manager – Community Resources and Projects (ext. 5332)
Parveen Vasdev, Principal Grants Officer (ext. 7625)
Charlotte Clark – Senior Grants Officer (ext. 2335).

Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Revised Application Form