

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

Meeting:	GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL
Date:	13 TH SEPTEMBER 2004
Subject:	STRATEGIC REVIEW OF GRANTS – UPDATE
Key decision:	YES
Responsible Chief Officer:	DIRECTOR FINANCIAL & BUSINESS STRATEGY
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	PARTNERSHIP & PROPERTY
Status:	PART 1
Ward:	N / A
Enclosures:	APPENDIX 1 – MORI SUMMARY CONSULTATION RESULTS APPENDIX 2 – DRAFT STRATEGY FOR FUTURE FUNDING

1. **Summary/ Reason for urgency (if applicable)**

- 1.1 The Grants Advisory Panel needs to finalise its recommendations for the new strategy prior to the Cabinet meeting on 14th October 2004.

2. **Recommendations (for decision by Cabinet)**

- 2.1 That the new Strategy for supporting the Voluntary Sector in Harrow, as amended following consultation with the voluntary organisations in the Borough, be approved.
- 2.2 That the Panel decide whether the current method of allocating space in the Community Premises should be grants based and subject to the Community Strategy criteria.

REASON: to enable Members to finalise their strategic recommendations to Cabinet for the Council's future support to the voluntary sector.

3. **Consultation with Ward Councillors.**

- 3.1 Not applicable

4. Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)

- 4.1 Grants Advisory Panel 27 July 2004 – Members considered the MORI report on the results of the consultation with the Voluntary Sector on the grants review and decided to defer in-depth discussion until this meeting.
- 4.2 Members at the same meeting discussed the use of the Community Premises and requested a review be undertaken as part of the strategy.

5. Relevance to Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 This report addresses the Council's stated priority of "strengthening Harrow's local communities by promoting social inclusion amongst all Harrow residents both young and old, by seeking to eradicate poverty and by reducing the fear of crime."

6 Background Information and Options Considered

- 6.1 At the last meeting of the Grants Advisory Panel the MORI voluntary sector consultation results were discussed briefly although since these had only been received by the Council the day before the meeting, Members requested the opportunity to discuss these further before making their final strategic recommendations to Cabinet.

The Consultation Process

- 6.2 Members will recall that a two stage consultation was carried out with the voluntary sector. The 1st stage the consultation involved 9 umbrella groups as well as the Chairs of the Primary and Secondary Headteachers' Associations and the Chair of the Association of Harrow Governing Bodies.
- 6.3 For the 2nd stage consultation the Council consulted 427 community groups, many of which are in receipt of some form of support from the Council. In order to expedite the process and ensure transparency and accountability, the Council commissioned MORI to conduct the 2nd stage consultation. MORI carried out a postal survey of the 427 groups which included reminder letters for those who did not respond within the first deadline given.
- 6.4 The response rate of 19% (80 responses) was disappointing although it is recognised that voluntary groups often lack the resources for this type of survey.
- 6.5 Importantly however, during this second phase MORI carried out face to face in-depth interviews with 10 umbrella groups suggested by the Council and the feedback received from these proved invaluable.
- 6.6 In addition, the survey was able to collect useful data about the groups and their users and obtained general views on how the Council's support is currently perceived.

The Consultation Results

- 6.7 Regarding general issues, there were several key issues highlighted by MORI:-
 - The voluntary sector has a low understanding of the Council's current funding strategy and grants process

- There is a perception that the Council lacks understanding of the needs of the voluntary sector
 - The communication between the Council and the voluntary sector is considered to be scarce.
 - Greater funding advice, assistance, information and moral support is sought by voluntary groups.
 - Transparency of funding decisions is very important.
- 6.8 Each of these issues will be addressed as part of the operational delivery of the new strategy, once this is approved.
- 6.9 Regarding the strategic proposals, the MORI survey was designed to seek specific views on each of the proposed changes. Their summary report findings are attached at appendix 1.
- 6.10 The following proposed changes in strategy were supported by the voluntary sector:-
- The adoption of the Community Strategy Criteria for allocating future funding.
 - The qualifying conditions that groups need to meet to be eligible for funding.
 - The establishment of a £10,000 threshold for SLA's
 - Funding conditions for SLA's with performance measures, reporting and monitoring requirements and "clawback" arrangements.
 - A move to 3 year funding
 - Monitoring of Council-wide funding distribution to influence grant decisions in the future
 - The introduction of transitional funding for groups that may not qualify in the future, or emerging groups.
- 6.11 The following suggestions were not supported by voluntary groups:-
- Annual funding themes within the Community Strategy criteria
 - Placing emphasis on supporting certain types of organisation or activity (such as groups holding the Community Legal Services Charter Mark, groups dealing with consumer debts, asylum seekers etc.)
- 6.12 At its meeting on 27th July 2004, the Panel agreed to drop the proposal for annual funding themes as a result of the consultation feedback.

Community Premises

- 6.13 The one strategic proposal that did not receive conclusive feedback concerns the suggested change of the allocation of the Community Premises accommodation to one of a grant-based system.
- 6.14 As a result Members requested a further discussion to determine the future strategy of the Community Premises.
- 6.15 There are two key issues Members are requested to consider:-
- Whether the current method of allocating premises should be changed to a grants - based system (as feedback from community groups was inconclusive), and;

- Whether the criteria for allocating space (or grants) should be based upon the Community Strategy criteria or separate criteria.

6.16 It should be noted that as far as can be ascertained, Harrow is unique in providing community premises in this form across London although several other London Boroughs do provide community centres run by the voluntary sector.

Staffing

6.17 At its meeting on 27th July Members requested a review of staffing within the grants unit to support the new strategy.

6.18 The Council is going through a major organisational restructure and at present middle management posts are being advertised and filled.

6.19 The grants function is within Business Connections in the new structure. The Group Manager (Procurement and Community Links) was appointed in June and the Service Manager (Community Links) post will be advertised this month. Community Links covers both relationships with the business community and the voluntary sector. The grants team will report to the service manager.

6.20 At present there are two permanent grants posts - Grants officer and Grants Assistant - one of which is filled on a part time basis. There are also resources currently devoted to educational lettings and the community premises. Therefore it is anticipated that the final structure will include 4 posts. However, one is likely to be used on a flexible basis to cope with the peak in the workload when grant applications are submitted.

6.21 The new team will have a more proactive and outward facing role and will start to build up a stronger relationship with the voluntary sector. A further report will be put to the Grants Panel later in the year once the new structure is in place.

7 Consultation

Not applicable

8. Finance Observations

8.1 None.

9. Legal Observations

9.1 None.

10. Conclusion

10.1 The MORI survey provided invaluable feedback and highlighted key issues to be addressed both at strategic and operational level.

10.2 The amended strategy document (appendix 2) takes account of the views expressed by the voluntary sector as discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 27th July 2004. It is recommended that the amended strategy be endorsed by the Panel and be reported for approval by Cabinet.

- 10.3 A further report regarding staffing of the Grants Unit will be provided once the new structure is in place.
- 10.4 Regarding the use of the community premises, Members are requested to agree any changes required to the current allocation system for incorporation into the strategy, which will be recommended to Cabinet on 14th October 2004.
- 11. **Background Papers**
 - 11.1 None
- 12. **Author**
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