

REPORT FOR: Grants Advisory Panel

Date of Meeting: 2 March 2011

Subject: **INFORMATION REPORT – Preliminary Results of Consultation into Review of Council Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector through Grants, Community Lettings and Community Premises**

Responsible Officer: Brendon Hills, Corporate Director
Community and Environment

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Appendix 1: Consultation comments

Section 1 – Summary

This report sets out the top level results of the consultation in to Council support to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) through grants, community lettings and community premises.

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

- 2.1 The Grants Advisory Panel recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Culture in September 2010 that the Council undertakes a consultation on Council support to the voluntary sector. This consultation included a review of Community Lettings and Community Premises to determine if the existing models are still fit for purpose and meeting the needs of the entire voluntary and community sector.
- 2.2 The consultation opened on the 1st December 2010 and closed on the 28th January 2011. The consultation was publicised in a number of ways including; Information sent to approximately 600 voluntary and community sector organisations via the Community Development database; information sent out via the HAVS (Harrow Association of Voluntary Service) mail-out; link on the front page of Harrow Council’s website etc.
- 2.3 84 responses were received to the consultation questionnaire by the closing date. Of these 77% of the respondents were responding on behalf of their organisation and 21% were responding in a personal capacity. In addition to the questionnaire responses a number of consultation focus group meetings were undertaken with Community Premises user groups, community lettings user groups, voluntary and community sector organisations and Headteachers. These meetings were attended by approximately 49 (voluntary and community sector) VCS representatives and 60 schools representatives. The feedback at these meetings was recorded and is presented in the background paper ‘Consultation comments’.

2.3 Summary of questionnaire responses

2.3.1 Commissioning

The consultation sought views on whether or not the Council should secure services from within the VCS through commissioning: 86% of respondents agreed that this was an effective way of securing some services by Harrow Council for residents. 8% did not agree and 6% did not know.

Respondents were asked their views on whether or not they agreed with the following criteria for establishing which services should be commissioned:

Criteria	Yes	No	Don't know / not stated
Does it help the Council and/or other statutory agencies deliver their priorities?	68%	17%	12%
Does it address disadvantage?	56%	24%	20%
Is it providing a preventative service?	56%	24%	20%
Is it an essential service that will reduce demand on statutory services?	49%	31%	21%
Does the service provide good value for money in the delivery of outcomes?	73%	10%	18%
Is the service making effective use of volunteers?	51%	29%	20%
Does the service work strategically with other key agencies to deliver outcomes for Harrow residents?	58%	18%	24%

Some of the comments on what other criteria should be included were:

- *Does it provide choice for service users?*
- *Does it help local youth?*
- *Is it a locally based organisation or group / or has a local presence?*
- *That it offers an opportunity to implement a fresh approach to service provision.*

(for a full list of comments see background paper 'Consultation comments')

2.3.2 Small grants

In addition to commissioning, the consultation proposed that a portion of the grants budget should be reserved for small grants. The proposal suggested that these would be for grants up to £10,000 per year, to support one-off or small-scale projects or activities.

Respondents were asked their views on what groups should be eligible to apply for small grants:

61% either strongly agreed or agreed that small grants should only be available to those organisations whose income is below a certain threshold. 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 8% neither agreed or disagreed.

Respondents were asked what they considered the maximum income threshold should be:

£10,000: 51%
£50,000: 27%
£100,000: 8%

£500,000: 10%

65% either strongly disagreed or disagreed that organisations receiving small grants in one grants round should not be able to apply in the next grants round.14% agreed or strongly agreed and 8% neither agreed or disagreed.

2.3.4 Assessment criteria for small grants

Views were sought on whether or not the following criteria should be used as part of the assessment process:

Assessment criteria	Strongly agree/ agree	Strongly disagree / disagree	Neither agree or disagree
Whether or not the proposed activity duplicates an existing project/activity being offered to the same client group?	68%	21%	11%
Whether or not the organisation has a track record of delivering the proposed project /activity?	83%	10%	7%
Whether or not the proposed project / activity can be shown to tackle disadvantage?	74%	16%	10%
Whether or not the project / activity provides value for money in the delivery of outcomes?	92%	2%	6%

Other criteria:

Other assessment criteria suggested by respondents included:

- *An understanding of local need and ability to adapt to changing needs / requirements.*
- *Evidence of need / demand for project*
- *Feasibility of proposal, capacity to deliver it, given staffing levels, skills mix and other commitments.*
- *How the project fits with the aims and objectives and skills of the organisation/s involved?*
- *Promoting community cohesion, understanding and inclusiveness.*
- *Sustainability of the project, good arrangements for monitoring outcomes and involving beneficiaries in the project development.*
- *Whether the project can be delivered in partnership with another organisation?*

(full list of comments available in the background paper 'Consultation comments')

2.3.5 Appeals criteria

The consultation sought views on whether or not the Council should remove the appeals procedure in line with other funding bodies, the responses were:

Strongly agree / agree:	35%
Strongly disagree / disagree:	51%
Neither agree or disagree / not stated:	13%

If the appeals criteria is retained should appeals be considered before final grant recommendations are made the responses were:

Strongly agree / agree:	78%
Strongly disagree / disagree:	11%
Neither agree or disagree / not stated:	10%

2.3.6 The consultation sought views on who should manage the delivery of a small grants programme, the results were:

Harrow Council:	62%
Voluntary or Community Sector agency:	11%
Community Trust:	18%
Other:	10%

2.3.7 Community Premises

Views were sought on whether or not organisations should pay towards the cost of this provision. The responses were:

Strongly agree / agree:	65%
Strongly disagree / disagree:	21%
Neither agree or disagree / not stated:	14%

Views were also sought on whether or not alternate provision should be identified in the borough, such as a resource centre/s or drop-in venue/s that is possible, run by organisations themselves:

Strongly agree / agree:	75%
Strongly disagree / disagree:	7%
Neither agree or disagree / not stated:	18%

Respondents were asked what sort of provision should be provided at such a resource centre:

Shared computer facilities:	68%
Wi-fi:	60%

Hot desk areas:	64%
Interview space:	62%
Meeting rooms:	76%
Training facilities:	63%
Other:	14%

Views were sought on whether or not larger VCS organisations should support small groups with access to office space and meeting rooms?

Strongly agree / agree:	75%
Strongly disagree / disagree:	13%
Neither agree or disagree / not stated:	12%

Other comments on how else this provision could be provided included:

- *small organisations should be twinned with larger organisations*
- *have a strong infrastructure organisation commissioned to provide the resource*
- *Link up with GP, primary care premises, private sector organisations*
- *Use of council premises when not required for council's own use...*

2.3.8 Community Lettings

Views were sought on whether or not community organisations should be able to book directly with schools rather than the Council operating as an intermediary:

Strongly agree / agree:	75%
Strongly disagree / disagree:	8%
Neither agree or disagree / not stated:	12%

Views were also sought on what other support the Council could provide:

Directory of venues on the Harrow Council website:	35%
Streamlined booking process for Council venues:	10%
Concessionary rates for certain Council venues: eg. Off-peak times	46%

2.3.9 Equality impact

Respondents were asked whether or not they thought the proposed changes would impact differently on one more of the following groups; age, disability, race, gender, gender identity, religion or belief or sexual orientation?

Yes:	42%
No:	50%
Not stated:	8%

Some of the comments provided in response to this question raised the issue of access for disabled people and the need for this to be addressed when considering options for premises. There were also comments that

suggested that small grass roots organisations will be disadvantaged by commissioning.

Of those responding to the questionnaire 61% stated that their project was directed at, or of particular relevance to people from a specific ethnic background and 58% stated that their project was directed at, of particular relevance to people with disabilities.

2.3.10 Other comments

A full list of other comments received is available in the background paper 'Results of consultation'. In summary, the responses stress the need for transparency and fairness, building the capacity of the sector, the need for clear priorities and accountability both on the part of the grant giver and the grant receiver.

Other comments on the question of how else the Community Premises provision could be provided included suggestions to make use of schools, looking at the role of an infrastructure body to provide support with premises, considering the use of Council premises and in general strong support for the suggestion that larger VCS organisations should support small groups with accommodation.

Section 3 – Further Information

- 3.1 The results of the consultation will be used to inform options for reviewing the way that Council support is provided to the voluntary sector through grants, community lettings and Community Premises. A further report on options for revising the way this support is provided will be presented at a future meeting.

Section 4 – Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications attached to this report however, the results of the consultation will inform proposals for the review of support to the voluntary sector including the need to address efficiency savings in how this support is delivered in future.

Section 5 – Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 The Council recognises the valuable contribution that the VCS makes in helping it achieve its corporate priorities including the following;
- United and involved communities: a Council that listens and leads
 - Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Name: Kanta Hirani



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 17th February 2011

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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

Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Consultation comments