

GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL (SPECIAL) MINUTES

30 MARCH 2011

- Chairman:** * Councillor Nana Asante
- Councillors:** * Sue Anderson * Chris Mote
* Nizam Ismail * Joyce Nickolay
* Krishna James * Lynda Seymour (4)
* Mrs Vina Mithani * Sasi Suresh
- Adviser:** * Deven Pillay, Representative, Voluntary and Community Sector

In attendance: * Mrs Rekha Shah Minute 4
(Councillors)

- * Denotes Member present
(4) Denote category of Reserve Members

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

4. Grant Funding 2011/12

The Panel received a report which set out grant funding recommendations for 2011/12. The report requested that Members award funding from the Main Grants Programme to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to support the delivery of services.

The Divisional Director of Community and Cultural Services informed Members that the Council had received a record number of applications for grant funding and that the total sum requested exceeded the total funds

available. The total amount of funding available for distribution from the Main Grants Programme in 2011/12 was £669,360. Of this, £62,649 would be set aside to fund the one month grant extension payments approved by Cabinet on 13 January 2011. It was also recommended that consideration be given to a further 5% of the available budget being set aside to fund successful appeals, with an additional £20,781 be ring-fenced to fund the interim delivery and long-term development of support services to the Voluntary and Community Sector to replace those previously provided by the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services. With these deductions made, the total sum available for allocation was £576,375.

The Divisional Director informed the Panel that the report included two possible options for the allocation of grant funding. The first option was to approve grants for applications that had achieved an assessment score of 95% and above, and award these organisations 85% of the grant requested. This would allow 31 applications to be funded within the available budget. Applications scoring below 95% would be placed on a reserve list and awarded funds if they became available. This was the officers' recommended option.

Option 2 was to lower the assessment threshold and this would make more organisations eligible for grant funding, although this would mean that each organisation would receive a lower percentage of the grant requested, depending on the percentage threshold used.

The Divisional Director informed Members that a number of improvements had been made to the grant application and assessment process in order to make it more transparent, fair and reduce the possibility of errors. Changes included:

- establishing a cross corporate, officer chaired assessment panels to assess applications, with rigorous record keeping to provide a clear and transparent audit trail for decision-making;
- the removal of questions on the scoring sheet used by assessment panels that referred to duplication and track record, as questions about these were not asked on the application form;
- the introduction of a word limit on sections of the application form;
- the introduction of an automatic calculating sheet on the budget page of the application form that only allowed information to be provided for one year;
- the direct transfer of information from the application form to the summary reports to ensure that information was not misrepresented or omitted;
- the introduction of a number of quality checks throughout the process to ensure that mistakes had not been made during the scoring and assessment process.

The Divisional Director informed the Panel that the quality checks had highlighted one error in that the Welldon Activity Group had been placed on the unsuccessful list when the organisation had in fact been successful at the first stage. The administrative error had been corrected, although this was not reflected in the paperwork circulated with the agenda.

Members expressed concern that the word limit had been introduced without discussion with the Panel and that a number of complaints had been received from organisations. Members were of the view that the change was constructive but ought to have been discussed with the Panel and communicated to the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Following questions from Members, officers clarified the following points:

- the word count on the electronic application form could not prevent those completing the form by hand from submitting additional information. However, any additional material in excess of the word limit had not been taken into account during the assessment process. Fortunately, most organisations had responded electronically;
- feedback would be made available to organisations should they wish to receive it;
- whilst the assessment panels were headed by different chairmen, they worked closely together to ensure there was consistency across the assessment process;
- the assessment panels consisted of a service manager, who acted as the chairman, a member of staff from the Community Development team and a member of staff from a relevant service area;
- due to the relatively small grants budget, officers did not feel it was appropriate to set aside more than 5% of funds for successful appeals.

The Chairman stated that the Panel should consider other options for managing the appeals process. She was of the view that putting aside 5% of the available budget might not be sufficient and that those successful at the appeal stage could be unfairly disadvantaged due to a subsequent lack of funds. She suggested that Members consider the possibility of only releasing money to successful applicants once all appeals had been considered. The percentage of grant offered to successful organisations may then have to be adjusted to accommodate those successful at appeal. Other Members of the Panel agreed with the proposal on the grounds that it would ensure that all successful applicants were treated equally, irrespective of whether they had appealed or been successful in the first instance. Members suggested that, for the purposes of considering appeals, only five Members attend the Panel and that no Member involved in the original recommendation to Cabinet be present.

The Panel's Adviser stated that it was important that the appeals process was fair, transparent and made clear to the Voluntary and Community Sector. He stated that the Voluntary and Community Sector would probably prefer a process with Member involvement that was open to the public.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That:

1. Grant recommendations for the 2011/12 Main Grants Programme be agreed, based on the assessment of applications described in the report and as outlined in paragraph 2.2.6, Option 1, subject to:
 - (a) completion of the appeals process;
 - (b) receipt of satisfactory supporting documents and references;
 - (c) confirmation from the recipient organisation that the proposed project can be delivered within the amount recommended by the deadline of 3 May 2011.
2. following the appeal process, authority be delegated to officers to adjust, in a uniform manner, the percentage of grant funding made to organisations with an assessment score of 95% and above, to accommodate any successful appeals;
3. appeals be assessed by reserve Members of the Grants Advisory Panel and final decisions made by the Portfolio Holder for Community and Culture or Cabinet, whichever is appropriate;
4. £20,781 be ring-fenced to fund the interim delivery and long-term development of support services for the voluntary and community sector to replace those provided by Harrow Association of Voluntary Service (HAVS);
5. applications with a score below the threshold agreed for funding are placed on a reserve list;
6. authority be delegated to the Corporate Director of Community and Environment to (i) withdraw grant offers where organisations do not comply with the conditions of grant funding as in Recommendation 1 above and (ii) award available funds to organisations on the reserve list in order of highest scores achieved (where scores are tied that funding is only distributed when available);
7. following the decision to release funds, officers carry out an equalities impact assessment to assess the potential impact of grant decisions on local residents, taking into account potential gaps in service delivery.

Reason for Recommendations: To award funding from the Main Grants Programme to Voluntary and Community sector organisations to support them in delivering their services in 2011/12.