

GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL

MINUTES

14 JULY 2011

- Chairman:** * Councillor Nana Asante
- Councillors:** * Ramji Chauhan (1) * Mrs Vina Mithani
 * Ann Gate (4) * Chris Mote
 * David Gawn (3) * Joyce Nickolay
 * Nizam Ismail * Krishna Suresh (5)
- Adviser:** * Deven Pillay, Representative, Voluntary and Community Sector

* Denotes Member present
 (1), (3), (4) and (5) Denote category of Reserve Members

58. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Sue Anderson
 Councillor Krishna James
 Councillor Sasikala Suresh
 Councillor Manji Kara

Reserve Member

Councillor David Gawn
 Councillor Ann Gate
 Councillor Krishna Suresh
 Councillor Ramji Chauhan

59. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: That

- (a) the following personal interests were declared and that all Members remained in the room during the discussion and voting:

Agenda Item 7 – Consultation on Draft Proposals to Contribute to the Development of a Third Sector Investment Plan

Councillor Joyce Nickolay

- Harrow in Europe
- Bentley Priory

Councillor David Gawn

- Harrow in Europe

Councillor Brian Gate

- Harrow in Europe
- Harrow Association of Voluntary Services

Councillor Nizam Ismail

- Muslim Council

Councillor Nana Asante

- Harrow Women's Centre
- Bentley Priory

- (b) the following prejudicial interests were declared and Councillors would leave the room should the relevant organisation be discussed:

Agenda Item 7 – Consultation on Draft Proposals to Contribute to the Development of a Third Sector Investment Plan

Councillor Joyce Nickolay

- Harrow Association of Voluntary Services
- Weldon Activity Centre

60. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

61. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that the following public question was received:

Questioner: Carmel Miedziolka (The Harrow Women's Centre)

Question: Do you have any evidence that Harrow's consultation with the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) that was conducted in January was at a sufficient level to engage all and was not as some VCS providers suggest a relatively small and limited sample?

**Answer:
(Chairman)** No, I do not have evidence that the consultation was at a sufficient level. My information is that 84 responses were received from the consultation. Bearing in mind that a conservative estimate of Harrow's Voluntary and Community Sector is 600 organisations, that is a small response. However, it is important to remember that response rates to public consultations are often low. The VCS must however take some responsibility to engage with the Council. I am confident that the Council has made an effort to reach out to relevant organisations although my personal view is that the response rate is not high enough in view of the change proposed.

Supplemental Question: Can you tell us how the consultation process was informed by intelligent commissioning, as defined by the Audit Commission?

**Answer:
(Chairman)** The consultation process is an ongoing process. I cannot say how much the process has been informed by the Audit Commission's concept of intelligent commissioning. However, there are still opportunities for the VCS to respond to the proposals and it is up to the sector to make its voice heard.

62. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

63. Deputations

RESOLVED: That in accordance with Executive Procedure Rule 50 (Part 4D of the Constitution), that the following deputations be received:

- (1) Representatives of Harrow Women's Centre submitted a deputation entitled: "Challenging the current proposal for the transition from Grants to Commissioning".

The first depute stated that:

- Harrow Women's Centre provided information, advice and support for women in a women-only environment. Support

services included counselling and sign-posting to other women's services. The Centre provided support groups, classes and social events;

- like others in the VCS, Harrow Women's Centre was concerned about the move towards a new commissioning model. It was felt that the move away from the old grants process would result in the loss of many important services that many vulnerable people relied upon;
- the VCS were not yet ready to move to a commissioning model and many organisations felt rushed;
- the consultation carried out by the Council was flawed and insufficient considering the potential impact of the change;
- there was evidence to suggest that the VCS would lose out in a commissioning system, with most money going to large professional organisations;
- the Improvement and Development Agency had created 8 key principles of good commissioning. These were: understanding the needs of the community; consulting potential provider organisations; putting outcomes first; mapping the fullest practical range of providers; consider investing in the capacity of the provider base; ensuring the contracting process is fair and transparent; ensuring long-term contracts and seeking feedback from service users;
- it was not felt that the Council had adhered to these principles when running the consultation. In particular, it was felt that the sample was too small and that few organisations understood the implications of the proposed change. The Council also needed to map providers;
- the closure of the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services meant that the VCS in Harrow had less support;
- in other areas where a commissioning model had been adopted, VCS groups had lost out to bigger providers. These larger providers often lacked the local knowledge required in order to provide an efficient service;
- the Council needed to look beyond providers and focus on the needs of end users.

The second deputy detailed some of the work she had done for Harrow Women's Centre. This included:

- supporting a support group for women with the intention of giving them a better understanding of themselves and encouraging them to improve their lives;
- supporting a language exchange workshop that promoted integration and allowed individuals to improve their English;
- supporting families to better support each other.

Following questions from Members, the deputies stated that:

- a longer consultation was needed in order to better understand the views of the VCS in Harrow;
- NHS counseling services were progressively being withdrawn, unless an individual was considered to be “in crisis”. However, Harrow Women’s Centre could provide long-term counseling for individuals before they reached this stage;
- some financial support was available from NHS Harrow, but this was also being scaled back;
- the VCS should be involved in the design of service specifications;
- a complete map of all current providers was essential;
- the current timescales were unrealistic and the Council would need to consider increasing these by 9 to 12 months. In relation to the time scales for the development of service specifications, this would take at least 12 weeks. Undertaking this work in August was also not advisable due to the number of individuals being on vacation.

RESOLVED ITEMS

64. Consultation on Draft Proposals to Contribute to the Development of a Third Sector Investment Plan

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Community and Environment, which set out draft proposals for the development of a Third Sector Investment Plan to replace the current main grants programme. An officer explained that the Third Sector Investment Plan would provide a strategic framework for the future delivery of support to the Third Sector from 2012/13 onwards. The report had been considered at the meeting of the Grants Advisory Panel on 13 June 2011 and Members were requested to consider and provide feedback on the remaining proposals.

In response to the proposed application process detailed in section 2.3.9 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- asking organisations to complete applications online was supported, but the Council needed to consider the issue that not all individuals had access to a computer and internet connection. It was important that organisations were informed that computers were available in local libraries;

The Divisional Director of Community and Culture informed Members that all organisations would be invited to information sessions, which would support those completing applications.

In response to the proposed assessment process detailed in section 2.3.10 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- assessment panels should include Councillor representation, even if these individuals did not have voting rights. This would ensure transparency. However, another Member did not support this view on the basis that the report of the assessment panel would be provided to the Grants Advisory Panel. As such, there was no need for Member involvement at the assessment stage;
- in the past, organisations had been penalised for not completing all sections of the application form. If the Council moved to an online system, the application form should not let the user progress until all fields had been completed;
- the Council needed to differentiate between the Third Sector and the Voluntary and Community Sector. At present the term was used interchangeably which could cause confusion.

The Divisional Director of Community and Culture informed Members that the assessment panels would include individuals with expertise in specific areas relevant to the application being considered.

In response to the proposed appeals process detailed in section 2.3.11 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- at present, a public appeal process was still needed to ensure that organisations had confidence in the process;
- in the future it might be possible to discontinue the appeal process but, at present, this was not a viable option;
- it was very important that all those sitting on appeal panels were provided with training, to ensure that all appeals were considered in a fair and equitable manner.

In response to the proposed premise support detailed in section 2.3.12 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- the Council needed to be sensitive when modifying support offered through the premises scheme as many small organisations were dependent on it;
- there needed to be clarification as to how large organisations would support small organisations;
- the problem with the old system was that, once an organisation was offered premises, it generally kept it for a long period of time. Any new system should encourage a “turnover” of premises, to ensure that new organisations could make use of the scheme.

The Divisional Director of Community and Culture stated that the conversion of some community schools to academies was likely to have an implication on the Community Lettings scheme. As a result of this and other changes occurring across the public sector, officers would reassess all available options and report back to the Panel with recommendations.

In response to the monitoring process in section 2.3.13 of the report, Members made the following comment:

- there was a danger that new organisations could “tick all the boxes” and request very large grants. This could mean there would be less money for other organisations. To combat this, officers might want to consider visiting new organisations to confirm what the grant would be used for.

The Divisional Director of Community and Culture stated that it would not be practical to visit all organisations. However, organisations did have an obligation to declare all other sources of funding.

In response to the future role of the Grants Advisory Panel detailed in section 2.3.15 of the report, Members made the following comments:

- Members should remain involved in the commissioning and small grants process;
- maintaining Member involvement would ensure transparency that could potentially be lost if all decisions were delegated to officers. The Grants Advisory Panel also allowed residents and the VCS to engage with the decision-making process, something that would not necessarily be possible if alternative arrangements were put in place.

The Divisional Director of Community and Culture thanked Members for their input and stated that all comments would be considered. A Member stated that if the Council did decide to re-consult the VCS in regard to the Third Sector Investment Plan officers would need to consider how the Grants process would be operated for the coming year. In particular, all the issues that had been identified in previous grant giving rounds would need to be addressed.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the Divisional Director of Community and Culture feed back the Grant Advisory Panel's comments to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services.

65. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item for the reason set out below:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Reason</u>
9.	Internal Audit Report: Grants to Voluntary Organisations	Information under paragraph 3 relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

66. Internal Audit Review: Grants to Voluntary Organisations

The Panel received a confidential report of the Director of Legal and Governance Services which enclosed an internal audit review of the Council's Grants process. An officer explained that part of the report had been considered by the Panel at its meeting on 30 March 2011 and was now being provided for information purposes only. Based upon the findings of the report, an action plan had been created to address the recommendations. Internal Audit was due to review the situation again before the end of July 2011 and officers were confident that all issues had been addressed. Members stated that the Grants Advisory Panel needed to be confident that the issues had been satisfactorily addressed before a future Grants round or a move to Commissioning.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the Grants Advisory Panel consider the final report of internal audit, once available.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.28 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR NANA ASANTE
Chairman