

GRANTS ADVISORY PANEL

MINUTES

9 NOVEMBER 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Nana Asante

Councillors:

* Sue Anderson	* Mrs Vina Mithani
* Nizam Ismail	* Chris Mote
* Krishna James	* Joyce Nickolay
* Manji Kara	* Sasi Suresh

Adviser: † Deven Pillay, Representative, Voluntary and Community Sector

In attendance:	Mano Dharmarajah	Minute 80
(Councillors)	David Perry	Minute 83

* Denotes Member present

† Denotes apologies received

76. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

77. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared:

Agenda Item 6 - Deputations

Councillor Nizam Ismail declared a prejudicial interest in that he was Chairman of the Harrow Muslim Council, which used the Community Premises at 27 Northolt Road, South Harrow. He would leave the room whilst the deputation was received and considered.

78. Minutes

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:
- (2) the fourth bullet point on page 72 of the minutes be amended to read, 'that the application form should be modified to take account of the comments of the Panel, the letter from Harrow Women's Centre and the question received. The Panel also expressed its view that small groups should not be competing with larger groups and should therefore be considered for provision of a separate Application Form in the future';
- (3) an additional bullet point be inserted on page 72 of the minutes and to read, 'The Grant Application Form should make it clear that organisations should not submit more than one application'.

Reason for Decision: To improve the grant application and assessment process for the administration of the main Grants Programme.

79. Public Questions and Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions or petitions were received at this meeting.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

80. Deputation - Community Premises, 27 Northolt Road, South Harrow

RESOLVED: That Executive Procedure Rule 50.3 be suspended and the following deputation be received.

The depute, who was a member of the Harrow Council for Justice, spoke on behalf of the community organisations which used the Community Premises at 27 Northolt Road, South Harrow. He made the following points:

- in 1980, Harrow Council had made an undertaking to support local community groups through the provision of resources, such as office space at the Community Premises;
- these community groups, though they did not have an SLA with the Council, served Harrow's citizens by contributing to Council Priorities;
- these groups' overheads and expenses had increased recently because they had been obliged to take out public liability insurance for use of the Community Premises. This insurance worked out to a total of approximately £9k between the 25 community organisations, which was approximately £350 per annum per group;

- these community groups were 'not for profit' organisations and their activities were carried out wholly by volunteers. The monies spent on public liability insurance would be better spent on the community;
- Harrow Council should therefore investigate the possibility of a single insurance premium which would cover all the community groups using the Community Premises.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, the depute stated that:

- there had been no insurance claims made in the past;
- equipment such as computers were stored at the Community Premises, many of which had been donated by the Council and were given regular electrical checks by the Council;
- groups were often obliged to take out public liability insurance for events they organised at other premises, but that this was often included in the cover charge for the hire of the premises. Small policies were more expensive and the cost for a typical event lasting 6 hours would normally work out to approximately £30;
- the Community Premises only provided office space and were not used for functions;
- the Community Premises also had meeting/consulting rooms available for use by groups;
- the maximum amount of people he had ever encountered at the Community Premises was approximately 16 and that volunteers from all of the 25 organisations using the premises were rarely all present at the same time.

The Chairman asked officers if they could facilitate the deputees' request. The Divisional Director Risk, Audit and Fraud tabled a report entitled 'Insurance for Voluntary & Community Groups Granted Use of Community Premises'. This document was not available at the time the agenda was circulated due to the late receipt of the deputation and in order to allow the concerns of the deputees to be addressed. He made the following points:

- community groups tended to buy their public liability insurance on the commercial market which explained the high rate of premium;
- most insurers were not flexible in that they used fixed minimum commercial rates;
- in theory, it would be possible for each of the community groups to sue one another, to sue the Council or for the Council to sue one or more of the groups.

The Divisional Director Risk, Audit and Fraud added that:

- the Council was not at liberty to arrange public liability insurance on behalf of a group to cover its activities beyond the use of Council premises, because this was prevented by insurance law;
- insurance arranged in the general insurance market would cover all of a group's public liability insurance requirements, however, the Council's scheme only provided cover in respect of liabilities arising out of a group's use of the Community Premises;
- the Council was able to offer insurance to groups through a scheme it had arranged with its current insurers, Zurich Municipal, at a rate of 7%. Although it was difficult to estimate premiums, the amount would be significantly lower than the rate currently being paid by the community groups, and the savings per group could be between £50-£100 per annum;
- officers from the Community and Environment Directorate would write to groups and work out individual cover for them. This would need to be phased in when the previous cover ran out. This premium would include the use of meeting rooms at the Community Premises.

Following questions from Members, the Divisional Director responded that:

- this cover would be in the form of a block Council insurance policy and groups would be charged in proportion to usage. It would also include a special endorsement facility from the insurers if one of the groups were to sue another;
- the Council's public liability insurance included all council buildings such as the Harrow Arts Centre, Harrow Teachers' Centre but did not include the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS) building as the Council did not hold the lease for this building. As a general rule, the Council already requested information relating to public liability insurance from groups prior to agreeing funding. This information was set out in the Grant Application form.

Members thanked the Divisional Director Risk, Audit and Fraud for his efforts in helping to resolve this issue. The Chairman added that this measure would help emerging and existing groups and enable the Council in its role as a supporting Council that 'listens'.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services)

That Harrow Council take all possible steps to support those community groups using the Community Premises at 27 Northolt Road, South Harrow, to have access to the Council's corporate public liability insurance rate cover.

RESOLVED ITEMS

81. EqlAs: A Briefing on the Processes and Responsibilities

An officer gave a presentation to Members of the Panel entitled 'Embedding Equalities in the Grants Process'. The officer highlighted the following points:

- equalities was not about treating everyone the same, but rather recognising that their requirements need to be met in different ways;
- the Equality Act 2010 emphasised the following 9 protected characteristics under which individuals may not be discriminated against:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage and civil partnership
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - race (ethnic or national origins, colour and nationality)
 - religion or belief
 - sex
 - sexual orientation;
- the Council had a statutory equality duty to eliminate discrimination proactively, which meant it was important for the Council to be familiar with the borough's demographic profile.

With regard to embedding these equalities principles in the grants process, the officer stated that this meant:

- that the grants process needed to be robust and ensure that any criteria used did not exclude any groups;
- grant application forms should be accessible to all, for example, making them available in large print or Braille if requested;
- ensuring that any groups supported also had robust, up-to-date equalities policies in place and were not discriminating against one of the 9 protected characteristics;
- reaching out to 'hard-to-reach' and under represented groups.

A Member commented that pages 27-28 of the Grant Application Form now addressed these equalities issues.

The officer added that officers had provided an analysis of previous years' grants application data to Cabinet in May 2011. The analysis had shown that there was an even spread across most groups, however, officers would need to take positive action to engage with under represented groups.

The Chairman commented that the analysis needed to be taken beyond headline figures - for example, whereas it may be true that provision to the Asian Community had not changed, if an analysis was taken under Nationality, the result would show that for example, Tamils had lost out in the last grants process. It was important for the analysis to be rigorous so that steps could be taken to mitigate the effects of the process.

An officer undertook to circulate the presentation notes to Members of the Panel.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) a more thorough analysis be undertaken of the results of the grants allocation process to ensure that mitigating measures could be put in place for any unwitting adverse impact of the allocation process on the communities represented by those groups who were not successful;
- (2) the presentation be received.

82. Information Report: Edward Harvist Trust

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director Community and Environment setting out the current position regarding Edward Harvist Trust (EHT) funds for Harrow.

The Divisional Director, Community & Culture stated that:

- the funds were distributed three times a year across 5 London boroughs;
- the annual sum was not guaranteed but depended on dividends earned;
- one group last year withdrew its application, therefore, the total funds distributed were £12,513.29 and there was a proposal to offer another grant round in early 2012;
- the criteria used for assessing EHT grant applications were the same as for the main grants programme. However, the Panel had previously agreed to clarify the use of EHT funds with the following additional criteria for the distribution:
 - organisations should clearly indicate the sum applied for;
 - applications would only be considered if the amount requested was to be used for one-off capital expenditure.

An officer explained that although the main grants programme did not allow for capital expenditure, in contrast, EHT funds were to be used for capital. She undertook to confirm this position with EHT and report back to Members of the Panel.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the position with regard to the distribution of Edward Harvist Trust Funds in relation to Capital expenditure be confirmed.

83. Grants Process for 2012/13 - Update

The Panel considered a report of the Corporate Director Community and Environment, which provided an update on the process for administering the Main Grants Programme for 2012/13.

The Divisional Director, Community & Culture stated that following feedback from the Panel, the Women's Centre and the public question received at the Panel meeting of 13 September, the following amendments had been made to the Grants Application Form for 2012/13:

- the term 'Voluntary Sector' had been replaced with the term 'Third Sector';
- the question relating to partnerships had been removed from the application form;
- the term 'activity' had been included throughout the form.

The officer added that:

- officers were trying to build in a more streamlined grants process and referred to page 30 of the application form which under the heading of 'Outcomes' requested details of how these would be delivered, measured and monitored by groups;
- officers had facilitated an information session for approximately 30 third sector groups wishing to apply for grants in 2012/13. Groups had had an opportunity to ask questions and the evaluation forms from the session had been positive;
- a representative from Community and Voluntary Sector Association Hammersmith & Fulham (CaVSA) had been present at the information session and had offered to hold surgeries with groups and offered to give them feedback on completed application forms. Further such information sessions were planned for forthcoming weeks.

An officer added that this year's grant funding would be divided into two categories, a small grant of up to £5k and larger amount of up to £100k. There was a proposal that 15% of the annual grants budget for 2012/13 be allocated to small grants. This would ensure a wide distribution of the monies, with a proportion ringfenced for smaller grants. This measure had been agreed in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, an officer stated that:

- analysis of funding figures for the previous 3 years had shown that the number of small grants of up to £5k had worked out to approximately 10% of the overall grant budget and that the Portfolio Holder had recommended that this be increased to 15% for 2012/13;
- the monitoring of groups awarded grants would be shared with officers from both Children's and Adults and Housing Directorates;
- officers across directorates have received training in health and safety, safeguarding and finance.

The Divisional Director, Community & Culture undertook to provide a monitoring report regarding grant funding to a future meeting of the Panel.

Following further questions from Members of the Panel, an officer stated that:

- the timetable for the administration of the Main Grants Programme for 2012/13 could only be brought forward once the application form was agreed and ready for use at the information sessions;
- the slide presentation from the information sessions would be available on Harrow Council's website;
- the scoring pass mark for smaller groups could be lowered with the agreement of the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services, once the quality of all the applications had been assessed.

Members expressed the view that:

- some of the low scoring applications had been from larger, more established groups;
- in the past, when not all the grant funds had been allocated, the grants process had been opened up for a second round;
- highest scoring groups should be awarded any surplus monies and that if the allocation set aside for small groups was not fully used up, the balance should be transferred to the large grants fund;
- the allocation of 15% for small grants would not affect the scoring and assessment process, which, in the interests of transparency and fairness, should remain the same.

With regard to commissioning of services from the Third Sector, the Divisional Director, Community & Culture stated that a pilot was planned and officers were in discussions with the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services, and internal stakeholders. It was noted that more than one department would be commissioning services, and departments may

commission services jointly. Officers were therefore investigating if budgets could be combined.

The Divisional Director added that it would not be possible to predict the amount of money required to launch the pilot scheme until discussions with internal stakeholders had been completed and service specifications identified. Officers had recommended to all groups that they apply for grants in 2012/13, as the commissioning process would not be in place by April 2012. A consultation regarding which services would be most suitable for the pilot would be launched in December 2011.

The Chairman of the Panel stated that good practice dictated that a minimum of 12 weeks be allowed for the completion of public consultations. She stated that she had reservations about a consultation being launched in December that would only last two weeks, as she felt this may not allow sufficient time for the public to engage with it. An officer undertook to consult the Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services regarding the timescales for the consultation.

A Member reminded officers and Panel Members of a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that officers needed to work closely with the Third Sector to improve the take up of small grants.

The Chairman of the Panel stated that Compact training should be made available to Members of the Assessment Panels and the Panel.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Third Sector organisations be informed that the Panel would not consider more than one application from any organisation;
- (2) the Panel had serious reservations about a proposal to undertake a two week consultation on the Commissioning Pilot in December when most people were distracted by the festivities or were away and recommended that the consultation should be undertaken in the new year when proper attention could be given to it;
- (3) the report be noted and that a monitoring report regarding grant funding be provided at a future meeting.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.50 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR NANA ASANTE
Chairman