
REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 11 SEPTEMBER 2013**PORTFOLIO: FINANCE AND RESOURCES****REPORT FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE****SUBJECT: VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS 2014/15****1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 To put in place a procedure for allocating the Voluntary Sector Grants fund for the financial year 2014/15 that is fair, transparent and compliant with the Best Value Statutory Guidance published in 2011.
- 1.2 To open applications to all voluntary groups operating in the District except for the Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the Rayleigh, Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Service (RRAVS) who will receive top-sliced funding from the same pot based on the previous year's performance in relation to their Service Level Agreement.
- 1.3 To follow a specified timeline that is in line with Best Value Guidance as outlined in the report.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Providing financial assistance to local voluntary and community organisations helps to generate a stronger Third Sector in the District.
- 2.2 Local authorities are required to adhere to the new Best Value Guidance (further details in section 3.3 and 3.4).
- 2.3 A timely and transparent process is required. Applications for the small grants programme would be open to all voluntary sector groups that meet with established criteria. Both revenue and capital funding will be available with a maximum of £1500 that any one group can apply for. After the closing date and once the overall budget allocation has been agreed, a Member Advisory Group assembled by the Portfolio Holder would meet (comprising the Leader, the Portfolio Holder, the Leader of the main opposition party and three additional Members) to take decisions on allocating funding, using an agreed scoring system, to the groups that submitted applications. Funding to the CAB and RRAVS would also be determined by the advisory group.
- 2.4 Applicants can select one of two options for capital grants. Firstly, capital funding in cash for projects that require money to go towards the purchase of equipment greater than £1500. Payment will be made once the equipment is purchased and an invoice / receipt is submitted. Secondly, for capital purchases of £1,500 or less, groups are asked to select equipment up to the

value of £1,500, which will then be purchased by the Council on behalf of the group. No alternative cash funding is available for this option.

- 2.5 The CAB and RRAVS' funding allocations, due to the nature of their work, will not be assessed in the same way as smaller more locally focused voluntary groups. The Council is the major funder for these two organisations, which is not the case for other voluntary groups. Assessing the grant allocation for the CAB and RRAVS separately, against additional criteria and performance data, will enable a more informed decision to be made. A Service Level Agreement will be set up for both organisations.

3 SALIENT INFORMATION

- 3.1 A provisional timeline is set out below:

Activity	Deadline
Decision by Executive on process for 2014/15	11 September
Open applications – notify affected groups of top slicing arrangements	23 September
Close application process	22 November
Amount allocated to voluntary grants pot determined at Full Council in advance of overall Budgetary Agreement	17 December
Member Advisory Group to meet to determine grant allocations from applications / top slicing	18 December with 19 December in reserve
Local groups notified of decisions of Member Advisory Group	end of December 2013

- 3.2 The exact amount to be allocated to the voluntary organisations grant pot will be decided on 17 December 2013.
- 3.3 The Best Value statutory guidance, introduced in September 2011, provides an expectation for voluntary and community organisations in their relationships with local authorities. It aims to be explicit about the scope for authorities to consider social value in their functions and allow them appropriate discretion in considering the circumstances of individual cases. The statutory guidance requires authorities to consult a wide range of local persons, including local voluntary and community organisations and businesses, before deciding how to fulfill our Best Value duty. This requirement applies at all stages of the commissioning cycle, including when considering decommissioning services.
- 3.4 The guidance requires authorities to be sensitive to the benefits and needs of voluntary and community sector organisations and small businesses. Authorities should seek to avoid passing on disproportionate cuts (i.e. no

greater than they take on themselves) and, in particular, an authority intending to reduce or end funding or other support that will materially threaten the viability of the organisation or the service it provides should give at least three months' notice to both the organisation involved and the public /service user.

- 3.5 In June 2013 Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, stated that '...Councils have to prioritise how they spend taxpayers' money, but they must resist any temptation to pull up the drawbridge on the voluntary sector by passing on disproportionate savings ... We have set out clear expectations for councils. The best councils are those that work with their local voluntary and community partners in the interests of local people whilst managing to balance the books'.
- 3.6 An initial sift of applications for the small grants fund will be undertaken by council officers. Assistance will be provided by RRAVS as the umbrella group representing the voluntary and community sector in the District.
- 3.7 A scoring system for assessing small grant applications will be set up to ensure the process is consistent, open and transparent. This is particularly important if any decisions are challenged. The advisory group will also receive details of applicants that are currently receiving rental subsidy or non-domestic rate relief.
- 3.8 In line with guidance to involve local voluntary groups in the process before a decision is made, previous recipients of grants have been contacted with details of these provisional arrangements to allow any issues to be raised. The arrangements have also been raised at the Community Development Partnership of the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 3.9 In 2013/14 the same application process was followed. After the closing date, a Member Advisory Group met to make decisions on the grant allocations. £90,000 was made available for revenue grants and £18,500 for capital grant allocations. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources had the final sign off. Should any significant changes to the way the process is managed be made then these changes should be opened up to consultation with the voluntary and community sector. The Best Value Guidance states that consultation needs to take place before any decisions are made.
- 3.10 The Council provides additional assistance to the voluntary sector through the Staff Volunteering Scheme and the GRANTnet service.
- 3.11 The Council is signed up to the Castle Point and Rochford Voluntary Sector Compact Agreement. This document was refreshed in February 2012. This agreement is between the voluntary/community sector and statutory organisations to improve their relationship for mutual advantage. The Compact is not a legally binding document but includes a series of guiding principles. The funding section refers to statutory organisations ensuring open, transparent and timely funding processes are in place.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Any delay in making a decision would inhibit local voluntary groups finalising their budget plans for 2014/15. The Council's reputation could also possibly be tarnished and the good relationships developed with local groups harmed.
- 4.2 The Council would also be open to challenge for not adhering to the Best Value Guidance and the local Compact Agreement.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A decision on the amount of funding to be allocated to the voluntary grants pot will be made by Council on 17 December 2013.

6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Regard needs to be made to the Equality Impact Assessment process as part of the overall budget allocation.
- 6.2 An Equalities Monitoring Form will be included with application packs for each group to complete in order to develop a profile of the organisations which apply for grant funding. Completion of this form will be optional.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

Chief Executive

Background Papers:

None.

For further information please contact Paul Warren (Chief Executive) on:-

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