

REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 9 SEPTEMBER 2015

PORTFOLIO: FINANCE

REPORT FROM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – LEGAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: PROCESS FOR AWARDING VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS 2016/17

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 To put in place a procedure for allocating the Voluntary Sector Grants fund for the financial year 2016/17 that is fair, transparent and compliant with the Best Value Statutory Guidance published in 2011, as outlined in paragraphs 3.1 – 3.10 of the report..
- 1.2 To open applications to the small grants scheme to all voluntary groups operating services in the District which is in line with the local Compact Agreement.
- 1.3 Rayleigh, Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Services (RRAVS) will receive top sliced funding from the same pot, based on the previous year's performance in relation to their Service Level Agreement. A joint grant agreement with Essex County Council (which also funds this organisation) will be set up to monitor the allocated grants.
- 1.4 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 Voluntary and community groups can help contribute to the delivery of corporate plan objectives.
- 2.3 Local authorities are required to adhere to the Best Value Guidance published in 2011 (further details in sections 3.5 and 3.6).

3 SALIENT INFORMATION

- 3.1 A timely and transparent process is required. Applications for the small grants programme would be open to all voluntary sector groups that meet established criteria. Both revenue and capital funding will be available with a maximum of £1,000 (revenue funding) and £1,500 (capital funding) 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 for Finance would meet (comprising the Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, 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 RRAVS would also be determined by the Advisory Group. All funding is allocated subject to applicants demonstrating how they would contribute to the Council's strategic priorities.

- 3.2 Due to the nature of its work, RRAVS funding allocation will not be assessed in the same way as smaller more locally focused voluntary groups. The Council is a major funder for this organisation, which is not the case for other voluntary groups. In their application paperwork RRAVS will be asked to evidence the need that their service delivers against. Assessing the grant allocation for RRAVS separately, against additional criteria and performance data, will enable a more informed decision to be made. A joint grant agreement with Essex County Council will be set up to monitor the allocated grants.
- 3.3 In previous years the Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) was funded through this process. However, from April 2016 a new advice services contract will be awarded for three years. Therefore, CAB funding will no longer be part of this process.
- 3.4 A provisional timeline is set out below:

Activity	Deadline
Decision by Executive on process for 2016/17	09 September
Open applications – notify RRAVS of top slicing arrangements	28 September
Application deadline	20 November
Amount allocated to voluntary grants pot determined at Full Council in advance of overall Budgetary Agreement	15 December
Member Advisory Group to meet to determine grant allocations from applications / top slicing	16 December
Local groups notified of decisions of Member Advisory Group	end of December 2015

- 3.5 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 the Best Value duty. This requirement applies at all stages of the commissioning cycle, including the consideration of decommissioning services.

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 A scoring system for assessing small grant applications will be set up to ensure the process is consistent, open and transparent. Applications will be measured against the Council's strategic aims. 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 or any other support from the Council.
- 3.9 Unsuccessful applicants will be signposted to other agencies for further support (e.g. RRAVS, Sport England).
- 3.10 The Council is signed up to the Castle Point and Rochford Voluntary Sector Compact Agreement. This document is refreshed regularly. The 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 advises that statutory organisations should ensure 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 2016/17. 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 15 December 2015.

- 5.2 Funding for revenue grants will be taken from the Voluntary Sector Grants budget which provides £90,000 for three years from April 2016 in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. £70,000 has been allocated to funding advice services provision from this budget. This leaves £20,000 for funding RRAVS and the small revenue grants. £15,000 will also be made available for capital grants.

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.

LT Lead Officer Signature: _____



Assistant Director – Legal Services

Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact Andrew Lowing, Strategic Partnership Officer, on:-

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.