

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 27 APRIL 2017

MINUTE FROM PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE – 20 MARCH 2017

Community Grants Scheme 2015/16

The Sub-Committee received a report which set out information on the monitoring of projects which had been awarded Council grant funding in 2015/16. It sought to assess the outcomes delivered to and for the community of Harrow.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Culture and Resident Engagement introduced the report and apologised for the delay in its submission which had originally been scheduled for December 2016. She advised that this delay was partly attributable to requests from the voluntary sector for an extension of time due to capacity issues in responding to the Council's consultation on support to voluntary and community organisations in Harrow during the same period. It was noted that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee had therefore agreed to the submission of the report to this meeting which was nearly 12 months from the closure of the delivery year. The 2016/17 monitoring report would be available for the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning informed the Sub-Committee that further monitoring information was now available and would be circulated to the Sub-Committee. As a result of queries raised by Members, the officers would ensure that the information in the summary table aligned with the individual monitoring reports. Feedback from the Sub-Committee would be taken into account in the preparation of the 2016/17 monitoring report.

A Member enquired as to the position concerning those organisations who had reported under or overspends and what percentage under or over spend triggered an investigation. Members were advised that organisations were liable for any overspends and, provided a project had been delivered more efficiently, a roll forward was an option or retention of the funding for use elsewhere in the Council. Investigations were not on the basis of meeting a percentage threshold but on whether the organisation had clearly indicated that the delivery objectives had been met.

In response to a question as to the emphasis on the number of target beneficiaries from organisations applying for a grant in the scoring system and whether variances in the actual beneficiaries resulted in an investigation, Members were informed that investigations took place on a risk basis and a return quoting the exact number of beneficiaries could also be a trigger to investigate. Small organisations sometimes found data management challenging and officers needed to be confident that good governance arrangements existed.

Members noted that the capacity to undertake monitoring was stretched following the reduction in staffing resources. The termination of the small grants programme mid year had resulted in the focus on Outcome Based Grants which were larger sums.

Although the scheme had been discontinued, the officers were pursuing certain organisations for information and the outcomes would be monitored. A Member questioned whether the available capacity was adequate for the 2016/17 monitoring and suggested that an investigation be undertaken as to whether staff resources were sufficient to ensure the expenditure was properly managed. The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning responded that it was important to put into context the size of the spend and that arrangements were in place in order to monitor grants.

With regard to ongoing schemes, the Sub-committee was advised of the replacement of the current arrangements whereby over 30 organisations were in receipt of grants with a single tender for advice and information services, an infrastructure service, and devolution to Harrow Community Action (HCA) of £100k for year one and £50k for two years. The new arrangements would free up some existing staff capacity in the relevant team. The situation had, however, been challenging due to a reduction in staff and sickness. In response to a question, it was noted that performance indicators would be agreed as part of the contracting model

Having agreed that further monitoring information provided by organisations and list of organisations visited by the Grants Officer be circulated to the Sub-Committee, it was

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted
2. Cabinet be requested to consider whether the available staffing capacity was sufficient for the monitoring of the current grants process and for the new arrangements in order to ensure that grants expenditure was properly managed.

Background documents:

Minutes of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee – 20 March 2017

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