

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 2 DECEMBER 2021

TITLE: PARTNERSHIP GRANT REVIEW

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR JOEL CHARLES, DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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This is a Key Decision
It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I012847
Call-in Procedures may apply
This decision will affect no ward specifically.

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Cabinet agrees minor amendments to the current arrangements for the provision of partnership grants to community and voluntary sector organisations, as set out in the report.

REASON FOR DECISION

- A** To enable decisions about the allocation of future partnership grants to be made in a consistent and robust way.
- B** To ensure allocated funds are targeted towards local identified need and utilised for the maximum benefit of the community.
- C** To ensure commitment from grant recipients to robustly monitor outcomes and clearly evidence positive change for the benefit of Harlow residents.

BACKGROUND

1. The Council's procedure for the allocation of partnership grants has not been reviewed for many years. A review of the procedure is required to determine whether current arrangements are still fit for purpose in terms of ensuring that decisions about the allocation of grants is made in a robust and consistent way, both to provide the most effective support to the community and voluntary sector and ensure maximum value for money for the Council.

2. Historically, partnership grants have been allocated to organisations over a fixed term of three years with the same set amount being allocated in years one, two and three. Outcomes data has been collected and monitored by way of a half yearly reporting system.
3. Over recent years the community and voluntary sector role in supporting Harlow's residents has changed significantly, especially in response to the Covid-19 pandemic when the sector magnificently came together to work with the Council and other organisations to provide essential support to all those in need but in particular to the most vulnerable in the town.
4. The Council recognises the sector's stoic resilience and ability to pivot to meet the ever changing needs of our richly diverse communities and, in its role as community leader, wants to ensure that the community and voluntary sector is supported to grow, thrive, be ambitious in its aims and receive the recognition that it so rightly deserves.
5. The Council's partnership grants provide community and voluntary sector organisations the opportunity to build on core work; improve ways of working with residents to ensure inclusion; develop new innovative ways of meeting local need and support longer term sustainability of services and good practice.
6. All organisations currently in receipt of a partnership grant, for the period 2019/20 to 2021/22, have utilised the funding as a contribution towards their organisation's core costs. Without this financial support some organisations may not have survived whilst others may not have had the resources to develop new services in response to changing local need. It is clearly evident that partnership grants are a valuable and much needed source of support to the town's community and voluntary sector.
7. The partnership grants currently provided are due to cease on 31 March 2022. It is an appropriate time to review the arrangements and apply a methodology that will ensure there is a clear criteria for applications and a robust and consistent way of allocating the grants in the future that includes a target driven approach and commitment to evidencing positive outcomes in a variety of ways to ensure impact can be demonstrated and measured.
8. On 8 November 2021 the Council held a consultation event to discuss with community and voluntary sector partners their thoughts on the current arrangements and how allocation of the fund could better support the sector whilst maximising positive outcomes for residents. Fifteen local community and voluntary organisations were invited to the event. Three organisations sent apologies; eleven accepted the invitation with nine of those in attendance on the day.
9. To help inform the review, discussions at the consultation event were intentionally focused around three main areas – 'Key Themes', 'Targets' and 'Next Steps'. The views and opinions expressed by consultees at the event have been taken into consideration when developing the proposals set out below.

10. Feedback from those attending the event was positive, with recognition that much can be achieved through collaboration, joint working and information sharing where relevant and appropriate. It was suggested that the sharing of resources could significantly improve future joint working opportunities and this is something the sector would like to explore further. In addition, it was agreed that should council resources become available, it would be beneficial to have a new central support in order to assist in ensuring the sustainability of community and voluntary sector organisations. For example, to advise and support partners in securing long-term funding to take forward pilot projects that have been successful, to identify potential sources of alternative funding, and to generally ensure that Harlow community and voluntary organisations are well prepared for bidding opportunities as and when they arise.
11. Consultees expressed a clear opinion that grant awards should be for a period of at least two years to allow for forward planning.
12. Facilitated discussion at the event regarding eligible themes for the award of grants broadly aligned with the six strategic pillars set out in the draft Community Resilience Strategy, these being:
 - a) The Council's leadership role;
 - b) Arts and Culture;
 - c) Community Engagement;
 - d) Enhanced voluntary sector;
 - e) Health inequalities; and
 - f) Safe communities

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

13. It is proposed that current arrangements for the allocation of partnership grants should remain in place and grants for the period 2022/23 – 2024/25 should be for a period of three years (subject to budget availability and satisfactory performance monitoring against the organisation receiving the grant).
14. Current monitoring arrangements are to be developed to become priority focused and target driven with outcomes for the community being demonstrated in a range of ways to include qualitative and quantitative data, case studies and customer feedback.
15. Only community and voluntary organisations will be eligible to apply for a partnership grant and will be required to apply via an application form. Applications will be expected to clearly demonstrate how the grant will be used to support local priorities. Award of the grant will be on a competitive basis, scored by officers using a scoring mechanism as set out in Appendix A.

16. Having considered the views and feedback from consultees, it is proposed that the priorities for the funding period 2022/23 – 2024/25 should be:
- a) Support the town's financial, health and social recovery from Covid-19 and address issues of the impact of long-Covid on residents and business;
 - b) Improve social inclusion and reduce inequality;
 - c) Address the issues (affordability of food, debt and other financial worries) compounded by the increased cost of living;
 - d) Reduce loneliness and social isolation;
 - e) Improve opportunities for employment, training and skills development;
 - f) Increase volunteering opportunities; and
 - g) Support physical and mental health and wellbeing initiatives and promote suicide prevention work.
17. It is proposed that ahead of each new funding round the council will work with local community and voluntary organisations to review existing priorities and identify if they remain relevant or require refreshing to meet the forthcoming funding period. This is to ensure that grants continue to be priority focused and target driven with a performance management framework that sets targets and measures the social value to the community, economy, society and the environment as set out in the Community Resilience Strategy.
18. The final stage in the partnership grant application process for those shortlisted will be dependent upon mutually agreed targets and expected outcomes, which will inform on whether positive impacts for the community are being achieved. In addition, it is proposed that there will be a regular reporting cycle and dialogue throughout the period of the grant in order to demonstrate that the allocation of the funding is having a positive impact on the priorities that have been agreed by both parties.
19. It is proposed that Expressions of interest for the 2022/23 – 2024/25 funding period will be invited in early 2022, with a final decision being made on the allocation of partnership grants being made in March 2022.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

None specific.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

Partnership Grants form part of the Councils annual budget with allocations being made to ensure that the sums paid remain within that approved budget.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

As contained in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Community Wellbeing

As contained in the report

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance (Includes HR)

Setting priorities for Grants will enable greater clarity to the consideration of applications and improve governance of the process.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A – Partnership Grants Scoring Mechanism

Background Papers

Community Resilience Strategy 2021 – 2023 –

<https://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/documents/s18780/Appendix%20A%20-%20Community%20Resilience%20Strategy.pdf>

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.