

Partnership grants programme 2025-2028



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	24 April 2025
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Danielle Brown, Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing
Lead Officer:	Becca Farrant, Assistant Director – Community and Corporate Services (01279) 446811
Contributing Officers:	Christine Howard, Strategic Manager – Community Safety, Youth and Engagement, (01279) 4461192 Leah Callan, LGA Graduate Programme
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan number I018364
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Mission:	Protect our communities
Wards Affected:	None specifically

Executive Summary

- A** The council is running a £50,000 per year partnership grant scheme for 2025-2028 to support voluntary sector groups delivering projects in Harlow that align with the council's corporate missions. A number of bids were received for the grant funding which have been reviewed and assessed against the criteria set. The Cabinet is now asked to approve the allocation of grant funding to six separate projects which meet the criteria set. The council will also seek to support unsuccessful bidders with advice and signposting to other funding sources.

Recommended that:

- A** Cabinet approves the allocation of grant aid to projects as set out in Appendix A to the report.
- B** Cabinet approves the allocation of an additional £3,000 per year from the Discretionary Services Fund to support partnership grant funding.

Reason for decision

- A** To enable the voluntary sector in Harlow to deliver initiatives that support the council's corporate missions.

Other Options

- A** The council could choose not to provide financial support to the voluntary sector; however, it appreciates that partnership working is a cornerstone of service provision within this sector and has focussed allocations on projects with outcomes that contribute to the council's missions.

Background

1. In 2022 the council focussed its grant allocations to the voluntary sector based on local priorities identified by participants in a consultation event. The council built upon this and introduced a Health and Wellbeing Strategy based on additional evidence and data which was reviewed by members of the Harlow Health and Wellbeing Board.
2. In setting priorities for the next round of partnership grants the council has used the Health and Wellbeing Strategy to focus grant criteria on projects that meet needs within the local community and the council's corporate missions. These priorities are:
 - a) Projects that address issues compounded by the increased cost of living (affordability of food, debt and other financial worries);
 - b) Projects that reduce loneliness and social isolation;
 - c) Projects that increase volunteering opportunities;
 - d) Projects that support physical and mental health and wellbeing initiatives and promote suicide prevention work;
 - e) Projects that support women's safety and behaviour change; and
 - f) Projects that provide positive opportunities for young people - specifically aimed at engaging disaffected young people (not in education or employment)
3. The previous round of partnership grants currently received by community and voluntary organisations ceased on 31 March 2025. It was agreed in the budget setting process for 2025/26, that in spite of reduced Government funding, the council would run a further three-year programme of grants. Following approval of the 2025/26 budget in February, the criteria for the new round of grants was confirmed and advertised accordingly.
4. Twenty funding applications were received. All applications were reviewed by a panel of officers and assessed against agreed priorities. The submission of mandatory supporting documents, including an Equal Opportunities Policy or statement and most

recent set of financial accounts, were requested as part of the due diligence undertaken.

5. Applicants were invited for a minimum of £1,000 and maximum of £10,000 per annum for three years. Bids received included amounts over £10,000 which could not be awarded and where this occurred the maximum bid amount of £10,000 has been recommended. A total of £176,000 (per year) was requested by applicants against the £50,000 (per year) agreed budget allocation.

Issues/Proposals

6. It is proposed that the funding available (£50,000 per year) be allocated across six projects which support delivery against agreed priorities to meet identified need and ensure maximum benefit to the community.
7. Recommendations to award grant funding have been made where organisations have evidenced delivery against multiple partnership grant funding criteria with a proven track record and provides wide reaching services that support priority sections of the community.
8. Due to the oversubscription of bids against available funding recommendations to award grant funding have been made for those projects which support three or more of the council's funding priorities.
9. In order to fulfil bids for projects which support three or more of the council's funding priorities in full and additional £3,000 is required per annum.
10. Where bids meet three or less of the funding priorities, they were considered unsuccessful. Feedback will be provided to unsuccessful bidders regarding other more suitable funding opportunities for their project. This includes through the council's Health and Wellbeing Board which will consider applications for project funding from late April and a number of projects may be more suitable for this funding.
11. Organisations will be awarded the grant for a period of three years through a grant funding agreement, subject to budget availability and satisfactory performance against agreed targets.
12. Organisations will be paid their grants six-monthly in advance and at the end of each six-month period will be required to report on how the funding has been used and what has been achieved during the period. Should there be any unexpected delays or failures in achieving agreed outcomes organisations will be challenged constructively on and required to justify any identified under-performance.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

An Equalities and Diversity policy was a requirement of grant applications. All recommended bidders have such a policy in place.

Finance

Allocation of grant funding up to £50,000 was included as part of 2025/26 budget setting, to be funded from the council's reserves. Due to the high demand for this funding and number of projects which meet funding priorities. The additional £3,000 request can also be met from the Discretionary Service Reserve.

Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

Governance

The council has several statutory powers that it can rely on to authorise the provision of the grant funding, including Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 which allows expenditure that is in the interests of or will bring benefits to its area, any part of its area or some or all of its inhabitants.

Prudent governance arrangements around a grant funding scheme would include a grant funding agreement (GFA) setting out a clear basis for expenditure along with prudential counter-fraud and evaluation mechanisms to enable compliance and effectiveness to be measured along with (if required) recovery of amounts used otherwise than in accordance with GFA.

Author: Daniel Dickinson, Assistant Director – Legal and Democratic Services (Interim) and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed partnership grant allocations

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.