

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GRANTS SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.00 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2018

MP704 - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Marc Francis (Chair)
Councillor Kahar Chowdhury (Member)
Councillor Ehtasham Haque (Member)
Councillor Mohammed Pappu (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Andrew Wood (Member) (Leader of the Conservative Group)
Kim Hayman (Co-Optee)
Sue Kenten (Co-Optee)

Officers Present:

Mohammed Ahad – (Community Programmes Officer, Third Sector Team)
Vicky Allen – (Intelligence and Performance Officer, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Governance)
David Black – Poplar HARCA
Steve Hill – (Head of Benefits Services)
Tracey St Hill – (Principal RSL Partnerships Officer)
Abdul J. Khan – (Sustainable Development Manager, Strategy Innovation & Sustainability, Place)
Caroline Pembroke – (Whitechapel Delivery Project Assistant, Planning & Building Control)
Jen Pepper – (Affordable Housing Programme Manager, Place)
Michael Ritchie – (Principal Officer - Place Shaping)
Warwick Tomsett – Joint Director, Integrated Commissioning
Farhana Zia – Senior Committee Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sufia Alam.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Kim Hayman, Co-opted Member of the Sub-Committee stated she is an employee of Bromley-by-Bow centre, which works with organisations receiving grants. Ms Hayman also stated she is a long standing member of the Bow Bridge Estate Board (Poplar HARCA).

Councillor Kahar Chowdhury stated he is a leaseholder of Poplar HARCA.

Councillor Marc Francis declared an interest in items 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 on the basis that his wife is the Deputy Mayor with responsibility for these areas.

Councillor Francis proposed a change in the running order of the agenda, with items 5.4 and 5.5 being taken first followed by the remaining items on the agenda, which the vice-chair Councillor Pappu chaired.

Councillor Marc Francis left the meeting at the point when the above items were to be discussed.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the meeting held on the 30th July 2018 were agreed has an accurate record of the meeting.

4. CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

The Sub-Committee noted that no public submissions had been submitted to the Committee Officer by the deadline. (5:00 p.m. the day before the meeting.)

5. GRANTS DETERMINATION SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Affordable Housing Grant Programme - George Green's Almshouses

Tracey St Hill, Registered Providers Partnership and Development Officer, presented her report in relation to the Affordable Housing Grant Programme-George Green's Almshouses. Ms St Hill explained to Members, Cabinet had agreed to set up a £7.06M fund of retained RTB receipts to be used for the period 2016 onwards. In January 2018 a further £5M of additional grant funding was agreed to allow for the acquisition and development of schemes that provide affordable housing.

Ms St Hill stated George Green's Almshouses were looking to purchase one property from Poplar HARCA and sought a grant of £90,600. She said the property would be managed by Providence Row Housing Management, with the freehold being retained by Poplar HARCA.

Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions in relation to the report and the Sub-Committee noted the following:

- Jen Pepper would clarify via email the age of the property being purchased by George Green Almshouses.
- The total number of properties purchased to date, by the Housing Provider was eight.

- Paragraph 2.1 of the report would be amended to state the council can now bank monies with the DCLG rather than having to spend RTB receipts within three years.
- In response to how many properties the Council had purchased, the Sub-Committee was informed in the circa of 140 properties and that these were mainly from Poplar HARCA stock or ex-RTB properties.

Members of the Sub-Committee **AGREED** to recommend to the Grant's Determination Sub-Committee to:

1. Authorise the Corporate Director Place to award Right to Buy grant funding for the amount listed in paragraph 1.7 of the report to George Green Almshouses, together with a 10% uplift to take account of potential increases in build or acquisition costs.
2. Authorise the Corporate Director Place to enter into a grant agreement and make decisions relating to any associated matter to give effect to the delegation referred to in paragraph 1 above.

5.2 Informal offer of Historic Buildings Grant to St. Mary and Holy Trinity Church

Michael Ritchie, Principal Officer Place Shaping Team presented the report in relation to the Historic Building Grant to St. Mary and Holy Trinity Church. Mr Ritchie informed Members the Church was a Grade II Listed building and is on the Historic England's Heritage at Risk register. The grant sought is for £30,000 and would be used to improve the external appearance of the building as phase 2 of the project. A grant award of £20,000 had already been awarded as part of Phase 1, which contributed to west tower of the church being repaired.

Members of the Sub-Committee made the following comments in relation to the report and noted:

- The Church was making a contribution of £7k to the project. Members wanted to know why such a small sum was being contributed and if the Church of England would also be making a contribution.
- Members asked how the Historic Buildings Grant was publicised and who could apply for grant funding. Members were told the responsible Officer worked closely with those on the Heritage risk register and organisations were aware of the grant funding available to them.
- Mr Ritchie confirmed Historic England decided which buildings were on the risk register. He said the Council are asked for its opinion and the risk register is reviewed every year. The grant had reduced over the years and the grant funding was targeted at those in need.

Members of the Sub-Committee **AGREED** to recommend to the Grant's Determination Sub-Committee to:

1. Consider and comment on the recommendation to issue an informal offer of grant of £30,000 to St. Mary and Holy Trinity Church, Bow;
2. Approve the issue of a letter of comfort to the Church, communicating the Council's willingness to offer a Historic Building Grant of £30,000 in principle, subject to conditions.

5.3 A12 Acoustic Barrier - Part of the A12 Green Mile Initiative

Abdul Khan, Service Manager for Energy and Sustainability introduced this report and stated the A12 Acoustic Barrier project was seeking £100,000 to award Poplar HARCA as a grant. Poplar HARCA would project manage the design and installation of a new innovative acoustic barrier for a section of the A12 to mitigate noise and air pollution. He said this was a pilot scheme in partnership with Transport for London and Poplar HARCA.

Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions in relation to the report and noted the following:

- The emphasis of the report was on improving air quality however Members of the Sub-Committee felt this was misleading, particularly as the design and materials to be used were untested and there was no evidence it would improve air pollution.
- Members asked if alternative options had been considered to reduce air pollution such as green walls and planting on rooftops. Some Members believed the design of the acoustic barrier was ugly and aesthetically would not enhance the area.
- The Sub-Committee were concerned about the value for money of this project, especially considering the cost per length.
- Some Members were concerned about the council's use of section 106 funding for projects that are not in the immediate area of the development – in this case, London City Island.
- Members questioned whether the proposed siting of the acoustic barrier was appropriate, considering the density of housing in the locality and therefore a relatively small number of residents benefitting. The Sub-committee felt that there are other sites where noise reduction solutions may benefit more residents.
- The Sub-Committee had reservations about using Poplar HARCA to manage the project as this may not be as cost effective as an in-house solution. The Sub-Committee wanted assurances that a value for money exercise for project management had been undertaken.

The Sub-Committee felt that they **COULD NOT ENDORSE** this project for the reasons outlined above. They asked for the project to be halted unless funding was already committed.

5.4 Sheltered Housing: Tenant's Activity Pot

Mr Warwick Tomsett, Joint Director of Integrated Commissioning informed Members that following a report to Cabinet in March 2018, the borough had adopted an intensive Housing Management Service (IHMS) model for sheltered housing provision. The savings realised from the move have been reinvested to tackle loneliness and isolation and Officers have worked with tenants and sheltered housing landlords to co-produce the Tenant's Activity Pot (TAP).

Mr Tomsett said the report was seeking authority to grant awards to residents in sheltered schemes at a maximum of £500 per resident per annum in line with the Ageing Well Strategy and the Council's Tackling Poverty agenda as well as the Mayors commitment to tackle loneliness and isolation.

Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions in relation to the report and noted the following:

- Members of the Sub-Committee were pleased the initiative was tenant-led and asked how the initiative would be communicated to all tenants.
- Members wanted assurances that the activities would be accessible to all tenants and that all sheltered housing residents would be able to exercise their preferences for activities and that there would be flexibility in the range, location and timings of activities.
- Furthermore the Sub-Committee asked that none of the activities provided added to the vulnerabilities of some residents and that this be monitored.
- Members asked if residents could access activities put on by other sheltered housing associations.
- The Sub-Committee asked the project be evaluated after the first year and that this evaluation be made available to the Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee, in order to gain assurance that the activities being delivered met the various needs of all the residents.
- The Sub-Committee sought clarification on how many residents would benefit from the scheme.
- Overall the Members welcomed the initiative as a positive way to tackle social isolation and loneliness amongst older residents and endorsed the proposed recommendations.

Members of the Sub-Committee **AGREED** to **NOTE** and **ENDORSE** the recommendation to the Grant's Determination Sub-Committee to:

1. Authorise the Corporate Director, Health Adults and Community to make grants to residents in sheltered schemes at a maximum of £500

per resident per annum in line with the Ageing Well Strategy, the Council's Tackling Poverty agenda and the Mayor's commitment to tackle loneliness and isolation.

2. Enter into agreements with the relevant sheltered housing providers who will administer the grants to residents under appropriate terms agreed in consultation with the Head of Legal Services.

5.5 LBTH Innovation Fund and ESF Community Employment Programme Updates

Mr Steve Hill, Head of Benefits Services stated the purpose of the report was to update Members on grants that had been awarded through two funding streams – the LBTH Innovation Fund (match funding for organisations crowdfunding through Spacehive) and the European Social Fund (ESF) Community Employment Programme which is co-financed through the European Union and administered by London Councils.

Mr Hill stated that the LBTH Innovation fund, had to date funded 9 projects totalling £49,421. With regards to the ESF fund three rounds had been launched and grants totalling £302,088 had been awarded to 17 organisations.

Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions in relation to the report and noted the following:

Innovation Fund

- The Sub-Committee asked officers to explain the funding criteria of the innovation fund; the Sub-Committee asked how some of the organisations funded were meeting the criteria and for details of how crowdfunding is promoted.
- Members asked officers to ensure that the council's funds were being used to support need appropriately, the committee requested details of the equalities data relating to the projects which is captured by Spacehive.

ESF Community Grants Programme

- The Sub-Committee were assured to hear that the funding for this project is already secured and should not be affected by the country's departure from the European Union.
- The Sub-Committee requested detail on how some of the organisations being funded were meeting the grant criteria. The Sub-committee asked about the training offered to organisations to enable them to access the grant.

- The Sub-Committee requested more detail on the organisations being funded and asked that the project monitoring and evaluation reports for the ESF Community Grants Programme be brought to a future meeting, at the end of the municipal year.

Members of the Sub-Committee **AGREED** to **NOTE** and **ENDORSE** the recommendations to the Grant's Determination Sub-Committee to:

1. Note the organisations and projects funded through the LBTH Innovation Fund and the ESFG Community Grants Programme as detailed in 3.3. and 3.7 of the report.

6. SUB COMMITTEE REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

There were no Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee reports for consideration.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

No other business was discussed at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Marc Francis
Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee