

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE GRANTS SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2016**

**TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

**Members Present:**

Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillor Clare Harrisson (Member)

Councillor Amina Ali

**Officers Present:**

Vicky Allen	(Strategy Policy & Performance Officer, Strategy, Corporate Strategy and Equality Service, Chief Executive's)
Zena Cooke	(Corporate Director, Resources)
Emily Fieran-Reed	(Service Manager, Community Cohesion, Engagement and Commissioning, Corporate Strategy and Equality)
Jo Green	(Childcare Sufficiency Manager)
Steve Hill	(Head of Benefits Service)
Everett Haughton	(Third Sector Programmes Manager, Third Sector Team)
Afazul Hoque	Interim Service Manager, Strategy, Policy & Performance
Sarah Williams	(Team Leader Social Care, Legal Services, Law Probity & Governance)
David Knight	(Senior Democratic Services Officer)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Pierce.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Sub-Committee agreed:

- The minutes from the meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> June as a current record; and
- That in order to better support transparency of decision-making that the minutes of the Commissioners Decision Making Meeting should be included in the agenda pack for the following meeting of the Grants Scrutiny Sub Committee. Similarly, the minutes of the GSSC meeting should be circulated to Commissioners, however due to timing issues, it was noted that this would need to be circulated separately.

#### **4. CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS**

The Committee noted that the Commissioners at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2016 had considered the public submission from Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service.

#### **5. COMMISSIONERS DECISION MAKING MEETING REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

##### **5.1 Exercise of Commissioners' Discretion**

The Committee received and noted the schedule that outlined those decisions made by the Commissioners outside of a formal public meeting.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

##### **5.2 MSG Theme 5: Community Engagement, Cohesion and Resilience Arrangements from 1st April 2017"**

This report was generally endorsed by Members as a positive move by the council. The main points of the discussion maybe summarised as follows

Councillor Abdul Mukit highlighted the importance of the work that small, local voluntary sector organisations made to delivering services to vulnerable groups. He raised a concern that local community organisations would find the transition to commissioning challenging. He stated that as the procurement rules precluded contracts being ring-fenced to organisations in Tower Hamlets, that the voluntary sector would find it difficult to compete with larger organisations from outside the borough, and may be put off applying, despite the capacity support being offered.

In addition, the Committee wanted reassurance on the following areas of concern that a move from grant-giving to commissioning could bring for the sector.

1. There should not be an under-estimating of the culture change that the move to commissioning represented, especially for small voluntary sector organisations.
2. The support offered by the Council and through the CVS must be robust and plentiful to facilitate this transition;
3. There must still opportunity for the development of new ideas and creativity in the new model as had existed under the previous grant-aid process;
4. The social benefit should be positively weighted in the tendering process and that the Council should look to other local authorities so as to identify best practice;
5. There should be a greater focus on outcomes rather than outputs in these contracts;
6. As the timetable for delivery was a challenging one consideration needed to be given to ensure there was enough flexibility in the process and Members suggested that it was made clear that the contract delivery commencement date was an 'expected' delivery date;
7. That whilst the Council cannot restrict the bidders, either to local voluntary organisations or to small groups based in Tower Hamlets. That the specification and assessment of tenders can however specify the nature of what is expected and how the applicants will be judged. It is therefore possible to ask for experience of working in Tower Hamlets or with the local community.

## **RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

### **5.3 Integrated Early Years' Service Commissioning**

The Sub-Committee received a report that outlined arrangements for clarifying arrangements for early year services provision in the circumstances of reducing Direct Schools Grant and move to a commissioning approach. To assist the transition, Schools Forum agreed arrangements for funding supplements for the Two-year Old Funding programme and for parachute payments for Early Years Grants over 19 months in the period August 2015 – April 2017. It was noted that Commissioners and the Executive had had input into the discussion regarding the arrangements for regularising early years provision.

As a result of consideration of this report the Sub-Committee

1. Requested an explanation as to why there were no bids from the complex needs block;
2. wanted an assurance that there would be a process of review and learning as to why there had been no bids by involving the sector earlier through co-production; and
3. Felt that many groups did not understand the logic around placing bids.

## **RESOLVED**

That the report should be noted and that the Chair would draw their concerns to the attention of Commissioners.

### **5.4 MSG Performance Report April-June 2016**

The Sub-Committee received a report which outlined those activities and services being delivered and their respective RAG ratings in the period April to June 2016. The discussion on the report may be summarised as follows

The Sub-Committee:

- Whilst recognising the need to keep such reports succinct, asked that in future reports provide some high-level information about the support offered to organisations which are needed to improve their performance;
- Endorsed the proposed recommendations but also indicated that it wished to receive information on measurable actions and cost analysis in future reports;
- Noted that the performance issues with the Mile End Community Project had been impacted due to the long term sickness of a key officer and that the organisation had no strategies in place to address such a situation;
- Raised concerns about how funds of over £17,721 had apparently been released to Limehouse Project in error and sought assurances that lessons from this had been learnt to ensure this does not happen again;
- Noted that as the status of some projects were changing constantly due to information being provided, it would be useful for officers to provide updates to the Sub-Committee at the meeting so they can consider these as part of their deliberations; and
- Noted that an interim evaluation report of the MSG would be presented to the Sub-Committee in December.

## **RESOLVED**

To endorse the proposed recommendations.

### **5.5 Emergency Funding Revised Criteria**

The Sub-Committee received a report which outlined a number of changes to the current emergency funding programme, to ensure a clear understanding and consistency in approach to addressing any applications in this category. As a result of discussions on this report the Sub-Committee:

Asked for assurance that financial robustness, such as building up reserves, would be included as part of the work to build capacity in the voluntary sector; Indicated that it was keen to receive an update on this development area at a future meeting; and

Suggested that the columns of the table identifying what areas emergency funding may be granted should be revised to indicate which types of activity for which emergency funding may be awarded followed by types of activity would not qualify for this funding.

### **RESOLVED**

To endorse the proposed recommendations.

## **5.6 Grants Register - Moving to Commissioning (review outcomes)**

The Sub-Committee received a report that outlined which grants were likely to be commissioned in future. It was noted that the outcome of the review had indicated that a large number of grants were likely to remain in a grants format rather than transferred to a commissioning arrangement. As a result of discussions on the report the Sub-Committee:

- Asked for an explanation about why it was appropriate to move the Ben Jonson Road Improvement Works to the commissioning model but not the Whitechapel High Street Fund works. The Corporate Director of Resource's indicated that she would ask the relevant service to provide further details to members on this; and
- Suggested that the table as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report should be amended to clarify that it represented the number of grant schemes as opposed to the number of grants.

### **RESOLVED**

To endorse the proposed recommendations.

## **5.7 Grants Forward Plan**

The Sub-Committee received and noted the forward plan 2016 17 as at 27 September 2016.

### **RESOLVED**

To note the forward plan.

## **6. SUB COMMITTEE REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **6.1 Review of Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee and work programme report**

The Sub-Committee received a report which reviewed the initial activity of the Grants Scrutiny Subcommittee during its first three months. The report made

11 recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Committee based on the findings of the review. Councillor Abdul Mukit advised that a recruitment of co-opted members was currently being undertaken with the aim of bringing relevant experience from the community into the grants making process. As a result of consideration on this report:

The Sub-Committee:

- Endorsed this report and reiterated the importance of ensuring regular attendance and cross-party support for the meeting to ensure robust scrutiny of grants decision making process; and
- Acknowledged that recruitment of co-opted members would ensure that the diversity of the Borough is reflected and that in future recruitment details would be sent to Councillors so they can advertise amongst the local community.

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**

Nil items

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor John Pierce Abdul Mukit  
Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee