


<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Grants Determination Sub Committee</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">11 October 2023</p>	
<p><b>Report of:</b> Robin Beattie, Interim Director of Strategy, Improvement &amp; Transformation</p>	<p><b>Classification:</b> [Unrestricted or Exempt]</p>
<p><b>Emergency Grant review</b></p>	

### **Executive Summary**

The Emergency Grant Fund provides grant funding to local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations who are facing a significant loss of council funding or unforeseen emergencies. Under this grant organisations can apply for a one-off grant of up to £10,000.

However, despite evidence that VCS organisations are facing significant challenges including increased wages and energy costs, which have been made worse by the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, the funding has been underspent every year since it was created.

Following Cabinet decision in March 23 to review the current Emergency Grant a review was conducted, and new refreshed programme will be launched from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023.

This report provides an update on outcomes of the review and for GDSC to delegate authority to Director Strategy, Improvement & Transformation in consultation with the Mayor to approve Emergency Grant fund applications.

### **Recommendations:**

The GDSC is recommended to:

1. Note the Emergency Grant Fund prospectus.
2. Authorise the Director of Strategy Improvement & Transformation, in consultation with the Mayor, to award Emergency Grant to organisations as and when they arise.

## **1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 In March 23 Cabinet agreed to review the current Emergency Grant to ensure that VCS organisations who require emergency support can access the funding and continue to deliver services to Tower Hamlets residents.

- 1.2 A review of the Emergency Grant Fund has now been concluded. The review included engagement with internal officers, VCS organisations and looking at good practices from other Boroughs.

A new prospectus has been produced based on the findings from the review and approved by the Chief Executive under delegated authority as per March 2023 Cabinet decision.

- 1.3 To make the decision-making process more efficient, we are recommending GDSC to authorise the Director of Strategy Improvement & Transformation in consultation with the Mayor, to award Emergency Grant to organisations as and when they arise. This will ensure organisations are able to access the funding quickly and are able to deal with the emergency they are facing in a timely manner. GDSC will be provided with updates on the funding on a regular basis.

## **2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Alternative option is not to delegate the authority to the Director Strategy, Improvement & Transformation to approve Emergency Grant fund applications. This is not recommended as it would delay the process for grants award process which will impact on the emergency facing organisations.

## **3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 The Council has a vision to support a thriving and diverse voluntary and community sector that improves outcomes for communities. Cabinet approved a new Grants Policy & Outcomes Framework in March 2023. This consist of three funds: Mayor’s Community Grants Programme, Small Grants Programme and Emergency Grants.
- 3.2 The purpose of Emergency Grant has previously been to provide support to VCS organisations who are facing a significant loss of Council funding or unforeseen emergencies. The total budget for the Emergency Grants Fund is £100,000 per year. Organisations can apply for a one-off grant of up to £10,000.
- 3.3 Below table shows Emergency Grant Fund award from financial year 2014/15 to 2023/24.

<b>Financial year</b>	<b>Total Amount Awarded (£)</b>
1st April 2014 - 31st March 2015	39,936
1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016	49,130

1st April 2016 - 31st March 2017	16,575
1st April 2017 - 31st March 2018	6,130.01
1st April 2018 - 31st March 2019	23,658
1st April 2019 - 31st March 2020	2,060
1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021	6,846
1st April 2021 - 31st March 2022	9,722
1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023	7,749

- 3.4 This funding helps organisations in need to survive, continue to deliver vital services for residents and take steps to become more sustainable in the future.
- 3.5 Despite VCS organisations facing numerous challenges such as increased wages and energy costs made worse by Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis, the funding has been underspent every year since it was created.
- 3.6 The Council has undertaken a review of the Emergency Grant which started in July 2023 which included reviewing the current process, why organisations are not applying for the fund, eligibility criteria, “what we will fund” section and the application form.
- 3.7 The review included:
- Interviews with VCS organisations who previously received Emergency Grant and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service.
  - A workshop with internal officers who have experience of working with VCS organisations and Emergency Grant
  - Identifying best practice from other boroughs
- 3.8 The analysis of the above work has identified the following improvements:
- Eligibility Criteria: Expand the criteria so more organisations are eligible to apply
  - What we will fund: Expand the list of things we will fund to ensure it meets current VCS emergency needs
  - Application form: Make the application form easier to read and navigate.

- Monitoring form: Developed a new monitoring form, which organisations will be expected to complete after 3 months of receiving the fund so we can demonstrate the impact of the fund.

3.9 The above findings have been used to produce a new grant prospectus, refreshed application form, and creation of a new monitoring form.

3.10 Another finding from the research is that many VCS organisations are not aware of its existence. Once the refreshed Emergency Grant fund has been agreed, we will be strengthening communications and promotion of the fund.

3.11 To make the decision-making process more efficient, we are recommending GDSC to authorise the Director of Strategy Improvement & Transformation, in consultation with the Mayor, to award Emergency Grant to organisations as and when they arise. This will ensure organisations are able to access the funding quickly and are able to deal with the emergency they are facing in a timely manner.

3.12 The council recently finished its assessment and awards process for the Mayor's Community Grants Programme. This included an external audit and internal review process. We have gathered the good practice and lessons learned from this process, which will be applied to the delivery of emergency grants and other small grants.

#### **4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no direct equality implications arising from the report. Once the new grant is launched it will be important to ensure a diverse range of VCS organisations are accessing the fund. As part of the communication and promotion we will use a diverse range of mediums.

4.2 Please see appendix 2 Equalities Impact Analysis Screening Tool.

#### **5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no statutory implications.

#### **6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

6.1 There is a budget of £100k for the grants programme. Awards must not exceed this limit and historically the budget has been underspent.

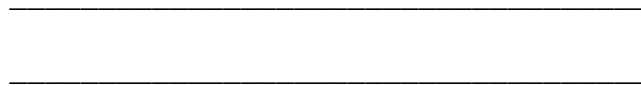
#### **7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

7.1 The Council has the legal power to set up this grants scheme in the manner indicated in the prospectus and other associated documents.

7.2 The Council has the legal duty to obtain Best Value when delivering its functions in terms of economy efficiency and effectiveness. The Prospectus

highlights the areas which the Council considers important when evaluating applications and this will assist the Council to demonstrate that the grant funds align with the Council's view of what represents Best Value. These criteria will be used when judging which applications should receive funding and this will contribute to the Council's demonstration of Best Value.

- 7.3 The Council will monitor the grants to ensure that the funds are used in line with the application and the purposes for which it is given. This will also contribute to the Best Value demonstration.



### **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

#### **Linked Report**

1. NONE

#### **Appendices**

1. **Appendix 1: Prospectus**
2. **Appendix 2: Equalities Impact Analysis Screening Tool**

#### **Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012**

3. NONE

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

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