

<p style="text-align: center;">Grants Determination Sub Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6th November 2024</p>	
<p>Report of: Julie Lorraine, Corporate Director of Resources</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">VCS Funding Awarded Under Delegated Authority</p>	

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on funding awarded to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations under delegated authority since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee.

VCS FUNDING AWARDED UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY (JUNE)

Recommendations:

Grants Determination (Cabinet) Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the update on funding awarded to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations under delegated authority since the last meeting.
2. Agree the change to the Delegated Authority from Director of SIT to Director of Finance (Section 3.4) for Small Grants and Emergency Fund programmes.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 There are several funding programmes to support VCS organisations where decisions are made under delegated authority by officers. These decisions are presented to the Sub-Committee for noting in line with the Committee's terms of reference.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Council could decide not to provide funding to VCS organisations through its various programmes. However, to do this would be contrary to the agreed policy to support VCS activities in the borough set out in the VCS Strategy 2020-2024.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 Emergency Funding

- (a) The Emergency Funding is grant support from the Council to local VCS organisations based in Tower Hamlets who are facing a significant loss of council funding. Organisations can apply for one-off grants up to £10,000. Applicants must clearly demonstrate the need for the funding and the fact that they are facing an unforeseen emergency.
- (b) The 18 September 2024 GDSC was postponed so the last GDSC meeting was 26 June 2024 and since the submission of the report to that meeting, two organisations have been assessed and awarded funding from the Emergency Fund budget under delegated authority.

Organisation	Total Emergency Funding Approved
Grand Union Orchestra	£6,480.00
Tower Hamlets Community Transport	£6,100.00
Total	£12,580.00

- (c) Details of the above Emergency Funding awards are set out in Appendix A.

3.2 Community Benefit Rent Reduction

- (a) The Community Benefit Rent Reduction (CBRR) scheme was set up by the Council to acknowledge the value of the work carried out by VCS organisations leasing its premises through a reduction in the rent payable. The Council charges an appropriate 'market' level rent for its premises and organisations can apply for up to 80% of this as a rent reduction.
- (b) CBRR is only available for short leases of three to five years. To qualify, organisations need to meet several criteria relating to governance, management and quality standards. Full details of the scheme are set out on in the council's VCS Premises Policy ([VCS-premises-statement-of-policy-and-procedures.docx \(live.com\)](#)).
- (c) Decisions are made by the CBRR Panel which consists of the following Council officers - Head of Revenues and Benefits (Chair), Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy, the Head of Asset Management - and the Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service.
- (d) Since the submission of the report for the last meeting of the Sub-Committee there have not been any CBRR awards.

3.3 Small Grants Programme 2023 – 2027

a) Background

The Council's [Strategic Plan 2022-26](#) sets out eight priorities designed to improve outcomes for residents. This includes a commitment to partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. In March 2023 Cabinet agreed a new Grants Policy & Outcomes Framework with a commitment to provide long-term funding to enable the achievement of our shared vision to 'support and invest in a thriving and diverse VCS to enable it to improve outcomes for Tower Hamlets residents'. This builds on our recognition that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Tower Hamlets plays a crucial role in supporting residents with many important services. They played a key role in the response to the pandemic, the subsequent recovery as well as throughout the current cost of living crisis.

To support this vision, the Council launched the Mayors Small Grants Programme on Monday 11th December 2023. The new programme provides £800,000 of annual grant funding between November 2023 – March 2027. The Small Grants is targeted at small voluntary and community sector organisations with an income under £150,000, to ensure a wide range of organisations can access Council funding.

b) 2024/25 Round 1 – bidding process

The first round of the Small Grants Programme in 2024/25 opened for applications on 20 May 2024 and closed on 28 June 2024. Following the round in 2023/24 a review took place that led to updated application forms, feedback to applicants, both individually and collectively through online and in person information events that highlighted common areas of weakness in the applications. The quality of applications was overall of higher quality in this round and more applicants are recommended for funding than previously. As this is a new financial year, applicants who were successful in 2023/24 can apply in 2024/25 but can only be awarded funding once per theme in the year.

c) 2024/25 Round 1 – applications received

In total, we received 113 applications across all five themes. The organisations applied for a combined amount of £316,491. The table below sets out the number of applications by themes:

Theme	Number of applications considered	Amount requested
Mayor's Community Events	30	£71,959
Mayor's Capacity Building Programme	23	£55,108
Mayor's Community Chest	24	£11,996
Mayor's & Young Mayor's Youth Empowerment Fund	12	£42,000
Mayor's Positive Activities for Young People	24	£135,428
Total	113	£316,491.00

d) 2024/25 Round 1 – assessment of bids and recommendations

The assessment period ran for 2 weeks. Projects were assessed on the Council's grant management portal, Blackbaud Grant Making. Each theme had a designated assessor who oversaw the assessment process. Each application was assessed once against the criteria set out in the prospectuses. The assessments consisted of an organisational assessment and a project assessment. For the organisation assessment the application scored a pass or fail, on the project assessment they received a numerical score. If an organisation failed the essential criteria on the organisation assessment (governance, local connection and managing money) or received less than half the available score on any question in the project assessment or scored less than 50% overall then their application was not considered for funding. All assessments that failed on essential criteria on organisation assessment were reviewed by a senior manager. Following the completion of assessments, a sample of 20% of all assessments were moderated by a senior manager to ensure the correct guidance was followed.

e) 2024/25 Round 1 – funding awarded

79 projects were recommended for funding, for a total of £211,889.

Due to not enough organisations passing the assessment, we have been unable to spend the budget for this round. Each theme has a budget allocation in this round, for the Community Chest it is one sixth of the annual allocation for all other themes it is one third. Two of the themes, Community Events and Capacity Building have applications that meet the criteria with total recommendations over the budget available and three themes are under the budget available.

The recommendations were approved by the Director Strategy, Improvement and Transformation under delegated authority with the breakdown set out below:

Theme	No. of projects awarded funding	Total amount
Mayor's Community Events	19	£46,335
Mayor's Capacity Building Programme	14	£33,568
Mayor's Community Chest	20	£9,996
Mayor's & Young Mayor's Youth Empowerment Fund	12	£42,000
Mayor's Positive Activities for Young People	14	£79,990
Total	79	£211,889.00

f) Details of the award are set out in Appendix B.

g) 2024/25 improvements to the process

As part of the VCS Strategy consultation a few improvements to VCS support from the Council was proposed. For the Small Grants Programme an action being taken forward is when the next round is open it remains open for the rest of the financial year, covering Rounds 2 and 3 in 2024/24 in the same way the Community Chest is open all year. There will still be 'Rounds' where the applications submitted by a specific date will be assessed, recommendations and a decision made but this will give more time for applications to be submitted rather than restricting it to a six-week period.

The maximum length of time to deliver a Small Grants funded project is 12 months and this will apply regardless of when in the year the application is considered.

h) 2024/25 Round 2

Round 2 is open with a deadline of 25 October for applications to be received, assessed, recommended and a notification of the outcome in December.

As explained above applicants will be able to submit applications any time after 25 October and before 14 February to be notified of an outcome in April 2025.

Rounds	Application to be submitted by	Notification of award decision	Delivery from
2024-25 Round	25 October 2024	December 2024	January 2025
2024-25 Round	14 February 2025	April 2025	May 2025

3.4 Change to Delegated Authority

The decision making for the Mayor's Small Grants Programme and the Emergency Fund grant were delegated to the Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation (SIT).

From the 1st of September the Corporate Strategy & Communities Team that manages the Small Grants and Emergency Fund has been transferred from SIT to Resources / Finance.

In light of the change in reporting it is requested that the Delegated Authority for these programmes is changed to the Director of Finance. The Director will engage the Mayor and Lead member following his decision and will continue to report to GDSC the outcomes of their decision.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All grants awarded need to demonstrate how they meet the needs of our diverse communities and support the council's Public Sector Equality Duty. Equalities data is collected as part of the monitoring process, and this will be reported as part of the annual reporting process.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.

- 5.2 **Best Value Implications** - The Council is required to ensure it achieves statutory Best Value in the delivery of its functions. Grants form part of that statutory framework and the monitoring of the use of the grant and achieved outcomes assists in compliance with the Best Value duty. The structure and process pathways of the Mayors Community Grants Programme were developed to meet the Council's best value duty. QC advice was secured confirming that the approach taken complied with the Best Value Duty.

- 5.3 **Risk Management** - The Mayors Community Grant Scheme is subject to independent external audit and internal challenge by a panel of senior officers resulting in learning and improvement actions as necessary.

- 5.4 **Safeguarding** arrangements are addressed as part of the grant application evaluation process.

- 5.5 There are no other specific statutory implications relevant to consideration of this report.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The voluntary and community sector (VCS) funding is part of the new mayor's community grant programme (MCGP). Majority of the new programme is funded through the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL). Which includes £100k allocated for Emergency fund and a further £800k for the Small Grants programme.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 The grants and information noted in this report are in line with approvals previously made and the terms of reference for this sub-committee. There are no other legal implications in this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

Appendix A – Emergency Fund grant awards

Appendix B – Small Grants 2024-2025 – 2024/25 Round 1

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

- NONE.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A