

17th April 2015

Sir Ken Knight
Chief Commissioner, DCLG
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London E14 2BG

Dear Sir Ken,

Funding for strategic level support to the voluntary, faith and community sectors in Tower Hamlets

We write in relation to the new Mainstream Grants Programme and how funding for strategic level support of the voluntary, faith and community sectors in Tower Hamlets will be provided under the new Grants Programme.

THCVS is a relatively new Council for Voluntary Service, having been set up with the assistance of Tower Hamlets Council in 2010 to support a vibrant, growing and successful third sector in the Borough and to be a strategic partner to the Council.

You will be aware that THCVS has until now been funded by the Council to undertake a number of different activities in the borough to support both the voluntary sector and also the Council itself. This support includes working with voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations to develop their capacity, as well as a second strand of strategic level work of representing the voice of the sector, acting as an independent advocate for organisations, and facilitating partnerships to help increase the sector's ability to work together and to bid for contracts. We have also been successfully providing a focal point for information, by building and maintaining a database and searchable online directory of organisations and services in the borough and supporting the Council and other statutory partners with their communications to the sector.

Over the last MSG programme, both these strands of work have been funded by the Council by way of a "top-slice" - a small amount of funding from each of the MSG funding streams has been used to fund the work of THCVS in supporting the sector overall.

We have read the papers published for the Commissioner's Decision Making meeting on the 22nd April and are aware that the proposed new MSG programme contains a Third Sector Infrastructure theme, which includes support to organisations to develop their

capacity (through the development of good strong governance, improving their monitoring and evaluation, helping organisations make successful funding bids and supporting organisations to achieve quality accreditations). This is work we feel THCVS has delivered strongly in the past and we will be making an application for funding under this theme.

We have noted however that the strategic level support currently undertaken by THCVS is not included in the new MSG programme. This work includes:

- Undertaking advocacy on behalf of voluntary sector organisations; and providing the voice of the sector;
- Facilitating partnerships between organisations in order to deliver better, more joined-up services to the residents of Tower Hamlets;
- Increasing the awareness of the voluntary and community sector amongst key audiences, and raising the profile of the sector;
- Assisting organisations to take part in consultations and planning, many of whom are small organisations with limited resources;
- Managing projects and taking part in partnerships and social enterprise;
- Administering, facilitating and chairing the Third Sector Advisory Board, a strategic level meeting for the voluntary, Council, health and business sectors to discuss and resolve common issues;
- Helping to ensure the delivery of the Tower Hamlets Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy action plan;
- Providing the view of the sector into borough-wide strategies and consultations, including the Community Plan and the Third Sector Strategy;
- Representing the Sector on the Community Safety Partnership and the Adults Safeguarding Board;
- Facilitating the Training, Employment and Enterprise Forum, bringing together businesses, the voluntary sector and the Council;
- Sector conferences and training, including our annual voluntary sector conference which attracts over 100 delegates from across the Borough;
- Communicating news, advice and legislative updates to the sector via regular e-bulletins and newsletters;
- Maintenance and regular updating of our website, which includes news and resources, a premises directory where organisations can find and list spaces for hire, and a searchable Directory of organisations and services in the borough.

We are very concerned about the impact on the sector should this work no longer be funded; we know that it is important work that is valued by both the sector and also the Council.

We are therefore asking that consideration is given to how this work is funded in the future. We believe there are a number of options available in order to support this work in the future - to add the funding for this work and a specification for it into the new MSG programme; for the Council to commission the work; or for the Council to fund the CVS through a top-slice of the MSG programme as before. We would welcome any of these approaches, but would ask that timeframe for any funding programme matches that of the MSG programme so that this valuable service continues without disruption.

The THCVS board and staff would welcome the chance to discuss these issues, and the work of THCVS and Tower Hamlets voluntary sector with you. Our Chief Executive, Kirsty Cornell, will be attending the public meeting on 22nd April, and will be contactable by phone and email both beforehand and afterwards.

Thank you very much for your time.

Yours sincerely,



Suzanne Firth
Chair
THCVS



Sharon Hanooman
Vice Chair
THCVS



Kirsty Cornell
Chief Executive
THCVS