


Commissioner Decision Report 12 th January 2016	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Luke Addams, Interim Director for Adults Services (AS)	Classification: Unrestricted
Adult Services Small Grants for Pensioners' Groups 2015/16 – Recommended Awards	

Originating Officer(s)	Barbara Disney – Service Manager, Strategic Commissioning
Wards affected	All
Key Decision?	No
Community Plan Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe and supportive Community • A Healthy Community

Executive Summary

Social isolation and loneliness are often considered to be particular problems of older age. Reduced social contact, loneliness, isolation and being alone are thought to affect older people's quality of life and their health. There are a number of very small pensioners' groups, often on estates, which go some way to alleviating social isolation and reducing loneliness amongst older people. Commissioners agreed, at the Commissioners Decisions Meeting on 21st October 2015, the process for inviting applications for the Adults Services Small Grants for Pensioners Groups 2015/16. This report recommends the award of 45 Small Grants to groups providing social activities and peer support for older Tower Hamlets residents.

Recommendations:

The Commissioners are recommended to:

1. Approve the award of the Adults Services Small Grants for Pensioners' Groups 2015/16 to 45 groups delivering social activities and peer support to older people in Tower Hamlets, as detailed at Appendix A.
2. Endorse the use of the underspend from the Small Grants budget.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To promote independence and alleviate social isolation amongst older Tower Hamlets residents by providing grant funding to a range of peer support groups.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 A decision could be made not to support this proposal and to allocate the budget elsewhere, or indeed take it up as a saving proposal. In this event, a number of groups who apply annually and are reliant on the award of a Small Grant may be unable to deliver activities to their members or, in the worst case scenario, cease operating.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- 3.1 At the Commissioners Decisions Meeting on 21st October 2015, the process for inviting applications for Adults Services Small Grants for Pensioners Groups 2015/16 was approved by Commissioners.
- 3.2 This report seeks the approval of the allocation of the Small Grants for Pensioners' Groups in Tower Hamlets for 2015/16 and to endorse the use of the Small Grants underspend.
- 3.3 The budget for the Small Grants programme 2015/16 is £25,000.
- 3.4 An advertisement was placed in the East End Life 2nd November 2015 edition, inviting pensioners' groups in Tower Hamlets to apply for a Small Grant. The £305 cost for placing this advert was met from the overall Small Grants budget. The closing date for returning applications was 11th December 2015.
- 3.5 Thirteen application forms were sent to pensioners' groups as a result of the above advert. In addition, 50 application forms were posted to those groups who had received a Small Grant in 2014/15. Where an email address had previously been provided, the application pack was also sent electronically. Application documents were also emailed to the Chair of the Community Involvement Network sub-group of the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum to be distributed to Housing Associations represented in the Network, thus increasing the reach of the Grants programme.
- 3.6 By the closing date 51 completed applications had been received, including 13 from new groups.

SMALL GRANTS 2015/16 ALLOCATION

3.7 In considering the Small Grant allocation, officers took into consideration the Small Grants criteria included on the application form at Appendix B and prioritised the funding requests as follows:

- a) Rent;
- b) Utilities bills: including gas, electricity, water rates, insurance etc.
- c) Small equipment, including bingo machines, white goods, and materials;
- d) Social activities, including day-trips and parties, cost of facilitators/tutors.

3.8 In order that all funding requests were dealt with in a fair and equitable manner:

- a) All requests for rent, bills and small equipment will be met, up to the maximum £500.
- b) Groups requesting assistance with social activities and facilitators/tutors are allocated awards based on the number of members currently registered with the group. The following guideline has been used:

Number of Registered Members	Proposed Awards
Up to 19 members	£300
20 to 29 members	£350
30 to 39 members	£400
40 to 70 members	£450
70 members and above	£500

3.9 It is recommended that a total of £18,440 be awarded to 45 organisations as detailed in Appendix B. Of these, 32 are organisations who were awarded a Small Grant in 2014/15 and have applied again this year, whilst 13 are from new applicants.

3.10 In response to a recommendation made by Commissioners to ensure that the award of grants better reflects the density of older people in the borough, a map has been produced (Appendix C) illustrating where the organisations recommended for funding are located. Appendix D shows the density of older people aged 65 and over in the borough. It is worth noting that all eligible applicants (who provided evidence of spend relating to a 2014/15 Small Grant award, where applicable) have been recommended for a grant.

3.11 Six applicants have not been recommended for an award. Five of these had not provided sufficient evidence relating to last year's grant award. One applicant was deemed ineligible as they are also in receipt of Mainstream Grant funding from the Council for the specific purpose for which financial assistance is sought.

3.12 Two applicants deliver their pensioners' groups in Community Centres operated by organisations in receipt of a Mainstream Grant:

- Island House Craft Club in Island House Community Centre
- Geezers Club in Appian Court, operated by Age UK East London

In both cases, the groups applying for a Small Grant are independently constituted organisations and are therefore recommended for funding.

3.13 Five applicants recommended for funding have been identified as delivering services from Council-owned buildings. For each of these buildings a tenancy at will is in place. Organisations may be sub-letting or hiring the space from the organisation that holds the agreement with the council. They are:

- Barleymow Veterans Club
- Collingwood Estate Friendship Club
- Cranbrook's Over 50's Club
- Wapping Community Group
- Will Crooks TRA

MONITORING

3.14 Organisations are required to submit evidence that the grant has been spent as outlined in their application. A Council Officer will check receipts etc. against the organisation's application to ensure this happens. Organisations who fail to submit acceptable evidence will not be considered for a Small Grant in 2016/17. Measures may be taken to recover the grant payment should evidence not be provided, or if the grant is used for a purpose other than that outlined in their application and on which the recommended grant award is made.

UNDERSPEND FROM SMALL GRANTS BUDGET

3.15 It is recommend that the £6,255 unallocated funds are kept in reserve in case of urgent or emergency situations arising in small organisations providing valuable services to older residents in Tower Hamlets and are taken as a saving in the event that they are not spent by the end of the Financial Year.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

4.1 There is a budget of £25k available to meet the cost of this scheme in 2015/16. The scheme would be administered by the Strategic Commissioning Team in the Adult Services Directorate.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

5.1 There is no strict legal definition of grant. However, a grant is in the nature of a gift and is based in trust law. There will be many grants which are made by the Council for the purpose of discharging one of its statutory duties.

However, as a grant is in the nature of a gift, it is considered there must be some element of discretion on the part of the Council as grantor as to whom a grant is made to and whether this is made. If the Council is under a legal duty to provide a payment to a specific individual or organisation, and cannot lawfully elect not to make such a payment, then that should not amount to a grant.

- 5.2 The power of the Commissioners to make decisions in relation to grants arises from directions made by the Secretary of State on 17 December 2014 pursuant to powers under sections 15(5) and 15(6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (the Directions). Paragraph 4(ii) and Annex B of the Directions together provide that, until 31 March 2017, the Council's functions in relation to grants will be exercised by appointed Commissioners, acting jointly or severally. This is subject to an exception in relation to grants made under section 24 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, for the purposes of section 23 of that Act (disabled facilities grant).
- 5.3 The wording used by the Directions is that the Commissioners will exercise the power "relating to the making of grants under any statutory power or duty". There is no definition of grant given under the directions and therefore, the assumption must be that a grant is that which would be deemed to be a grant under the law.
- 5.4 The proposed grants may be supported by the Council's general power of competence. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a general power of competence to do anything that individuals generally may do, subject to specified restrictions and limitations imposed by other statutes.
- 5.5 The Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This is referred to as the Council's best value duty. For the short term pending new arrangements for the provision of services it is considered that the continuation of the present arrangements provides value for money for the reasons specified in the report. Best Value considerations have also been addressed in paragraph 7 of the report.
- 5.6 The Council must operate a fair and open application procedure to process a request to obtain funding. Requests for grant funding should ordinarily be measured against a predetermined set of criteria and the criteria themselves must be fair and transparent.
- 5.7 The grant agreement should include a clear monitoring process against defined parameters in order for the Council to demonstrate either: that delivery is in line with the application and, therefore, the grant achieved its purpose; or provide clear delineation where outcomes were not achieved and the reasons for such failure are apparent. Monitoring should therefore include measuring performance against the expected outcomes.

- 5.8 When implementing the scheme, the Council must ensure that no part of the funds issued represents a profit element to any of the recipients. The inclusion of profit or the opportunity of making a profit from the grant or third parties indicates that the grant is really procurement activity and would otherwise be subject to the Council's Procurement Procedures and other appropriate domestic and European law. This would mean therefore, that the Council would have failed to abide by the appropriate internal procedures and external law applicable to such purchases.
- 5.9 All the proposed grants appear to fall under the *de minimis* threshold for the purposes of European restrictions on State aid.
- 5.10 When making grants decisions, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). A proportionate level of equality analysis is required to discharge the duty and information relevant to this is contained in the One Tower Hamlets section of the report.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1. The Small Grants programme supports two of the four themes of the community plan:
- *A Healthy Community*: Small groups such as these for older people support the prevention agenda and offer additional opportunities for peer led advice around healthy living and exercise activities and health promotion.
 - *A Safe and Supportive Community*: Small group provision contributes to the safe and supportive community theme by promoting peer support and volunteering and ensuring that services are safe to use for service users
- 6.2. This provision enables the needs of a wide range of clients including those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and long term conditions to be catered for and included. Special focus can be given to providing services to the diverse faith and ethnic communities in Tower Hamlets.
- 6.3. However, due regard continues to be given to encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low through volunteering, and engagement in shaping services and decisions that affect their own lives, such as involvement in user groups.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 By prioritising funding for rent and other running costs, these Small Grants can potentially safeguard the existence of groups that provide our older

residents with opportunities to socialise and both provide and receive support from peers, reducing isolation and increasing independence

- 7.2 Where a grant is used as a contribution towards social activities, the level of funding is determined by the number of members on a group's register (see section 3.1.4). This ensures that the available budget is tiered to reach a larger number of beneficiaries.
- 7.3 Loneliness has an impact on one's wellbeing and a range of personal circumstances such as poor health, living alone and lack of support network are factors contributing to feelings of loneliness¹. For such a small outlay (£25k) this programme will contribute to preventing longer term effects.

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 There are no immediate sustainability or environmental issues to consider. The prospective service providers, as organisations within the borough, would be required to comply with all national and local legislation regarding energy conservation, recycling etc. As services will be provided locally, most of their staff/volunteers would also be local, thereby reducing commuting.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 These are small one-off payments for which invoices and evidence are to be provided and monitored.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no immediate Crime and Disorder reduction implications.

11. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no immediate Safeguarding implications.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- Commissioners Decision Report 21st October 2015 – Adults Services Small Grants for Pensioners' Groups 2015/16²

Appendices

- Appendix A – List of recommended Small Grants 2015/16, including those not recommended for funding

¹ ONS, 2015a; ONS, 2013a, Age UK, 2015

²

<http://moderngov.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s78094/2015%2010%2013%20PG%20Commissioners%20Report%20-%20Adult%20Services%20Small%20Grants%20for%20Pensioners%20-%20legal%20cleared.pdf>

- Appendix B – Small Grants 2015/16 Application Form, including criteria for award.
- Appendix C – Map indicating geographic spread of organisations recommended for Small Grants 2015/16 funding.
- Appendix D – Heat Map illustrating spread of residents aged over 65 in Tower Hamlets.

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

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

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