

## **Comments of the Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee of 20<sup>th</sup> September 2016 for Commissioners Decision-Making meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was agreed 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.

### **5. Commissioners Decision Making meeting reports for consideration**

#### **5.1 Exercise of Commissioner Discretion**

This report was noted with no comment.

#### **5.2 MSG Theme 5: community engagement, cohesion and resilience arrangements from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017**

This report was generally endorsed by Members as a positive move by the council.

The Chair 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.

Members wanted reassurance on the following areas of concern that a move from grant-giving to commissioning could bring for the sector:

- Not under-estimating the culture change that the move to commissioning represented, especially for small voluntary sector organisations. Members wanted assurance that the support offered by the Council and through the CVS would be robust and plentiful to help this transition;
- Assurance that there would still be space for new ideas and creativity in the new model which existed under the grant regime;
- Ensuring that social benefit is positively weighted in the tendering process, the council should look to other LAs to learn from best practice;
- There should be a greater focus on outcomes rather than outputs in these contracts;
- Members raised a concern that the timetable for delivery was tight, and in order to ensure there was enough leeway built in, it was suggested that it was made clear that the contract delivery commencement date was an 'expected' delivery date.

#### **5.3 Integrated early year's-service commissioning**

Members asked for an explanation as to why there were no bids from the 'complex needs' block. Members wanted assurance that there would be a process of review and learning as to why there were no bids for the 'complex needs' block by involving the sector earlier, through co-production.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **5.4 MSG project and performance report April-June 2016**

Whilst recognising the need to keep the report succinct, the committee asked for future reports to provide some high level information about the support offered to organisations which were rated as AMBER or RED. In addition, Members asked for appendices to be printed in colour and A3, where necessary, to make them more readable.

The committee were pleased to see measurable outcomes included for the jobs, skills and prosperity theme, and asked that this was replicated for the other themes in future reports. The committee suggested future reports should also include cost-benefit analysis.

The Committee also raised concerns about how funds of over £17,721 were released to Limehouse Project in error and sought assurances that lessons from this had been learnt to ensure this does not happen in the future. It was also 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 Committee at the meeting so they can consider these in their deliberation.

Zena Cooke advised that an interim evaluation report of the MSG will be reported to GSSC in December.

The committee endorsed the proposed recommendations.

#### **5.5 Emergency funding revised criteria**

The 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. The committee were keen to receive an update on this development area at a future meeting.

The committee suggested that the columns of the table identifying what areas emergency funding may be granted were swapped, to start with what may be awarded as opposed to what may not be granted.

#### **5.6 Grants register- moving to commissioning (review outcomes)**

The 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. Zena Cooke agreed that she would ask the relevant service to provide further details to members on this.

The committee suggested that the table at 3.5 should be amended to clarify that it represented the number of grant schemes as opposed to the number of grants.

## **5.7 Grants forward plan**

The committee noted the forward plan.

## **6. Sub-Committee reports for consideration**

### **6.1 Review of grants scrutiny sub-committee and work programme report**

The committee endorsed this report and reiterated the importance of ensuring regular attendance and cross-party support for the meeting in to ensure robust scrutiny of grants decision making process.

It was also noted that recruitment of co-opted members should ensure diversity of the borough is reflected and future recruitment details to be sent to councillors so they can advertise amongst the local community.