

Comments of the Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee of 1st November 2016 for Commissioners Decision-Making meeting on 8th November 2016

Feedback

As agreed at the previous September GSSC meeting, the comments of the Grants Scrutiny sub-committee reported to the Commissioners Decision Making meeting, and the minutes of the Commissioners Decision Making meeting are included within the GSSC agenda pack as a standing agenda item.

5. Commissioners Decision Making meeting reports for consideration

5.1 Exercise of Commissioner Discretion

This report was noted with no comment.

6.1 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

This report was welcomed by Members as a positive move by the Council.

Members asked for assurance that the Council would be working closely with other host local authorities and join up with voluntary and community organisations in the borough to ensure that these families do not feel isolated and are made to feel part of the community.

Members were provided with some headline information from the Council's legal representative for the committee with regard to children in the borough as a result of the Dubs Amendment, and heard how the Council was engaging with charities to support integration.

Members asked if consideration could be given to clustering families in specific areas to enable families to support each other. In addition it would be useful to link up the families within local communities who speak Arabic language and have similar cultural needs.

The committee endorsed the proposed recommendations.

6.2 Agreement of the business case for the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership

Members welcomed the approach being taken to promote collaboration, learning and joint working between the borough's schools and the local authority.

Members wanted assurance that there was still a strong rationale to go ahead with this model now that the government had rolled back on the academisation agenda. They were also assured to hear that this model or similar models were also being developed by other local authorities.

Members asked for assurance and clarifications in a number of areas:

- That baseline information for stated success outcomes was expected to be ready by the end of the calendar year;
- That the measures THE Partnership were putting in place would ensure that the organisation would be self-financing by the end of the three year grant period;
- Members were keen to be assured that the composition of the Board would include both parents and businesses;
- That one of the focuses of THE Partnership should be on building relationships with groups from the wider community (such as housing associations) and including organisations from outside of the borough (such as big businesses and non-London based universities) in order to widen participation and widen aspirations; and
- Whether in future, there would be an offer for supporting graduates in gaining employment (for example supporting them with soft skills).

The Committee sought clarification on what arrangements were being put in place to monitor and report on progress of THE Partnership. They welcomed the opportunity to receive the planned six monthly monitoring reports as part of their scrutiny remit.

The committee noted the report.

6.3 Event Fund – report on the Event Fund Awards 2016-17

The Committee asked for the allocation criteria to be provided to have a better understanding of the Event Fund which they can then use to advise local people and groups. The Committee requested that in future where events funding application is being rejected that information be provided on which criteria had not been met be provided at the meeting.

Members asked about the measures the service has in place to support small organisations to be successful in their applications and what they did to ensure there was appropriate and representative coverage for beneficiaries and of geographies. Officers agreed to offer a workshop on applying for grants as part of the annual networking events in February and May.

Members were keen to hear that arts and events grants were being migrated onto the GIFTS system, like the MSG grants. They were interested in hearing about the online grants portal and wanted to know whether the portal could link organisations seeking funding to other funding opportunities (such as from housing providers).

There was a general discussion about how the grants portal and the open data solution currently being implemented (Socrata) will enable greater transparency through interrogation of information held about the Council's grant giving and about the recipient organisations.

The committee noted the report.

6.4 Grants Forward Plan

The Committee wanted the grants register enhanced to show which grants were discretionary so that they could better target their focus on those grants where scrutiny would be appropriate and add value to the grants decision making process.

The Committee agreed that they would look into best practice on grant giving and scrutiny of grants process. This will involve working with the LGA and Centre for Public Scrutiny.

7. Any other business the Chair considers to be urgent

7.1 MSG performance report – project variation requests

Where a decision about a grant was required, Members asked that future reports to include a short paragraph of description about the grant being funded, especially where this was unclear from the title of the grant project.

The Committee recommended that the Council should identify the organisations which physically host a number of our grant recipients (for example Oxford House) and work closely with them to coordinate and

complement the support being given to organisations which are not meeting their targets.

With regard to the Shadwell Community Project – The People Gap, Members wanted assurance that the significant reduction in match funding would have no impact on project delivery as a result of the reduction.

The committee endorsed the proposed recommendations.

Grants scrutiny sub-committee business

1. Co-optee recruitment update

Four out of a total of eight applicants have been shortlisted, one has withdrawn and the other three will be interviewed on Monday 7th November – the delay was been to accommodate applicant's pre-booked holiday. Interviews are being conducted by the Chair of GSSC, the Corporate Director Resources, and the Committee Services Manager.

2. Review of grants scrutiny sub-committee and work programme update

The Committee agreed that would like to review the arrangements that the Council is putting in place to support local organisations with a move to a more commissioning-based approach. This will include an overview of the co-commissioning approach, an update on progress to date, feedback from the CVS on the needs of the voluntary and community sector, and details of activities currently being undertaken by both the Council and the CVS to support the sector. A presentation spotlight session will be added to the agenda in the New Year. An end of pilot evaluation report of the Community Engagement, Cohesion and Resilience theme commissioning will be added to the GSSC forward plan.

It was also agreed the Committee would receive a report providing an overview of grants in the Council at their next meeting.

3. Grants Scrutiny sub-committee meetings

Members asked for the start time of GSSC to be amended to 6.00pm, in line with other scrutiny committees. They also asked Democratic Services to ensure the committee did not clash with major committee meetings (such as Cabinet), moving the committee to a Wednesday to accommodate this if necessary.