

Grants Determination Cabinet Sub-Committee 1 September 2021	
Report of: Sharon Godman, Divisional Director Strategy, Policy and Performance	Classification: Unrestricted
VCS Funding Awarded Under Delegated Authority	

Lead Member	John Biggs, the Mayor Councillor Candida Ronald, Cabinet Member for Resources
Originating Officer(s)	Awo Ahmed, Programme Assessment & Monitoring Officer Emily Fieran-Reed, Senior Strategy and Policy Manager Robert Mee, Programme Assessment & Review Officer
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	
Reason for Key Decision	
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	All

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on funding awarded to voluntary and community sector organisations under delegated authority since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee.

Recommendations:

The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the update on funding awarded to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations under delegated authority since their last meeting.
2. Note the grant funding agreed through Individual Mayoral decision and cabinet from the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund.
3. Note the new theme of the Small Grants Programme, Recovery from Covid-19 Loneliness and Isolation. And agree, for this theme only, the eligibility criterion for applications, relating to turnover not exceeding £250,000 per annum be waived.
4. Approve the extension of the grant variation for the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme that was approved at Cabinet on 21st October 2020 for a further 12 months, from October 2021 to September 2022.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 There are a number of funding programmes to support voluntary and community sector organisations in the borough where decisions are made under delegated authority either by officers or, in the case of the Small Grants Programme, the East End Community Foundation (EECF). These decisions are presented to the Sub-Committee for noting.

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

Small Grants Programme

- 3.1 The Small Grants Programme was established to ensure that local people and community groups will continue to be able to get funding from the council to support community initiatives – people getting together to get things done. The programme is intended to make funds available to support grass roots activity in local communities that will help make life better in Tower Hamlets and achieve the changes set out in the Tower Hamlets Plan and the council's Strategic Plan. By establishing a single grants programme with different themes or activities to be funded, the council is trying to make sure local

groups seeking funds will have a one stop shop to get to the funds best suited to their needs.

- 3.2 The small grants programme has five themes that constitute the main programme and three that are focussed themes as detailed below.

Main themes

1. **Innovation** - to encourage innovation or pilot something new, especially where there is a gap.
2. **Prevention** - to promote grass roots activity to reduce the need for statutory services.
3. **Neighbourhood action** - to promote local neighbourhood initiatives
4. **Community cohesion** - to develop community resilience, promote cultural opportunities and reduce social isolation.
5. **Partnership working** - making the sector more effective through closer partnership working within the sector and across sectors.

Focussed Themes

6. **Community Support Services for Older People** – to combat social isolation of older people through the provision of community-based support services.
7. **Access and Participation** – establishing access and participation schemes to provide referral gateways for people from BAME communities.
8. **Loneliness** – Reducing the impact of loneliness and isolation.

Covid Recovery Cohesion Events Fund

- 3.3 At the budget setting meeting of Full Council on the 4th March, 2021, it was agreed that the Council would establish a £3 million 'Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund (CRF)' to be used to "kickstart our community's recovery from the pandemic over the next 12-24 months.
- 3.4 Approved by Individual Mayoral Decision on 17 June 2021 were a number of projects within the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund, including £50,000 funding for a cohesion events fund to be added to the current Small Grants Programme. This will fund a programme of community events to be held over a two-week period across the borough marking the pandemic.
- 3.5 Details of the first round of small grant awards for 2021 including the Covid Cohesion Event Fund and other grants is set out in Appendix A.

Older Peoples Services Year 2

- 3.6 For this theme of the small grants programme, Older Peoples Services projects across year 1 2020/21 all had the opportunity to continue funding for an additional year.

3.7 There were eight organisations awarded funding under this theme, six of the awarded projects have completed delivery and reported back on year 1. And have all requested funding for year 2 delivery.

3.8 The remaining two projects have yet to complete delivery of year 1, once this is achieved it is anticipated that they will request for year 2 funding.

3.9 The Older People's Services Fund Year 2 awards are set out in Appendix B.

Small Grants Financial Summary					
Theme	2021-22 Budget	Brought Forward Balance	Available for Grant Making	Grant Awards	Remaining Budget
Small Grants Fund Themes 1-5	180,000	950	180,950	72,525	108,425
Access & Participation	50,000	25,087	75,087	29,870	45,217
Loneliness Fund	50,000	270	50,270	31,995	18,275
Older Peoples Services Fund	100,000	0	100,000	75,000	25,000
Cohesion Events Fund*	45,000	0	45,000	27,286	17,714
Additional Cohesion Fund*	45,000	0	45,000	0	45,000
Totals	470,000	26,307	496,307	236,676	259,631

*£50k Cohesion Events Fund approved 17 June IMD includes £5,000 admin costs, £50k Additional Cohesion Fund approved 30 June Cabinet includes £5,000 admin costs

Innovation Fund

3.10 The council is keen to encourage and support innovation in the sector and acknowledged that this would require some funding to enable the sector to pilot new initiatives and approaches to service delivery and support.

3.11 At the Commissioners Decision Making Meeting on the 12th April 2016 the creation of the Innovation Fund was agreed.

3.12 The Innovation Fund supports VCS organisations to "test and learn" new ways of working, new initiatives and new delivery models that if successful could be scaled up and commissioned more formally.

3.13 Decisions are made by the Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance in consultation with the Chair of this Sub-Committee based on recommendations of an advisory panel which consists of the Chief Executive of the East End Community Foundation, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy and officers from within that service.

- 3.14 The Council has an agreement with the crowdfunding portal, Spacehive, to support local VCS organisations crowdfund for projects and the Innovation Fund budget is £180,000. Total awards to date are £142,230.25 with a remaining balance of £37,769.75
- 3.15 VCS organisations that crowdfund through the Our Tower Hamlets page of the Spacehive portal will have an opportunity to pitch for up to £10,000 (or a maximum of 50 per cent of an organisations crowdfunding target) in match funding for their projects.
- 3.16 Further details can be found on the [Space Hive Tower Hamlets](#) and the [Innovation Fund](#) pages with more information available in the [factsheet](#).
- 3.17 Details of a pledge agreed by officers under delegated authority since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee from the Innovation Fund are set out in Appendix C.

Contingency Fund

- 3.18 The Contingency Fund was set up by the Sub-Committee to extend the existing Emergency Fund from being purely a fund to support organisations facing 'life and limb' emergencies to a fund that may also support organisations facing the impact of a significant loss of council funding.
- 3.19 At the meeting held on 29 July 2020, Cabinet agreed to close the transition element of the Contingency Fund and extend the Fund further to include support for organisations affected by Covid 19. The Covid Community fund opened for applications on the 5th Nov 2020. For a limited period, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in Tower Hamlets will be able to access funding and organisational support.
- 3.20 Awards are made from this Fund by the Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance in consultation with the Chair of this Sub-Committee.

Covid Community Fund

- 3.21 The Covid Community Fund Budget is £100,000, A further three organisations have been awarded funding since the last Grants Determination Sub Committee Meeting totalling £14,956.
- 3.22 To date six organisations have been awarded funding totalling £28,928. The remaining balance is £71,072.
- 3.23 Details of awards agreed by officers under delegated authority from the Covid Community Fund since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee are set out in Appendix D

Emergency Funding

- 3.24 The Emergency Funding budget is £50,000 and the remaining balance is £43,153.
- 3.25 Since the last meeting of the Sub-Committee there has been no further funding awarded under delegated authority for Emergency Funding.

Community Benefit Rent Reduction

- 3.26 The Community Benefit Rent Reduction (CBRR) scheme was set up by the council to acknowledge the value of the work carried out by voluntary and community 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.
- 3.27 CBRR is only available for short leases of three to five years. To qualify, organisations need to meet a number of criteria relating to governance, management and quality standards. Full details of the scheme are set out on the council's website at the [CBRR page](#).
- 3.28 Decisions are made by the Divisional Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance in consultation with the Chair of the Sub-Committee based on recommendations of an advisory panel which consists of the Head of Revenues (Chair), Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy and the Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service.
- 3.29

CBRR Financial Summary				
	Total payable pa	rent	CBRR (80%) Grant per annum	Organisation contribution pa
Applications approved	£316,652		£253,321.60	£63,330.40
Leases completed and CBRR payable	£23,000		£18,400	£4,600

- 3.30 Community Benefit Rent Reduction has been approved to 12 Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and the funding is subject to the completion of their leases and an annual review. The following are four active CBRR cases with completed leases:

- Dorset Community Association
- Legal Advice Centre
- SPLASH
- Weavers Community Forum

3.31 At the Community Benefit Rent Reduction Grants Panel meeting on the 4th August 2021, it was agreed to fund Women's Inclusive Team £30,605 per annum subject to satisfactory completion of their lease.

Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund

3.32 At Cabinet on the 30 June 2021, new grant funding was agreed as part of the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund. Those that have been committed to be awarded via grants are detailed below.

- An additional £50,000 to the Small Grants Cohesion Theme (This is in addition to the Cohesion Events Fund detailed above under Small Grants).
- £100,000 added to the existing Local Community Fund Advice project to provide further capacity to support residents up to 31st March 2023.
- £350,000 to support local businesses with adaptation grants, aimed at small and micro sized Tower Hamlets Businesses.
- £90,000 for a project including small grants for VCS organisations to support residents in recovering from the impact of the pandemic.
- The Loneliness programme has been awarded £180,000, of which £166,000 will go in grants to help reduce the impact of social isolation and loneliness.

Recovery from Covid-19 Loneliness and Social Isolation

3.33 Using the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund, an additional small grants scheme is proposed that would enable VCS organisations to apply for grants with a maximum value of £25,000.

3.34 Through the Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund grants we want to encourage and support local organisations to identify and mobilise innovative and creative ways to address the pandemic legacy of loneliness and isolation, helping people to move gradually back to connecting with each other, enjoying each other's company and to restore or enhance their quality of life.

3.35 Larger VCS organisations with an annual turnover above £250,000 are generally excluded from applying for small grants but for these one-off grants, which are to be spent within one year, it is proposed that by exception all VCS organisations should be able to apply. After two rounds of the existing loneliness small grants scheme the Loneliness Taskforce are keen that there is an opportunity for larger organisations to demonstrate what they can deliver with the higher level of grant proposed from the Covid recovery fund. This enables some of the key voluntary sector service providers to play a part in the programme, to contribute innovative ideas and to align projects with others service delivery outcomes. Smaller organisations will still be strongly encouraged to apply for funding and be treated on a level playing field.

- 3.36 The Grants Determination Committee is requested to agree for this theme only, the eligibility criterion for applications relating to turnover not exceeding £250,000 per annum be waived.
- 3.37 The Council's Loneliness Taskforce, chaired by Councillor Denise Jones, will provide additional oversight on how the funded projects add value to existing services and programmes to support community recovery from the pandemic and to build resilience should any further restrictions on social contact be introduced in future.
- 3.38 East End Community Foundation will be administering this funding in line with the grants policy agreed by cabinet in 2018.
- 3.39 The Recovery from Covid-19 Loneliness and Social Isolation specification is set out in Appendix E.

Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants Programme

- 3.40 Cabinet agreed on 20th October 2021 to approve a grant variation for the Infrastructure & Capacity Building Grants Programme, managed by a partnership led by Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service, for October 2020-September 2021. The approved variation permitted the re-allocation of 60% of the £63,000 of Programme funds allocated over those 12 months to a Programme partner, Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH), to manage the delivery of the work of the COVID-19 Volunteering Hub relating to recruiting and supporting volunteers to be deployed in voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in the borough to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These re-allocated funds were diverted from a number of lower priority volunteering infrastructure support activities for VCS organisations in the borough to the new main volunteering infrastructure priority for the VCS in Tower Hamlets - supporting VCS organisations to manage and deploy volunteers to respond to the demands of the pandemic. It is now recommended that this variation, on the above same terms, is approved for extension for a further 12 months, from October 2021 to September 2022, to allow VCTH to continue to manage the Hub's support for volunteering in VCS organisations to respond to the ongoing demands of the pandemic and the recovery process in the borough. These re-allocated funds would also be matched by £75,000 COVID Recovery Fund allocation between October 2021 to March 2023, via a contract, to support VCTH to manage the Hub's support for volunteering resources deployed by the council to respond to the above demands.

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 Best Value

Recent legislation, particularly the Localism Act 2010, has emphasised the role of communities working in partnership with local authorities to help achieve more effective and less costly services to local people. The process of co-production of services delivered by local voluntary and community organisations is a tool now widely recognised as a means to achieving this outcome.

5.2 Risk Management

There is a risk that, by not publishing details of funding awarded to VCS organisations, the council could leave itself open to challenge that it is not fulfilling previous commitments to openness and transparency. This report is one of a series that will provide updates on funding decisions made under delegated authority and the VCS Annual Report will provide more detailed analysis.

5.3 Crime Reduction

There are no specific crime reduction considerations arising from this report.

5.4 Safeguarding

There are no specific safeguarding implications arising from this report. However, ensuring appropriate consideration is given to safeguarding will be addressed in the development of the Small Grants Programme, both through governance requirements and in the capacity building programme for the sector.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 This report notes the update on funding awarded to voluntary and community (VCS) organisations under delegated authority. The total of grants awarded is contained within the approved budget.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 For the most part this report updates the sub-committee on various pre-approved grants. However, as part of the Council's strategy to assist the

community during the pandemic, the Council sought approval to amend the purposes of the Infrastructure & Capacity Building Grants Programme. Recommendation 4 seeks to continue the amendment for a further 12 months. The Council has the legal power to do this if it so wishes. The Council also now has the apparatus in place (in terms of grant agreement amendments and monitoring etc) to ensure that such extended variation will continue to achieve Best Value.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

NONE

Appendices

Appendix A Small Grants Programme

Appendix B Older People's Services Fund

Appendix C Innovation Fund Pledge

Appendix D Contingency Fund – Covid Community Fund

Appendix E Mayor's Covid Recovery Fund: Recovery from Covid-19 Loneliness and Social Isolation Relief

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

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents: