

Minutes of Scrutiny and Area Committees on the Review of Policies and Procedures for support to the Community and Voluntary Sector

Community Scrutiny Committee – 7 March 2006

122 REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning grant aid to voluntary and community organisations for 2006/2007.

Oliver De Soissons (Leisure and Cultural Services) and Val Johnson (Neighbourhood Renewal) presented the report to the Committee. During discussion, the following key points were raised:-

- (1) 80% of the present grants money is spent on 3 year grant schemes, with a further 18% being allocated to smaller grants. Within the grants awarded there are recognisable themes – for example, 30% of all grants are awarded to housing issues, with 20% being spent on the arts and culture.
- (2) Organisations need to approach the City Council, and the Council tends to be reactive rather than proactive.
- (3) European Union case law has demonstrated that care should be taken whilst awarding grants to organisations from the public purse, especially where those grants are large. There should be much more transparency in the process.
- (4) A position statement had been drawn up as a result of studying good practice elsewhere. This was outlined in the report.
- (5) It was noticed that the Council had 44 strategies and plans that needed to be taken into account when grants were being considered.
- (6) It had become obvious when this issue was being researched that the Council often gave grant aid to assist organisations to pay their rent. This was often rent owed to the Council. Little regard had been paid to whether or not this was the best solution for the organisation concerned. Cross subsidisation was not always the most efficient solution, and there was a need to separate grants from support given in kind.

- (7) Benefits to the Council were not always easy to measure, and there was a need for the Council to become more focussed in its expectations from an organisation to which a grant was awarded. Groups receiving a grant, especially where it was a modest amount awarded on an annual basis, should be encouraged to review their situation. This would apply particularly where a grant was desired for more than 2 consecutive years. It was preferable for the Council to make a conscious decision, taking each application on its merits, and being clear why each grant was being awarded.
- (8) Several members of the Committee felt that the provision of Emergency Grants was an important function. Val Johnson informed the Committee that the aim was to structure the application process so that all emergency aid was applied for in the same way, rather than on an ad-hoc basis.
- (9) The Committee's attention was drawn to the fact that the City Council presently had a budget of £1.7 million for grants and aid in kind. This was reviewed annually, and attempts were made to improve both the monitoring and the allocation process.
- (10) Concern was expressed at the concept of top slicing the grants budget to pay for additional staff. Individual Business Units could be made responsible for monitoring grants, as opposed to hiring additional staff to do so. However, additional staff would provide additional support to the Business Units concerned.
- (11) It was suggested that applicants for grant aid should be assisted to make a good and comprehensive application. Matched funding gave better value for money and helped promote fund-raising, and this should be commended to applicants for grant aid.
- (12) The question of good practice at other local authorities was raised. It was felt that it would be helpful to look not only at good practice elsewhere, but at those Councils that did not give grant aid to voluntary organisations as well. It was observed that there was the option of ceasing all grant aid and putting the money saved into service provision instead. Some local authorities did not give direct grant aid, but instead commissioned some services through voluntary organisations.
- (13) Val Johnson observed that one way forward might be to establish a Community and Voluntary Organisation (CVO) Steering Group to jointly address the issues around grant giving.

Resolved:-

- (1) To support the report,
- (2) To ask that the following comments from the Committee be added to it:
 - (a) Emergency grant aid should be protected;
 - (b) That where grant aid to any organisation was to be cut, this should take place over a period of time, so that the aid was allowed to tail off, rather than it ceasing immediately.
- (3) To ask for a list of recipients for grant aid, showing how much each group received from the Council, be presented to the Committee.

Cowley Area Committee – 1 March 2006

152. REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTORE

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which will be submitted to the Executive Board, on options for the processes and allocation of support to the community and voluntary sector.

Oliver De Soissons and Nicola Harrison attended the meeting and outlined the proposals to the Committee.

In response to questions Oliver De Soissons said with regard to the Officer Steering Group, that Councillors would still take the decision on the allocation of the grants to the various groups and organisations.

County Councillor Val Smith said that previously grants had been allocated according to areas of need, such as environment etc. She said she was pleased that the proposals included this as an option and that it was good for the City Council to have dialogue with the various community and voluntary groups on grants. She welcomed the proposals.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To welcome the proposals;
- (b) To request that Area Co-ordinators were included on the Community and Voluntary Organisations (CVO) Steering Group;
- (c) To request that as part of the new scheme, Area Plans were linked to it, in the same way as other City Council strategies and plans were.

North Area Committee – 2 March 2006

**169. REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT FOR THE
COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which would be submitted to the Executive Board, on options for the processes and allocation of support to the community and voluntary sector.

Oliver De Soissons attended the meeting and outlined the proposals contained within the report.

Ann Spokes-Symonds said that there needed to be more consultation. She said that the proposals contained a lot of good ideas, but these did not necessarily address the concerns of the small voluntary organisation who might fear that they would lose funding and support. She asked what the view was from the OCVA on the proposals.

In response Oliver De-Soissons said that OCVA had been involved since the start of the process to review how grants were made etc. He said that the granting of small grants to groups was still an option in the Delivery Plan, but that Officers would now go out to these organisations and start a dialogue with them, rather than just receiving grant requests etc.

Councillor Armitage said that he was glad to see the review, but said that there was a danger that for small organisations the emphasis would be on achieving targets and so creating more bureaucracy for them. He added that another problem was the current lack of Officer time which needed to be addressed if there was to be greater dialogue with the voluntary groups.

Councillor Susan Roaf said that the proposals were welcomed as they provided assistance to the organisations. She also welcomed the use of themes as part of the process.

Councillor Goddard said that he was sceptical of the approach. He said that the essence of the community and voluntary groups was to respond to need, and these proposals could inhibit the smaller organisations acting on needs in areas not covered by the Councils own services. He added that the Community Scrutiny Committee should be involved in the consultation process and that the comments etc. made now should be fed back to the Community Scrutiny Committee. He also asked how the new Community and Voluntary Officers (CVO's) Unit would be funded.

In response Oliver De Soissons said that the Innovation Fund would take on issues from the CVO's. He said that this new policy was in agreement with what the Council provided now with the voluntary sector. He said that with regard to the funding of the CVO Unit, the current view was that one further post would be funded from the general Grants Budget.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To thank Oliver De-Soissons for attending the meeting;
- (b) To make the following comments on new policy:
 - (i) To welcome the review
 - (ii) To register concerns that there was insufficient officer to ensure that the proposals worked
 - (iii) The use of "Themes" as part of the process was welcomed
 - (iv) To register concern that the proposed scheme could inhibit small organisations and voluntary groups from responding to the needs of their client, which was why these groups were established initially.

South East Area Committee – 6 March 2006

195 REVIEW OF GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning grant aid to voluntary and community organisations for 2006 – 2007.

The Area Co-ordinator explained that this report would be presented to Executive Board. He drew attention to the Position Statement contained within the report, which outlined a more strategic approach to grants.

Councillor Carole Roberts observed that, as a Councillor, she wished to understand why additional staff posts were needed to facilitate this strategy. (Having previously declared a personal interest in this item, she then left the room whilst this issue was discussed.)

Councillor Turner observed that at present the grants process is purely responsive, and whilst this was good in some ways, it meant that some areas of potential grant giving were not covered. The Council was therefore advised to consider how it wished to deal with grants for the whole of the city.

Resolved to ask the Area Co-ordinator:-

- (1) To pass on the Committee's comments to the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager, and to the Executive Board;
- (2) To obtain a written response to the question concerning the proposed new staff posts.

Central South and West Area Committee – 14 March 2006

162. REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The Strategy and Review Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved that the Executive Board be informed that the Committee notes the position statement; has reservations about the proposed process and the potential costs of implementing it; does not believe that the existing system is as deficient as suggested; considers that responsibility for defining and monitoring outcomes should be embedded within the relevant business unit and expresses concern about the proposal to fund salary costs from the grants budget.

East Area Parliament – 15 March 2006

203. REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended) concerning options for the processes and allocation of support to the voluntary and community sector. Oliver de Soissons presented the report and answered questions from members of the Area Parliament. He advised that point 10 of the Position Statement was to be revised prior to the report being submitted to the Executive Board on 3 April.

Resolved that the review be broadly welcomed but that the following comments be passed to the Executive Board: -

- Concern at the suggestion of top-slicing grant money for additional staff costs
- Concern that the priorities set by the Council as a whole and Area Committees could be different

- There was a need to protect the independence of Area Committees so they could give grant aid for local priorities even if they were not whole Council priorities
- Some grant funds should be set aside so that local communities could participate in deciding how a proportion of the budget should be spent
- Concern that the emergency fund did not adequately cover the need for a proportion of the budget to be used reactively
- Concern at the possible introduction of an element of competitive tendering.

North East Area Committee - 21 March 2006

The report was not discussed in detail at this meeting. It was agreed that comments should be fed back to Oliver de Soissons or Councillor Hollingsworth to be taken at Executive Board as appropriate.