

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 September 2019
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Monitoring the Community Grants Programme 2018/19

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Monitoring the Community Grants Programme Report for 2018/19
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Marie Tidball, Supporting Local Communities
Corporate Priority:	Strong, Active Communities
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 03 September 2019, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet for its 11 September meeting concerning the grants awarded by the Council in 2018/2019 and the impact of those grants on Oxford's communities.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Tidball, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The

Committee would also like to thank Julia Tomkins, Grants & External Funding Officer for supporting the meeting and producing the report.

Summary and recommendation

3. The Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities, Councillor Marie Tidball, introduced the report, highlighting a number of key issues. Councillor Tidball drew attention to the scale and breadth of support for the voluntary and community sector amidst a particularly challenging context of increased demand for services and reduced funding. In 2018/19 the City Council was reported to have awarded £1,515,042 in grant funding to local community and voluntary organisations to support the Council in meeting its corporate plan objectives and more broadly to improve the quality of life amongst local residents. However, in addition, for every pound invested by the Council through grant funding, a further £2.81 was leveraged from external funding sources, including funding from abroad, totalling £4,264,575 in additional funding.
4. The link between the Council's funding, successful outcomes for residents and achievement of its corporate priorities was illustrated through case studies, such as Parasol's funded intervention supporting disabled young people along the pathway to employment via volunteering.
5. Two particular recent innovations were also highlighted, the use of The Good Exchange, and the Oxford Lottery. The benefit of The Good Exchange was identified to be the automatic matching to relevant funding sources, thereby allowing applicants to be eligible for multiple grants whilst only having to fill out a single form. The Oxford Lottery was launched in March 2018 with a system in which half the ticket price goes to the charity of the player's choice. Based on existing numbers of players and tickets sold, a total of £12,000 was anticipated to be raised for local good causes in the twelve months following the date of the meeting. As of 05 September this figure has since been updated to £14, 750.
6. In its scrutiny of the report the Committee's questions and discussions focused on four key areas: extending the potential of the Oxford Lottery; issues surrounding ensuring a diversity of funding recipients, and particularly clarifying eligibility for grant funding amongst social enterprises; the degree to which grant funding was backfilling previously removed statutory funding; and issues around monitoring itself. In hearing from the Cabinet Member and reviewing the responses provided the Committee have made two recommendations as outlined below as well as a number of other observations.

Oxford Lottery

7. The Committee welcomed the Council's innovation in facilitating fundraising for local organisations. Following clarifications from the apparent clash between figures referenced in paragraph 19 of the report and the verbal presentation forecasting funds raised for approved causes to be £12,000 over the forthcoming twelve months provided, the Oxford Lottery was recognised as having particular potential to be an important means of targeted fundraising despite only being

launched within the last six months. Given its status as a new initiative, however, the Committee agreed that greater visibility and promotion would be necessary in raising its profile in order for it to fulfil that potential.

Recommendation 1: That the Council produces a plan of action to raise the profile of the Oxford lottery, particularly through promotion to residents, large local businesses and within the Council itself.

Ensuring Organisational Diversity and Clarifying Eligibility

8. The Committee welcomed reports of the efforts made to promote awareness of grant funding, particularly amongst BAME communities, and recognised the breadth of communities benefitting from grant funding as a significant success for the Council.
9. Whilst the outcomes of the Council's efforts to ensure a breadth of beneficiaries, particularly from minority groups, was welcomed, the Committee questioned whether there existed a similar diversity amongst organisations receiving funding, or whether many were receiving year on year funding. It was noted that year on year funding was not necessarily wrong and many such organisations did provide extremely valuable services, but it was important that the Council be aware if new organisations confronting new issues were experiencing detriment by not having previously applied for funding. It was felt that Council should monitor access to the grants process from new organisations to ensure artificial blockers did not exist, and to monitor year on year grant funding recipients to ensure similar levels of outcome were being maintained.
10. A particular area of concern regarding access to grant funding related to social enterprises. The Committee recognised that Oxford is home to a wide variety of co-operatives, delivering with significant expertise a broad range of services of which many align with the Council's own corporate priorities. Examples of the types of work undertaken include childcare, community hubs and delivery of low carbon measures. Likewise, Oxford's housing associations work with many of the City's most vulnerable and those with complex needs.
11. Currently, the Council's guidance on legal structures for many of its grant funding opportunities is that the structure be 'appropriate to the size and nature of the organisation'. The Scrutiny Committee recognises that within each of the categories of 'social enterprise', 'co-operative' and 'housing association' there lies a variety of legal structures, each one with their own implications around legal forms, governance and finances.
12. It is the principal concern of the Scrutiny Committee that grant funding not be allowed to support private profits. Its secondary concern is that lack of clarity over eligibility amongst social enterprises including co-operatives and housing associations, may lead to self-exclusion from the grants process, or that the challenge of understanding complex nuances within legal structures may potentially lead to applications from such groups being incorrectly deemed inappropriate.

Recommendation 2: That the Council provides and promotes additional guidance to prospective grant applicants from social enterprises (including co-ops and housing associations) to clarify the circumstances under which they would or would not meet the Council's requirement that grant applicants must have a legal status appropriate to the size and nature of the organisation.

Backfilling of funding following reductions by other authorities

13. A number of questions were raised by the Committee regarding the degree to which Council grants were funding services following the withdrawal of funding from other statutory bodies. It was confirmed that the open-access nature of the Council's grant giving programme made robust recording of the extent of such 'backfilling' impossible. Nevertheless, was also recognised by the Committee that there does exist a higher demand for services, particularly around youth services, for which funding from other statutory bodies has reduced substantially.

Monitoring issues

14. The Committee also discussed a number of broader issues around the monitoring process itself, particularly around the wish to be able to account for the positive outcomes achieved or negative outcomes avoided, and around the move to the commissioning model. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Committee recognises the dual nature of the problems with ascertaining a return on investment on the small grant and annual open bidding grant programmes, namely the significant challenge of grant recipients collecting such data, and the difficulties of accurately aggregating such data by the Council. However, regarding the monitoring of commissioned services the Committee notes the deeper, ongoing relationships the Council has with organisations funded through this process and the encourages consideration to be given as to how deeper-level information may be collected regarding the impacts of projects which, it is important to note, reflect corporate priorities.

Further Consideration

15. The scrutiny of Council grant giving and the concomitant outcomes for residents, and particularly priority groups, remains an important area of focus for the Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Committee will maintain annual consideration of reports to Cabinet on the Council's grant giving and grant monitoring.

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