

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Date of meeting: 28th September 2017
Report of: Leisure & Community Section Head
Title: Small Grants Fund Review 2016 – 2017

1.0 **Summary**

1.1 This report provides Elected Members and Heads of Service with a review of the Small Grants Fund (SGF). The grant budget forms part of the Community and Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework and covers the period from April 2016 to March 2017.

1.2 This report is for information only

2.0 **Recommendation**

2.1 That the report be noted

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Report approved by: Head of Community & Environmental Services

3.0 **Background**

Watford Council is committed to supporting a vibrant and engaged voluntary and community sector which can deliver quality and value for money services that benefit those who live, work and visit the town. The Community and Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2016 - 2019 recognised the importance of maintaining a Small Grants Fund (SGF) programme to allow local community organisations the opportunity to apply for 100% one-off grants to support their group.

Applicants can apply for grants up to £2,000 towards:

1. a community initiative or project
2. items of equipment

3.1 **Governance procedure**

The decision process of the Small Grants Fund is delegated to the Head of Community and Environmental Services, in consultation with the then Portfolio Holder for Community. Delegated decision meetings would take place on a monthly basis throughout the year from April – February. Introduced in 2016 local ward councillors are informed when an application is received and when a grant is awarded.

The approved criteria for the Small Grants Fund applications for 2016 – 2017:

- meet one of the following council corporate priorities;
 - *'champion smart growth and economic prosperity'*,
 - *'provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities'*,
 - *'deliver a digital Watford to empower our community'*
- demonstrable future benefit for the people of Watford

3.2 **Headline statistics**

Between 2016 – 2017 the small grants fund awarded £50,010 to;

- 32 voluntary and community sector organisations working to engage and benefit the local community
- The scheme attracted £30,376 of match funding for the different projects funded by the SGF

3.3 **On-going review of the small grant programme**

During 2016-17 officers undertook a review of the small grants fund.

This included:

- Geographical map of the Town (Appendix 1) showing ward locations of organisations
- Reviewed the grant application process flow chart and a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ'S)
- Online SGF applications continue to be developed as part of the Watford 2020 programme
- Developed a database of other available funding streams to voluntary sector groups
- Undertake an annual satisfaction survey of applicants to the SFG (Appendix 2)
 - 2016-17 the survey was emailed to 48 organisations, with 28 responses (58% response rate).
 - 2017-18 the survey was emailed to 59 organisations, with 22 responses (37% response rate).

3.4 **Enhancing our relationships with non-constituted groups**

During the 2016-17 review the officers identified that improvements could be made to the councils processes for making payments to non-constituted organisations and reduce the barriers to allow them to access funding.

The council worked with Watford & Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) to develop a 'Volunteer Partnership Agreement' which satisfies the council audit and financial processes for non-constituted organisations, but also provided a link for small organisations in the borough to benefit from the protection of working under the umbrella of an infrastructure organisation like W3RT.

The Volunteer Partnership Agreement ensures that:

- Non constituted organisations have their funding award paid to W3RT.
- The Volunteer Partnership Agreement provides a legal framework within which W3RT is able to support the volunteer partners to deliver their activities.
- W3RT will provide the volunteer partners with support, advice and guidance to develop their organisation to become constituted.

Commissioning Officers improved the wording of the application form and guidance notes to highlight those applications from non-constituted groups were welcome and encouraged. This has been a slow process as many organisations are unaware that they are able to apply. Our continued efforts to meet organisations and publicise this fund has started to see an increase in applications from non-constituted organisations.

In 2016-2017, 3 non-constituted groups applied for funding, this is a 100% increase on the previous year and reflects the work the council has done to promote the scheme to grass root organisations in the borough.

3.5 **Relationship with Watford & Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)**

In 2017, W3RT appointed a new Service Manager with specific responsibility for the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), Michal Siewniak. Michal has been keen to work with the officers since the start of his employment. He has supported the 3 non-constituted organisations who have received small grant funding.

The council also worked in partnership to plan a successful Small Charities Week Funding Conference on 22nd June 2017. Colleagues from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Herts Community Foundation were able to provide 1-2-1 sessions for organisations to speak to colleagues about their individual ideas for projects. Michal included WBC in the design and agenda for the conference and took our suggestions on board.

31 people registered to attend this event, with 32 people actually attending. 17 people completed feedback forms, a 55% response rate. Responders thought the presentations and 1-2-1 sessions were either excellent or good.

3.6 **Networking and Herts county wide funding partnerships**

Officers have continued to maintain positive working relationships with our neighbouring local authorities and other organisations that provide funding for local voluntary and community sector organisations. The council have established good links with:

- Three Rivers District, Dacorum Borough, Hertsmere Borough and St Albans District Councils
- Watford Community Housing Trust and Thrive Homes
- Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)

Networking meetings take place 2-3 times per year and cover agenda items such as:

- Current national, regional and local funding programmes
- Information sharing of application processes and paperwork including application forms and guidance notes
- Decision processes e.g. involvement of Elected Members or Portfolio Holders
- Annual budget allocation and award actual figures
- Possible projects for local authority cross boarder and joint working
- New funding initiatives and programmes (i.e. crowdfunding)

4.0 Legal Issues

The Head of Democracy and Governance states that the Council has a number of different powers it can use to fund grants of this nature.

5.0 Finance

The budget will be subject to the council's annual budget setting process and any requirements to make savings or provide growth will be dealt with as part of this process.

The SGF has an annual budget of £50,000

2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
The budget for 2013-2014 was £50k with an additional £38,580 carried forward from 2012-2013 giving a total budget of £88,580	The budget for 2014-2015 was £50k	The budget for 2015-2016 was £50k with an additional £2000 returned funding due to a non-completed project	The budget for 2016-2017 was £50k
Total awards for 2013-14: £66,508.97	Total awards for 2014-2015: £49,442.59	Total awards for 2015-16: £51,609.90	Total awards for 2016: £50,010
57 organisations applied for funding	42 organisations applied for funding	43 organisations applied for funding	59 organisations applied for funding. 17 applications had to be deferred to 17/18 as the budget was fully spent.
43 applications were successful	33 applications were successful	35 applications were successful	32 applications were successful

6.0 Appendix

1. GIS Ward map of grant applications - 2016-2017
2. Satisfaction survey results (conducted June 2017)
3. Application table shows 2016-2017 Ward comparison
4. Profile of grant received per month 2016-2017