

SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT

TASK GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Watford Borough Council

Committee Membership

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| Councillor Jeanette Aron . | Chair of the Task Group and Councillor for Nascot Ward |
| Councillor Ian Brandon . | Councillor for Callowland Ward |
| Councillor Sue Greenslade. | Councillor for Meriden Ward |
| Councillor Stephen Johnson | Councillor for Leggatts Ward |
| Councillor Anne Joynes . | Councillor for Leggatts Ward |
| Councillor Rabi Martins . | Councillor for Central Ward |

Portfolio Holder

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| Councillor Keith Crout . | Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services Councillor for Stanborough Ward |
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Non-Committee Members

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| Councillor Jackie Connal . | Councillor for Holywell Ward |
| Councillor Asif Khan . | Councillor for Leggatts Ward |

Officer Support

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| Lesley Palumbo . . | Head of Community Services |
| Gary Oliver . . | Culture and Community Section Head |
| Prema Mani . . | Commissioning Manager |
| Carol Chen . . | Head of Legal and Property Services |
| Linda Newell . . | Property Manager |
| Sandra Hancock . . | Committee and Scrutiny Officer |
| Rosy Wassell . . | Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer |

External Support and Information

Watford Community Voluntary Services

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| Bob Jones | Chief Executive Officer of the Watford Community Voluntary Services |
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PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESENT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Proposed Recommendations:

1. The Small Grants Fund should be continued.
2. The total Small Grant Fund should be £50,000.
3. The limit for individual small grants should be £2,000.
4. Application criteria should include projects and 'invest to save' initiatives
5. The process for Small Grant applications should encourage match funding.
6. The priorities in the draft Commissioning Framework document as detailed below are supported:
 - Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector
 - Enabling people with physical mobility problems to access services in the town centre
 - Advice services
 - Arts and Culture
 - Community Centres
 - Sport

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

December 2011

Recommendation for this topic as a subject for scrutiny was the outcome of the Cabinet report of 5 December 2011 and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 22 December 2011.

March 2012

At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2012 the Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she had spoken to the Community Services Section Head regarding the additional resolution at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22 December 2011. This resolution is below:

that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework.

Members at this meeting agreed that a Task Group be set up in May 2012 to review the draft Commissioning Framework prior to public consultation in June 2012.

The meeting agreed that:

- A Task Group be established to review the Draft Commissioning Framework
- All non-Executive Members be asked whether they wished to participate in the review
- The appointment of the Task Group membership be delegated to the Head of Legal and Property Services in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The outstanding actions and questions list be updated as agreed

Scope of the Task Group

The Task Group would review proposals for developing the Council's New Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Commissioning Framework.

The current framework and three-year grant funding programme would close on 31 March 2013. It was considered appropriate that the Council revisit its support for the VCS and ensure that there existed a clear understanding of its priorities and commissioning objectives. This was particularly important in the context of the impact of the economic climate, the recession and public sector funding cuts.

It was anticipated that the task group would:

- Examine the evidence
- Engage key stakeholders in testing the information provided
- Form a view on the priorities

At the close of the review, were it to be felt appropriate, the recommendations would be incorporated into the process of developing the new commissioning framework. .

Six Councillors had expressed an interest in working on this review; it was agreed that these Councillors would form the membership of the Task Group.

The Task Group would comprise:

Councillor Jeanette Aron – Councillor for Nascot Ward
Councillor Ian Brandon – Councillor for Callowland Ward
Councillor Sue Greenslade – Councillor for Meriden Ward
Councillor Stephen Johnson – Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Anne Joynes – Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Rabi Martins – Councillor for Central Ward

SUMMARY OF MEETINGS

First Meeting - 24 May 2012

The Task Group received the terms of reference for the review which had been drafted by officers from Community Services. The Head of Community Services explained the scrutiny suggestions and details of how Members could be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework; she also advised on background information for the grant funding process.

Members considered a discussion paper on the Commissioning Framework which set out areas for the group to examine. The discussion paper had included a definition of the term 'commissioning' as a 'process for ensuring quality services meeting the identified priority needs of the community'. It was intended that this service should be provided by the best placed organisation at an affordable cost to the Council. Items discussed by Members included funding and resources, services commissioned by other bodies and funding priorities.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the

- a meeting to discuss technical issues should be programmed to a meeting in July 2012.
- A representative from the CVS should be invited to a future meeting in order to answer any questions the Members may have.

Second Meeting - 19 June 2012

Members had been supplied with a variety of background documents.

The meeting discussed Joint Funding for cross boundary organisations and the sharing of resources.

The Head of Community Services advised on the proposed priorities and gave a brief comment on each of the recommendations. She also referred to the Service Level Agreement template and advised that a new version would be introduced.

The Task Group was provided with the latest edition of the draft Commissioning Framework and asked to forward their comment to officers. Consultation on the document would take place between 25 June and 10 September and officers would collate responses to present to the Task Group at the September meeting.

Third Meeting - 13 August 2012

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Watford Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) had been invited to the meeting to respond to the Group's questions. The CEO also advised on the proposed Watford Community Trust which, it was anticipated, would be launched in March 2013. He explained that it was hoped that under this scheme charities would become more financially independent.

The Property Manager tabled a list of Council properties used by charities and community and voluntary organisations. The Task Group discussed leasing

arrangement and rents charged for properties. It was agreed that officers would adjust the final version of the Commissioning Framework to clarify the property related issues discussed by the Group.

The Task Group also discussed issues related to Non Domestic Rate Relief and funding priorities and the delay proposed in reviewing this policy in the light of future government changes.

Final Meeting - 5 September 2012

Members discussed the feedback from the consultation.

Points noted included:

Commissioning Framework Document: This should be easier to read

Funding: Flexibility was required

An infra-structure support network for voluntary organisations was important

Commissioning Approach: The new approach would be monitored through Service Level Agreements.

Priorities: Members deliberated on a range of priorities as itemised within the survey responses

Members discussed how small grants should be deployed.

Recommendations were reviewed and determined prior to presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

During the course of the scrutiny task groups work, Members had :

- examined in detail the background to the proposed introduction of a new Commissioning Framework in the context of financially constrained circumstances
- obtained a greater insight into the working of the wider voluntary and community sector and the environment in which those organisations operate
- received information on the methods used to monitor the outcomes and performance of organisations receiving council funding and the intention to re-focus and stream-line the approach in the future
- examined in detail the Council property related issues relating to the occupation by voluntary and community organisations
- received a report on the reasons for delaying the review of the policy for non-domestic rate relief in light of future government changes
- explored with officers the content of the draft Commissioning Framework and input into the final version that was consulted upon
- received a report on the feedback obtained through the consultation process and in the light of that feedback re-examined the priorities proposed and the issues relating to the small grants fund

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 ~ The Small Grants Fund should be continued

The survey had shown that respondents felt there was a need for small grants.

The Head of Community Services counselled that were the Small Grants fund to be retained there must be clarity on anticipated achievements and outcomes and this must be clearly demonstrated within the application criteria. It would also be easier to encourage groups to apply if the criteria were clear.

It was suggested that small grants be maintained for two years and then monitored to evaluate whether it would be wise to continue with this scheme.

Recommendation 2 ~ The total Small Grant Fund should be £50,000

Grants had, in the past, been provided through two funds, the Mayor's Fund and the Annual Fund, which both had £50,000 available. During the previous year the two funds had been combined into one Small Grants Fund; this fund had then been reduced to £50,000 in total.

Members agreed that this budget should be maintained.

Recommendation 3 ~ The limit for individual small grants should be £2,000

The Head of Community Services advised that there was currently a limit of £2,000 for individual grants. Checks were made to ensure that the grants had been used appropriately. The decision to award a grant was delegated to Portfolio Holders.

Members agreed that the limit should be set at £2,000 and that monitoring should continue

Recommendation 4 ~ Application criteria to include projects and 'invest to save' initiatives

The Task Group noted that small grants would be useful for organisations as additional funding in the short term or to make the group more sustainable in the longer term. Several Members commented that a small grant for necessary expenses could, in some circumstances, make the difference to a group's continuance or closure.

Members also recommended that small grants be used to finance specific projects not ongoing revenue requirements.

Recommendation 5 ~ The process for applications should encourage match funding

It was noted that the three-year grant funding programme had caused service users to regard the ending of this scheme as a withdrawal of funding. This reinforced the view that funding created a dependency culture.

Members discussed the case for match funding in order to eliminate a sense of dependence. Responses within the survey had indicated that many organisations which received Council grants were then enabled to increase match funding from other sources.

Members agreed that the small grants application process should encourage match funding but that commissioned services needed to be able to recover the costs of the service required to be provided.

Recommendation 6 ~ Priority areas for grant funding should be:

(i) *Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector*

It was agreed that it was important to provide a support network for voluntary organisations and support to enable organisations to be business like in their approach and sustainable.

It was agreed that the principle of 'time-banking' be promoted.

(ii) Enabling people with physical mobility problems to access services in the town centre

A number of Members considered that access to services should be extended beyond the town centre and that the needs of those with disabilities other than physical mobility should be included.

The Head of Community Services advised that it was important to specify the town centre as this was the location for the delivery of many services. She added that were the service to be extended beyond the town centre considerable cost would be incurred. The Head of Community Services noted that 'Shop Mobility' currently provided this facility in the town centre where need had been demonstrated; no evidence of need had been proved in areas beyond the town centre.

Members discussed the suggestion that the wording of the priority should include the needs of those with disabilities other than physical mobility. After consideration it was agreed that the original term be retained.

(iii) Advice Services

Members agreed that this was an important priority through which social deprivation could be identified. It was agreed that commissioned services should be made accessible to all and would take account of culture and language needs, disability access and tackling debt and economic impacts

(iv) Arts and Culture

Members wished to be informed on how the Palace Theatre had benefited the community.

The Head of Community Services advised that the theatre had included a diverse range of events for the whole community and were actively engaging with different groups in the community in order to widen their audience.

Members considered that it was important to reach residents from all backgrounds and that 'outreach into the community' should be included in the Service Level Agreement.

(v) Community Centres

The mapping of council-owned community centres had identified that the centres were mainly in areas of social deprivation on large housing estates. Services and facilities to support local community needs could be based in the centres.

The Head of Community Services advised that the community centres had been asked to work with local communities to identify the needs of local residents and by providing services and other facilities to meet those needs. She explained that whilst the

Council did not run the centres, the Service Level Agreements could require the centres to act as vehicles to support individuals in their areas.

It was agreed that joint working with art and culture organisations should be included in the Service Level Agreements for community centres.

(vi) Sport

Members agreed that sporting facilities should be available for all residents and that groups who were currently non-participants should be encouraged to undertake physical activity because of the known health benefits.