

Cabinet

8th October 2012

Present: Mayor Dorothy Thornhill (Chair)
Councillor D. Scudder (Vice Chair)
Councillors Crout, Sharpe and Watkin.

Also present: Councillors Aron, Bell, Khan and Meerabux.

29 **VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK
2013 -2016**

The current three-year Voluntary and Community Sector [VCS] grant funding programme ceased on March 31st 2013. Cabinet received a report of the Head of Community Services setting out the case for a new VCS Commissioning Framework and changing to a commissioning approach as opposed to an open grant application process. It also identified the priorities for commissioning services with the limited funds available.

The Mayor opened the discussion by saying that this had been a thorough and extensive piece of work for which she commended all the officers involved. She added that, despite the fact that grant funding was not a statutory function the Council had chosen to support the voluntary sector and actually frozen the grants' budget for a number of years.

The Head of Community Services highlighted the key points of the report and set the context. She said that the strong relationship that the Council had with the voluntary sector had to be recognised and the fact that they were in the best place to deliver some services.

The proposals had been considered by a Scrutiny Task Group and its report and recommendations were attached as an appendix to the main report. A public consultation exercise had taken place and a summary of the key issues raised was also attached. The report also included the priorities being recommended for approval, details of the services to be commissioned, proposals regarding the small grants' fund and the position with regard to the use of Council owned property by VCS organisations.

The Head of Community Services drew Members' attention specifically to the officer recommendation in the report on domestic abuse commissioning and the following correction to Appendix E:

The paragraph:

"This is achieved with volunteer counsellors providing this year 2815 hours of their time which would have a value of £147245. 196 women accessed specialist legal services and volunteers provided 5,399 hours of support"

to be changed to

“This is achieved through the provision of a Domestic Abuse Specialist post with 20 years experience funded by Watford Borough Council, she co-facilitates with a part time specialist counsellor who is funded from the Women’s Centre reserves at the moment”

The Head of Community Services explained that, whilst domestic abuse was not a commissioning responsibility of the District Council, it was clear from the Equality Impact Analysis that there would be a disproportionate impact on this group. Officers were therefore recommending that funding support continued for 12 months to mitigate the impact whilst the County and the local Community Safety Partnership considered local service needs and priorities.

In response to a point made by Councillor Bell, the Head of Community Services stressed that domestic violence had not been included in the priority list but that the funding would continue for a year to allow time for other funding streams to be identified.

Councillor Bell responded that it was important to reassure women who currently accessed the Women’s Centre for support. He welcomed the fact that the Women’s Centre was expected to remain as part of the Charter Place development.

The Mayor said that the Council would do what it could to ensure that the facility remained available.

Councillor Watkin commented that the small grants fund was excellent and provided small groups with the opportunity to start new initiatives.

The Mayor advised Cabinet that she wished to look again at the small grants issue prior to budget setting as she wanted to ensure that funds were available to assist groups who were working towards sustainability. The amount could not be increased and how it was allocated needed further consideration.

Councillor Crout commented on the need for flexibility and to demonstrate that the Council would help if it was able to do so.

Councillor Meerabux asked about the position with the County and expressed concern that some vulnerable groups could be left wanting.

The Mayor responded that the whole concept of commissioning was accepted as the way forward – including by Herts County Council. The Head of Community Services endorsed this view and added that many organisations were now moving in this direction.

In response to a point made by Councillor Aron (Chair of the Voluntary & Community Sector Commissioning Framework Task Group) regarding the small grants fund, the Mayor proposed that the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Service be requested to look at the criteria for the allocation of small grants with a view to holding back some of the

funds for those groups suffering from the effects of the recession. She added that the funds could very quickly be used up if it was open to all to apply.

The Head of Community Services drew Members' attention to the suggestions for the small grants' fund as detailed in the report and advised that the allocation of the £50k fund was a matter for Cabinet.

Councillor Aron commented that she hoped that groups would also be able to access match-funding.

RESOLVED

that Cabinet:

1. agrees amendments to the draft commissioning framework [2013 - 2016] as identified in this report.
2. agrees the service commissioning priorities as identified in 3.4.of the report.
3. agrees the continuation of the Small Grants Fund
4. delegates responsibility to the Head of Community Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and the Chair of the Voluntary & Community Sector Commissioning Framework Task Group to approve the eligibility criteria for the Small Grants Fund.
5. delegates responsibility to the Head of Community Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to finalise the wording of the Commissioning Framework prior to publication
6. delegates responsibility to the Head of Community Services to implement the commissioning process for the service priorities identified in 3.8 of the report to ensure services are in place from April 1st 2013, subject to Council approval of the Budget for 2013/14.