

PART A

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Date of meeting: 17th September 2014
Report of: Commissioning Manager – Client Services – Leisure & Community
Title: Small Grants Fund – A review of the fund for the period May 2013 - March 2014

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the Small Grants Fund from May 2013 to March 2014
- 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 Corporate Strategy & Client Services

2.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

2.1 Background

The Commissioning Framework recognised the importance of maintaining a Small Grants Fund programme to allow voluntary sector organisations to apply for one-off payments to support their organisation. A key objective of the fund is to encourage small, grassroots organisations to apply for funding towards equipment and or a project/initiative to enable them to continue to thrive and meet the needs of the diverse community in Watford.

At the Cabinet meeting of 8th October 2012 it was agreed that the approval of the eligibility criteria for the Small Grants Fund would be delegated to the Head of Community Services (now Corporate and Client Services), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and the Chair of the Voluntary & Community Sector Commissioning Framework task group.

The approved criteria for the Small Grants Fund for 2013 – 2014 was:

- demonstrated need for the community initiative, project and/or item(s) of equipment; and
- demonstrable future benefit for the people of Watford

Applicants could apply for the following to a maximum bid of £2,000:

- equipment (but not sports equipment)
- funds towards a specific event/initiative/project

2.2 Summary of the Small Grants Fund from May 2013 – March 2014

Applications

There has been very good take-up of the fund with a steady stream of applications being received throughout the year.

Between May 2013 and March 2014, there were 61 applications. The table below provides a breakdown of applications.

Total applications	61
Number of successful applications	44
Number rejected	17
Number of successful applications - community initiative or project only	9 (21%)
% of successful applications - community initiative/project and equipment	12 (28%)
% of successful applications - equipment only	21 (48%)
% of successful applications (42) given partial funding	16%

Range of applications

Appendix 1 (attached) provides details of the applications that were awarded funding in 2013/14. 48% of the successful applications were for equipment. Organisation requests covered a range of diverse needs including a new disability scooter, a boiler for the kitchen of a community café and a solar powered watering system.

Of the applications requesting funding for a project/initiative, the majority were for specific events or workshops and ranged from support towards Queens Road summer market and Watford Celebration to workshops for dads and baby sessions. A number of initiatives were aimed at improving the green spaces and playground facilities in Watford including regenerating an orchard area and installing a park skate ramp.

Organisations

A key element of the Small Grants Fund has been to encourage small to medium sized organisations to apply for funding. In this context small to medium sized organisations are defined as those with minimal or no paid staff and therefore predominately operated by volunteers.

In 2013-2014, the majority of applications came from small and medium sized organisations with 67% (41) of the total applications.

Rejected applications

There were 17 rejected applications. Reasons for rejecting applications were primarily because organisations wanted funding for items outside the scope of the fund, for example for core funding, capital building works or sports equipment. A number were individual private businesses or clubs. Applicants are offered possible avenues of funding if appropriate (for example for sports related equipment), and are also referred to Watford & Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) who receive funding from the council to provide support and advice to the voluntary sector including the provision of funding advice and support.

Demonstrable benefits

The successful applicants are required to complete a monitoring form providing information on how the funding was allocated, including presenting receipts and identifying any under spend. Additionally they are required to provide evidence of the demonstrable benefit for people in Watford.

With regard to demonstrable benefits some common themes have emerged particularly from those applications who received funding towards projects/initiatives. These included increased awareness and knowledge of a particular subject matter, opportunity to try out new skills, increased confidence and reduction in social isolation. There were a number of initiatives/equipment requests targeted at engaging young people. Feedback received indicated that these initiatives enabled young people to participate in more focused activities and helped limit behaviour issues.

2.3 **Budget**

The budget for 2013-2014 was £50k with an additional £38,580 carried forward from 2012-2013 giving a total budget of £88,580.

Total awards amounted to £68,889.16.

This was the first year that the base funding (£50K) of the small grants initiatives (previously the Annual and Mayor's fund) was fully spent.

2.4 **Publicity initiatives**

There was a concentrated publicity drive to ensure that voluntary sector organisations were made aware of the fund. Officers worked with the Communications team to develop posters and leaflets to publicise the fund in the following venues and publications:

- Members Bulletin
- About Watford
- Community centres and libraries
- WBC Customer Service Centre
- Parks and open spaces
- Adventure playgrounds
- Allotment sites
- Websites including Herts County Council and W3RT
- Commissioned partners (CAB, Shopmobility, Palace Theatre, Colosseum, Leisure Centres)
- Watford Women's Centre

Additionally there was periodic marketing via Facebook and Twitter. The success of the first year of the Small Grants Fund can in part be attributed to the increased visibility of the fund.

3.0 **Changes to the fund for 2014-2015**

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services and the Portfolio Holder have agreed to keep the existing criteria for the Small Grants Fund for 2014-2015 within the budget of £50k. In the period April – July 2014, 22 applications were received. Some changes have been made to application assessments resulting in a more efficient and effective administration process.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS** **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.

Finance

The Finance Manager advises that there are no budget implications arising from the report