

Voluntary Sector Grant Funding Working Group

Date: 19th May 2016, 10am
Present: Councillors T Hayward (Chairman), D Brown and L Duffy
Officers: N McCurdy, C Stopford, D Smith and A Green (Note Taker)

Notes Of The Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 26th April 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

Discussion

The Chairman commenced the discussion by referring to the email he had circulated to Members. The key points would form the basis of the discussion and are as follows:

Ms Dungarwalla – Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)

- a) CAB has five main issues: benefit, debt, employment, consumer issues and relationships.
- b) The CAB have an increasing number of enquiries.
- c) The CAB believe that there is a need to provide the public with the tools to help themselves.
- d) Budgeting courses would be beneficial.
- e) CAB have identified that they have to be more agile and mobile.
- f) They recognise that at the moment they do not provide visits to elderly and disabled people in their own homes.
- g) The CAB recognise that they need greater use of phone and electronic communication.

Ms Farrow – Hunts Forum

- a) Ms Farrow raised the question of 'outside organisations' tendering for any large contracts.
- b) The Working Group noticed that demand was increasing.
- c) The issue of contracts versus grants was raised.
- d) Ms Farrow emphasised a need to educate not only the public but also Councils and Councillors.
- e) Umbrella approach was highlighted as more effective.
- f) It is recognised that there is a need to ensure that volunteers have the right skills and knowledge.
- g) Ms Farrow highlighted that smaller organisations have problems demonstrating the impact that they have.

The Chairman highlighted that both experts had emphasised the need for education in the broadest sense. Members were advised that they would have to consider the number of contracts that the Council should award to the voluntary sector.

Mr Stopford continued the introduction by summarising the work of the Working Group. He informed Members that the purpose of the Working Group is to review the voluntary sector arrangements. During the course of the review Members have received evidence including from the County Council and Kettering Borough Council. The County Council evidence outlines the detail of their voluntary sector arrangement and the Kettering Borough Council evidence focuses on the outcomes. Members were reminded that Kettering Borough Council have not adopted the umbrella approach.

In summarising the findings of the Working Group, Members stated that they found all three meetings useful and that they have learnt a lot through the review process. All Members highlighted that education and information is important however they recognised that there is would be a cost implication to it. The point was raised that education has to be the type that is overt and reaches people in their own homes as it needs to reach those people who require help but may not be able to help themselves.

The Working Group noted that the Hunts Forum have submitted to the Council a document which contains a whole section on education. In addition education for Members was highlighted as key, regret was expressed that Members have not been known to attend training or educational seminars in high numbers.

The Chairman ~~raised~~ highlighted the section within the Council's Corporate Plan 2016-18 regarding the voluntary sector. The aims as stated within the Corporate Plan are aims the Working Group are in agreement with however there is concern regarding the reference to the reduction of people accessing Citizen's Advice Bureau. Members were advised that what is meant by the aim was a reduction of repeat customers.

Members noted that the approach the Council has in regards to handling customers is old fashioned and costly. It was highlighted that the customers arrived at the front desk and in most cases the Council ends up signposting the customer to other services.

Number of Contracts

Following a discussion on the number of contracts the Council should offer, the Working Group agreed to adopt a two contract approach with education as an important component of both contracts. It was highlighted that one umbrella contract would improve efficiency and reduce administration costs for the voluntary sector however Members thought that two contracts would be more appropriate. The reasoning for this was ~~because~~ that there are two separate jobs to do and if the Council went down the one contract approach there would be concern that the end product might be diluted.

The Working Group were reminded that any decision to award contracts must be based on the organisation's capacity to manage and fulfil the requirements of the contract and not personalities.

Members noted that future funding could be awarded within the perimeter of one contract however moving from six contracts to two contracts is a significant step. The Working Group agreed that the Council would require regular feedback on the contracts.

Length of Contracts

Members were informed that historically the Council had awarded a five year contract as this linked in with the medium term financial strategy however the Council moved towards three year contracts as to allow Members to scrutinise the contract more often. The Working Group accepted the fact that it is common practice to award three year contracts. Members agreed that the contracts should be three years in length.

Split of Funding

The Working Group were informed that the current split is 61% to 39% in favour of advice with £115k awarded to Rural Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau and a combined £85k awarded to Hunts Forum, Huntingdon Volunteer Centre and the Care Network.

A discussion ensued regarding the viability of the split and whether the split should be advertised. Members agreed that the split should be advertised but that organisations should submit a budget plan. No decision was made as what the split should be and it was ~~The~~

~~Working Group~~ agreed to discuss the split further at the next meeting once the scope had been fleshed out.

Funding

The question was asked that as more people have come through the door looking for advice does the Working Group recommend that Cabinet allocate more funding to the voluntary sector. However as the process will be streamlined from six contracts to two Members thought that efficiency savings would be expected. In addition the voluntary sector has been protected from funding reductions for the last eight years.

It was agreed that Option Three of reducing the budget in year one but then providing an equal annual payment equivalent to the same total amount of spend as option two (which involves a steady decline) should be adopted. This would mean that the voluntary sector would be awarded £190k per annum and it was thought that the voluntary sector organisations would prefer to have certainty in the amount of funding they would receive during the contract period.

It was suggested that if a voluntary sector organisation delivered a service better than the Council this would mean the Council won't need to carry out the service and there is would be a saving to be made. It is then up to the Council to decide on how to realise the saving as it could be an efficiency saving or a financial saving.

Working Group Activity

Members were advised that the Working Group report would be submitted to Cabinet in July. After that Cabinet meeting there would be a need to be in a position to enter into the procurement process. The Chairman stated that he thought that the Working Group has worked very well and that he would like the Working Group to continue the work into procurement process. The Chairman believes most strongly that Members should be involved in the procurement process.

Members agreed that the Working Group should recommend to Cabinet to keep the Working Group established in order to work alongside the Executive Councillor for Community Resilience and the Executive Councillor for Strategic Partnership and Shared Services during the procurement process.

Next Meeting

Members were advised that they need to consider what should be involved in both advice and voluntary sector infrastructure. In addition it was thought that Kettering Borough Council had presented what they would like very well however Members noted that the Council did not need to follow Kettering Borough Council entirely as there are different arrangements within Huntingdonshire for Business Support and duplication of work should be avoided.

Mr Stopford will draft a report for Cabinet which would be circulated at the next meeting. Members were ~~advised to submit ideas before the meeting~~ asked to submit their views to him as soon as possible so that he can include them in his draft.

The Working Group expected that as part of the reporting process the Council should expect the voluntary sector organisations to be agile.

Any Other Business

The next meeting of the Working Group will take place on 14th June 2016, 2pm at Pathfinder House.