



A Place for Everyone Hackney Voluntary and Community Sector Grants - implementing the new programme in 2022.

Key Decision No - CE S007

**CABINET MEETING DATE
(2021/22)**

24 January 2022

CLASSIFICATION:

Open

If exempt, the reason will be listed in the main body of this report.

WARD(S) AFFECTED

All wards

CABINET MEMBER

Councillor Chris Kennedy - Cabinet Member for Health, adult social care, voluntary sector and leisure

KEY DECISION

Yes

REASON

Affects two or more wards

GROUP DIRECTOR

Mark Carroll - Chief Executive

1. CABINET MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. I am very pleased to be introducing this report that sets out how we intend to invest in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in 2022/23 and our plans to continue to reflect and learn from the last two years.
- 1.2. A review of the grants programme was planned for 2020 following approval of the VCS Strategy by Cabinet in 2019. This plan was overtaken by the need to prioritise a response to the pandemic. However our work during the crisis has accelerated the learning and direction of travel that had already been articulated in the VCS Strategy. The crisis unmasked a level of vulnerability in communities that could not be met by the statutory sector working in isolation. We therefore began to work in new ways with communities and organisations that have the best reach and expertise, and by adopting new ways of working we were able to respond effectively in an environment where much was unpredictable and needs were changing quickly.
- 1.3. Significantly our officers learnt about the importance of trust and how to fully collaborate with VCS partners. Working relationally led to increased levels of good will, and reciprocal trust enabling better outcomes for residents. The reach and expertise within organisations that work with residents that are furthest from our services was very apparent, as was their ability to 'scaffold' a resident's relationships with Council services. The Council was also able to really take an enabler role, making use of assets and resources beyond our investment through grants. This included providing access to our Community Halls when they were closed for general use, using logistical expertise and skills of staff to help the sector improve the storage and distribution of food, and facilitating ongoing communication and collaboration by hosting meetings between organisations and different departments of the Council.
- 1.4. This experience and what we know about how we need to shape public services going forward has informed our approach to this review of the grants programme. As a Council we need to continue and extend the collaboration we have undertaken with the sector during the pandemic and ensure that we continue to learn and adapt with them to meet the needs of residents. We need to develop new approaches and ways of working together as a system that transforms the experience of support for people living in poverty and/ or with complex needs.
- 1.5. Although we have protected the grants programme from any reductions throughout the last ten years of austerity we know that the local VCS has experienced greater competition for resources available from other funders. As a Council we are having to find savings of **£35m** over the next two years despite having made £140m over the last 10 years. However we are committed to working across the system to identify how we can work together to deliver poverty interventions and preventative work that builds our communities and protects residents, and the review is helping us to identify

the role of the grants programme within the wider reprioritisation of investment that is needed.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This Council has a strong financial track record but 11 years of Government cuts and the cost of keeping people safe during the pandemic much of which has fallen to the Council, has taken their toll on public services. More and more people are turning to councils for support, with less and less money available to help them. In Hackney, our Government grant has shrunk from £310m in 2010 to £170m - a cut of 45%. Per head of population we have seen the biggest funding cut of any London borough at £529.
- 2.2 Despite this the Council has again protected the budget for the Voluntary and Community Sector grants programme. However our Council grants are only one of the ways in which the Council continues to provide financial support. The annual subsidy to voluntary sector organisations occupying Council buildings is estimated to be £400,000 based on the difference between market rent and rent payable. This does not include some buildings where long term plans are being established, playgrounds and several short term VCS lettings. A total of £566,271 discretionary rate relief was awarded in 2019/20 with the Council contributing 48% of the rate relief under the rules of the London Business Rates pool. This is in addition to significant levels of commissioning of the VCS to deliver services all of which add up to approximately £20m of investment.
- 2.3 The sector is itself currently operating in a highly constrained financial environment which is likely to become more difficult. However in light of the financial challenges outlined all areas of the Council's budgets remain under review. The grants programme continues to enable activities and services defined and designed by the VCS, in line with borough priorities and which complement our own statutory service delivery.
- 2.4 This report includes proposals to test a new approach to the Council's grant programme responding to what we have learnt over the last 18 months and what our partners have told us. We are intending to introduce a funding stream for organisations that are part of that local community infrastructure to apply for core funding. It will enable organisations to continue to develop community support and social networks but also contribute to the development of 'healthy systems' which is seen as increasingly important to the transformation of public services.
- 2.5 We intend to continue funding project based activity recognising the value that these grants add, often reaching communities furthest from our services and complementing Council and commissioned activity. The VCS strategy identifies the importance of some of our smaller and grassroots organisations but also their vulnerability and the need to protect and grow them and our

experience of funding during Covid and the feedback we have received from VCS partners has reinforced this.

- 2.6 The grant review is helping us to consider how we should invest in the sector in the future to support the transformation of public services so that as a system of support we are able to continue to meet demand for services, despite the budget pressures we face. We have and will continue to identify opportunities for us to change the way we use resources to support the strategy and a stronger sector in the future.
- 2.7 Changes in the way that we work with and fund Advice Services were developed over three years and new grants were allocated in 2019 following an open process. An interim review has been undertaken and no changes to the organisations currently funded are proposed at this stage, as these could negatively impact organisations that have been stretched by the impact of the pandemic and the rising demands on their services. The partnership amongst advice services is also still in development as are the relationships with Council Officers and the wider Community Partnership Network. We are therefore intending to extend the grants for a further year before revisiting the allocation of funding.
- 2.8 We will be increasing the proportion of funding for advice services from the grants budget. Prior to the pandemic, our analysis and comparison with similar boroughs highlighted that funding for advice services should be increased given the levels of need in Hackney. The impact of the pandemic on residents has stretched their resources even further and as a critical service for preventing demand on statutory services we need to ensure that they can provide timely interventions and advice.
- 2.9 The last review of the Specialist Grants was concluded in the autumn 2017. There are no plans to change the Specialist grant organisations next year. As with our advice partners we need to provide a period of stability following the pandemic. However, we intend to change the way we monitor and measure in line with our new approach and will undertake a review of this funding later in the year, and we would expect there to be some changes to reflect what we now understand about the contributions needed .

Project based grants (including Community Chest)	£350,000
Advice Services	£1,000,326
Community anchors and infrastructure	£400,000
Specialist	£747,333

Total	£2,497,659
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3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Cabinet is recommended to :-

- 3.1 Agree the timetable for the Hackney Voluntary and Community Sector Open Grants Programme for 2022/23.**
- 3.2 Agree that the following funding streams can be launched through the programme:**
 - **Community infrastructure core grants of up to £45,000 for one year with allocation of these grants subject to Cabinet approval in June 2022**
 - **Project based grants for up to £20,000 for one year from May 2022**
 - **Community Chest grants for up to £1,000 for one year for short term projects or one-off activities from May 2022**
 - **Children and Young people activity based grants of up to £10,000 over one year totalling £200,000**
- 3.3 Agree the continued funding of advice services in the borough for one year and an increase in awards for organisations as set out in [appendix one](#) from April 2022, totalling £1,000,326.**
- 3.4 Agree one year funding for Specialist grants totalling £747,333 as set out in [appendix one](#)**
- 3.5 To contribute to the London borough's grant scheme administered by London Councils 2022/23 and note that the contribution will be in the region of £208,093.**
- 3.6 To note that proposals for the future grant programme from 2023/24 onwards will be presented to Cabinet in June 2022**
- 3.7 To delegate authority to approve the interim project based grants 2022/ 23 including community chest and children and young people's grants to the Director of Inclusive Economy, Policy and New Homes in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health, adult social care, voluntary sector and leisure, and the Portfolio Holder for education, young people and children's social care**
- 3.8 To note that there will be an exploration of grant governance as part of an upcoming internal audit of the Council's grant programme and that recommendations arising from this may be brought back to Cabinet in June 2022**

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

4.1. Cabinet is asked to agree the funding criteria, timetable and details of the Hackney Voluntary and Community Sector Grants programme for 2022/3 as a key decision of the Council as it affects two or more wards and is related to Council spend. The timetable is set out below:

	Project grants	Community Infrastructure grants
Applications open	7 February 2022	7 February 2022
Applications close	25 April 2022	25 April 2022
Delegated authority decisions	16 May 2022	
Recommendations to Cabinet		20 June 2022

4.1.2 A grants review was planned for 2020, and the intention was to build on continuous learning about best ways to make grant investments in a complex environment, learning in particular from the work with advice providers. The direction of travel for this grants review had already been summarised in the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2019. So whilst the formal review was delayed following the onset of the pandemic because of the need to focus on grant making that responded to the immediate crisis, the Council was able to put the learning into practice in the way we funded organisations during this period, when we had to accelerate plans to change the way we understood grant funding.

4.1.3 The crisis unmasked a level of vulnerability in communities that could not be met by the statutory sector working in isolation. We had to ensure we were working with communities and organisations that had the best reach, seeing them as assets in a more integrated, collaborative, cross sector partnership. By moving away from funding from a single service perspective or a command and control style of agreement, we were able to respond effectively in an environment where much was unpredictable and needs were changing quickly. Some of our key learning includes;

- Trust - officers had permission to fully collaborate with VCS partners and work relationally leading to increased levels of good will, reciprocal trust, and more collaboration and sharing of resources between VCS organisations
- We need to place greater value on reach and expertise within organisations that are working with residents that are furthest from our

services and are able to 'scaffold' a resident's relationships with public services

- Traditional power relationships were challenged enabling partners to take leadership roles and reducing expectations on the Council
- The Council was able to really take an enabler role, making use of assets and resources beyond grants. This included providing access to our Community Halls when they were closed for general use, using logistical expertise and skills of staff to help the sector improve the storage and distribution of food, and facilitating ongoing communication and collaboration by hosting meetings.

4.1.4 From this learning we know that there are much more effective and impactful ways to invest in the voluntary and community sector than the traditional approaches to grant making and to commissioning. This traditional approach is transactional and arms length and assumes complex challenges can be addressed through simple projects and measurable outputs.

4.1.5 We have started to position our grant investment to: -

- **encourage sustainability and adaptability of the VCS**, rather than making organisations chase time limited funding when many local, community based organisations are already struggling
- **collaborate with other VCS organisations and across sectors** to meet residents' needs, rather than compete with each other for limited resource
- **focus on their impact** and any difficulties in making an impact, rather than just giving us what they think we want and what is easier to measure
- **promote openness and transparency**- about their whole funding picture
- **contribute to building stronger communities**, rather than delivering one off projects, recognising that communities that are more connected and resilient draw on public services less.

4.1.6 We now need to invest in recovery in a way that is:

- Helping and allowing the VCS to adapt through developing and enhancing their service offers, encouraging and building on what worked well in responding to the crisis so that more people are supported in the future.
- Empowering ethnically diverse groups led VCS organisations/groups as a key way that we can address structural racism; addressing imbalances of power and prioritisation.
- Responding to the increasing need for capacity building, particularly nurturing leadership to help guide the transition to survive post-pandemic.
- Supporting, developing and sustaining community action at a local level so that it can best meet needs and strengthen local relationships.
- Prioritising interventions that help residents and communities to navigate the changes caused by the pandemic and importantly prevent difficulties escalating and enable emergence out of the crisis.

- Maintaining levels of collaboration and trust developed within the sector and with public agencies

4.1.7 The future of the grants programme is being shaped by the Council's experience of working with the sector during the pandemic, the knowledge we have gained from working with Advice providers, and the change and transformation we are trying to achieve as a Council. We do not intend to change the objectives of the grant programme and the two main aims are still relevant, if not more so given the refresh of the Council's Corporate Plan.

- To promote social inclusion, encourage independence and develop personal resilience
- To build positive relations between different groups and communities that will maintain the high levels of community cohesion in Hackney

4.1.8 The review of the grants programme will be progressed over the next six months. This will include exploring further opportunities to build in equality focussed and anti-racist approaches to the delivery of the investment e.g. the application process. A report to Cabinet the summer of 2022 will outline these proposals and ask permission to launch the new grants programme. Permission is being sought in this report for decisions on project based grant recommendations made in May 2022, to be delegated to the Director of Inclusive Economy, Policy and New Homes whilst decisions in regards to community infrastructure and local anchor organisations will be taken to Cabinet next summer. Although grants are non-recurring and organisations should not rely on funding, an analysis has been undertaken with existing grantees to ensure that the gap in grant funding availability between April and June 2022, will not adversely affect their continued operation.

4.1.9 In January 2022 an internal audit of the Council's grant programme is being undertaken as part of the 2021/22 Internal Audit Annual Plan, as approved by the Audit Sub-Committee on 21 April 2021. The Plan was developed following an assessment of the key risks facing the Council. The audit may result in recommendations that will need to be brought to Cabinet later this year for consideration.

4.2 Community infrastructure and local anchor organisations

4.2.1 Place-based or locality-based working can be a key way to build preventative ways of working, working with communities at grassroots level to co-design services, build local systems of support and improve reach. Pre-pandemic, we knew that we needed to be more explicit across the system about the role of local community anchor organisations within this way of working, and of the potential investment needed. The VCS Strategy describes how place-based approaches focus on areas where there is greater need, but take an asset-based approach building on the strengths and aspirations within the area, serving as a focus point for residents and community organisations in a

local area and enabling informal and formal groups to deliver positive activities within their communities.

- 4.2.2 During the pandemic we were able to witness the expertise and reach that these organisations have in their communities along with the person-centred ways of working they adopt to meet the presenting need and work with complexity. This was seen in place-based organisations but also those working with particular communities e.g. black led organisations. This range of community infrastructure utilised its strengths and assets, flexing and adapting to the needs of individuals and communities. At the same time they were promoting social inclusion, building relationships with people and creating new connections. Community infrastructure proved to be a crucial resource during the pandemic and yet for many years there has been little or no direct investment in this.
- 4.2.3 This activity is key to a preventative agenda that seeks to build upon the assets within communities, as well as responding to a crisis. The importance of this is demonstrated in the Kings Fund 'Four pillars for Health and Wellbeing'. Whilst statutory services are more able to influence the wider determinants of health and wellbeing e.g. employment, housing, education, transport etc. and work towards an integrated health and care system we have much less ability to influence behaviours and lifestyles and the communities our residents live in. The VCS and particularly community infrastructure organisations are unique in their ability to directly influence these by developing and supporting community networks and social connections enabling them to share public health information and giving them influence over behaviours and lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol, diet, exercise, as well as mitigate against the impacts of racism.
- 4.2.4 Another benefit of strong community infrastructure is its potential to contribute to the development of 'healthy systems' which is seen as increasingly important to the transformation of public services and working with complexity. The outcomes that we are seeking are not produced by individuals, organisations or programmes and the VCS needs to be enabled to be part of the system's leadership. However they need the capacity to be active within systems and support to develop and nurture the leadership that is needed.
- 4.2.5 It is intended that £400,000 of the grants budget is now invested to support both geographical, place-based activity as well as community focused e.g. black-led community infrastructure. This will ensure that the Council can protect a group of organisations that can be able players in the system and can help us meet our priorities for Hackney.
- 4.2.6 The assessment process will focus on key qualities and characteristics of organisations such as reach and expertise working with marginalised communities, as well as a track record of collaboration and partnership, reflecting what is needed to be a participant in a healthy system. The investment will be used to fund organisational purpose, to stabilise and give

capacity to organisations to work relationally with other parts of VCS and statutory providers. Reviewing the way that grants are allocated will also ensure that our processes are not disadvantaged certain groups and that we are identifying the value that organisations bring to the system. Although the ecosystem of VCS support will not be fully protected by this investment it will help to provide a range of organisations that can work with and protect some of our most vulnerable residents.

4.3 Project based grants

4.3.1 As already set out we intend to continue with our existing programme objectives and equality aims, which guide applicants on the outcomes we are seeking to achieve from the grants programme. Whilst we are reprioritising our investment to protect and develop community infrastructure we will continue to invest part of the programme in short-term project based activity.

4.3.2 Although this is an interim year we have undertaken some analysis of data and feedback from the VCS over the past year to inform our proposals. Our analysis has identified that the majority of grants from external funders are awarded to organisations with an annual turnover above £1m. In line with the priorities of the VCS strategy we want to ensure that we continue to protect smaller, grassroots organisations and those with less income are able to continue to access resources. We are therefore limiting applications to those organisations with turnovers below this threshold.

4.3.3 This year we will also be combining Main and Small grants. This will make the process simpler for applicants. Although in previous years we have committed two years worth of the budget for some Main grants, as this is an interim year only one year grants will be available totalling £350,000. Community Chest will continue to be a standalone programme, however income thresholds for organisations will be reduced enabling more targeted support to smaller grassroots organisations as was originally intended for this funding stream.

4.4 Grant funding childrens and young people's activity

4.4.1 The grants scheme specifically for children and young people will use a budget that in previous years has been deployed for one-off commissioning of youth activity by the Children and Families Service. The funding will be prioritised for the identified health and wellbeing needs of young people within the eight Primary Care Networks of the Integrated Care Partnership. However as with all grants in the programme the ability to ensure geographical spread across the borough will be dependent upon the spread of applications received.

4.4.2 The grants will be for one year youth work projects. Applicants will be asked to focus on youth work methodology and may include specialist providers for a variety of activities including sport, drama and film. As with the wider grants programme the activities for children and young people should speak to anti racist and anti oppressive practises so that provision is inclusive and seeks to

promote equality. Grant funding rather than commissioning should enable more collaborative working both with the Council and between VCS organisations that are funded. This in turn should ensure additionality from the resources being used.

4.5 Advice grants

4.5.1 Changes in the way that we work with and fund Advice Services were developed over three years and new grants were allocated in 2019 following an open process. An interim evaluation has been undertaken and no changes to the organisations currently funded are proposed at this stage, as these could negatively impact organisations that have been stretched by the impact of the pandemic and the rising demands on their services. The partnership amongst advice services is also still in development as is their role within the work we are undertaking across the system to identify how we can work together to deliver poverty interventions and preventative work. Rather than potentially dismantling this at a critical time we are intending to extend the existing grants for a further year before revisiting the allocation of funding.

4.5.2 Prior to the pandemic Council officers and colleagues from HCVS had been working closely with advice partners to support an ongoing learning approach where measures are used to understand what is or isn't working and then adapting to respond. The purpose of the interim evaluation undertaken with advice services Council the purpose aimed to;

- establish data set against original framework for comparison
- explore current understanding of the systems approach in the advice network
- explore whether current measurements tell us what we need to know
- capture learning so far and to understand "distance travelled"
- inform next steps towards building wider systemic relationships

The evaluation was set out over several months to allow advice partners sufficient time to undertake a whole-organisation approach to reflect and look at their various systems, procedures and measurements to track progress.

4.5.3 Whilst most advice partners had struggled with the changes in approach to measuring and capturing data that helped them to learn, due to the pandemic it was no longer possible for the Council to sustain the more practical support for partners to learn and adapt. Grant monitoring over the period of the coronavirus restrictions had been shifted to a more relational and supportive approach whilst continuing to look at adaptations of delivery and creative solutions to advice provision. The evaluation has provided an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved so far and understand the next steps for the partnership.

4.5.4 We will be increasing the proportion of funding for advice services from the grants budget from £780,328 to £1,000,326. Our analysis and comparison with similar boroughs such as Islington (approximately £1.5m) and Camden (approximately £1m) has highlighted that funding for advice services should be increased given the levels of need in Hackney. The impact of the pandemic

on residents has stretched their resources even further and as a critical service for preventing demand on statutory services we need to ensure that they can provide timely interventions and advice, and deliver the changes in approach to their services.

4.6 Specialist Grants

4.6.1 A full review of Specialist Grants was completed in 2017 which identified where investment should be focused in the future. Consideration was given to the impact of these grants through a set of high level questions and assessment against the Community Strategy and the emerging Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy. It is intended to continue with current funding arrangements totalling £747,333 for the Specialist Grant organisations in 2022/23 as set out in Appendix One but to begin an evaluation of the grants during the year.

4.6.2 Following approval by Cabinet the four adventure playgrounds including the associated infrastructure support services have been funded via commissioning since October 2016 and managed by Young Hackney, although it is still considered part of the grants programme. There are other adventure playgrounds not funded through the grants programme and this approach enables Young Hackney to take a consistent approach to all adventure playgrounds.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

5.1 Given the budgetary pressures facing the Council the future of the VCS Grants Programme is regularly reviewed. However consideration has been given to the reductions in public spending through welfare cuts and reduced grants to local government which can lead to increased demands upon the VCS. The unique position of the VCS to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents as well as its ability to deliver added value e.g. through inward investment and volunteering necessitates a grant programme that ensures that the sector can continue to thrive and build resilience to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and in the face of further budget reductions.

5.2 Whilst commissioning helps to support the VCS, the investment through the Council's grants programme helps to maintain a thriving third sector and a wide range of suppliers. Funding the sector through grants ensures that it can identify new needs and new ideas and innovate and test new solutions. It enables added value activity that complements direct or procured service delivery and can fund open universal activity. The sector is also able to use grant funding to respond to specific challenges in regards to community cohesion by providing grassroots community based activity that builds cohesion and community action and the support that is needed by our most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents.

BACKGROUND

6.1 Policy Context

6.1.1 The VCS is well placed in its ability to reach and work with some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents of the borough and is therefore often best placed to provide a service or to ensure that other services are accessed. Funding for the sector is best deployed to fully realise the sector's potential and play to these strengths. The priorities of the grants programme supports the wider agenda of the Council and our partners with a focus upon intervention and prevention and building resilience within communities.

6.2 Equality Impact Assessment

6.2.1 The Council's support for the VCS is a major expression of Hackney's commitment to making social inclusion and community cohesion a reality. This is demonstrated by the wide diversity of organisations recommended for funding and the requirement for each application to demonstrate its contribution to meeting at least one of the grant priorities and equality aims.

6.2.2 In recognition of the potential barriers facing applicants a number of interventions are put in place to ensure that the grant investment is planned and delivered to positively benefit as wide a range of equality groups as possible and to mitigate negative impacts. The programme is advertised widely across the VCS in Hackney using the VCS networks, Hackney Today, the Council's website and social media. Workshops and one to one surgeries on the applications process are also run by Hackney CVS. Officers from the Policy Team attend workshops to share information about where to find published evidence and advice about collecting additional evidence locally.

6.2.3 The increase in funding for advice services will have a positive impact on residents who are financially disadvantaged and experiencing poverty which is often the result of inequalities such as structural racism. However the overall envelope of the grants programme will remain the same which will see a reduction in the open elements of the grants programme.

6.2.4 The proposed local community anchor and infrastructure organisation grants will also benefit residents experiencing multiple disadvantage as the funding aims to ensure that local community organisations are more responsive to their needs. In particular the new grants aim to recognise the role of black-led organisations and those with particular expertise and cultural competency and which have reach within communities that are furthest from statutory services.

6.2.5 The increase in funding for advice services and the allocation of budget for community infrastructure means that less funding will be directed to the project based grants. This could potentially impact upon those equality groups that benefit from initiatives and projects which have been identified as needed

by the sector. These often reach communities furthest from our services or below access thresholds and complement Council and commissioned activity.

6.2.6 Across the Main and Small Grants since 2016 (excluding crisis funding during the pandemic) the main beneficiaries have been young people under 25 as both recipients of services and as volunteers. Some mitigation for this is presented through the proposal to grant fund organisations using Young Hackney's Lot 2 budget. The Orthodox Jewish Community submits a significant proportion of applications for project based grants the majority of which are for children and young people. The Lot 2 funding that will be used to allocate grants of up to £10,000 will help to ensure that this part of the community continues to benefit from support through the grants programme.

6.2.7 As this in an interim year the equalities impact assessment will be updated as the review of grants is progressed. This will be presented to Cabinet along with proposals for the future of the grants programme in the summer 2022.

6.3 Sustainability

6.3.1 The Council will continue to administer the programme electronically through the use of the GIFTS grant software, which eliminates the need for paper applications, thus contributing to the Council's commitment to reducing carbon.

6.3.2 The VCS in Hackney plays an important role in the local economy, supporting both individuals and groups and makes a significant contribution to the community and civil life. Continuing to nurture and support the sector is fundamental to achieving sustainable communities in the borough

6.4 Consultations

6.4.1 Extensive engagement was undertaken to inform the VCS Strategy 2019 including a day-long workshop attended by a range of local VCS organisations followed by four open invites focus groups. A series of discussion papers were then developed based on the findings and a series of five further workshops including one focussed upon Council investment in the sector were used to test and develop the papers. The findings were then used to develop the discussion papers into key themes within the strategy.

6.4.2 The strategy sets out the shift needed in the way that we invest in the sector that encourages more collaboration, shared learning and enables the sector to be more person centred and responsive to residents. It recognises that the current way that the grant programme funds organisations pushes them into narrower more transactional relationships, creates siloed working and is not funding an approach that fully enables a more preventative approach within communities.

- 6.4.3 The changes that have been proposed by introducing community infrastructure grants also acknowledge the unique ways in which the sector works which was a key message in the consultation and has continued to be a central theme in feedback from the sector. The new funding stream will support organisations whose role extends beyond the service that they deliver and reflect the strategy's focus upon a different approach to investing that funds purpose and longer term outcomes.
- 6.4.4 Whilst all of the above was set out in the VCS Strategy the feedback from VCS organisations on their experience of Covid and working with the Council suggests that the way that they were funded enabled them to be more effective. By changing the relationships and the ways in which we managed and monitored grants, organisations felt empowered to use their expertise and reach within their communities along with the person-centred ways of working that they could adapt to meet the presenting needs of residents.
- 6.4.5 The interim year will provide the space needed to undertake further engagement with the sector and reflect on delivery over the past two years. A communications and engagement plan has been developed by the grants team to better understand the experience of applicants and to ensure that the proposals taken to Cabinet in June 2022 are based on a thorough understanding of the most effective ways of investing in grants.

7. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 7.1 This report seeks approval of the Voluntary Sector Grants Programme and timetable. In summary the programme recommended for approval is as follows:

Main Programme	
Project based grants (including Community Chest)	£350,000
Advice Services	£1,000,326
Community anchors and infrastructure	£400,000
Specialist	£747,333
	£2,497,659
Children and Young people activity based grants	£200,000
Total Grants Programme	£2,697,659

- 7.2 The report also recommends approval of the contribution to the London borough's grant estimated at £208,093.
- 7.3 There is a budget available to fund the recommendations arising from this report. Whilst the Council's Budget for 2022/23 has not yet been approved there are no proposals within the Budget report to make savings from the budget that supports the Voluntary Sector Grants Programme. However, it should be noted that due to the impact of Covid-19 and the cyberattack, and the outlook for the local finance settlements going forward, the Council will need to make further savings from 2023/24 onwards which may impact the budgets supporting this programme.

8. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & GOVERNANCE SERVICES

- 8.1 The recommendations in this Report concern the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Programme. Agreeing the award of grant aid from the voluntary sector grants programme is reserved to the Mayor and Cabinet under the Mayor's Scheme of Delegation (January 2017) so the awards in this Report will need to be approved by Cabinet.
- 8.2 The award of a grant is a discretionary function. The grant programmes in this Report are for Open Grants, Specialist Grants and Advice Grants.
- 8.3 Paragraph 2.2 i) of the Cabinet Procedure Rules states that "if the Elected Mayor delegates functions to the Cabinet, unless they direct otherwise, then the Cabinet may delegate further toan officer.....". Therefore, subject to the approval of Cabinet, the Director of Inclusive Economy, Policy and New Homes is permitted to award the Grants in this Report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Recommended Grants

BACKGROUND PAPERS

In accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) England Regulations 2012 publication of Background Papers used in the preparation of reports is required

None

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