

CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

MEETING , 27TH MARCH ,2007

Present – Councillors Morris (Chairman),Adia (Vice-Chairman) ,Darvesh ,Hayes ,Hussain ,Rock (as deputy for Councillor Mrs Ronson) ,Rushton and Mrs Thomas (as deputy for Councillor Sherrington)

Augmented by Councillors Ibrahim and Mrs Fairclough .

Also in attendance

Mr . S Harriss	-	Chief Executive
Ms . C James	-	Head of Strategic Projects
Ms . K Warriner	-	Principal Policy Officer
Mr . A Jennings	-	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors P. Brierley , Mrs Ronson and Sherrington .

Councillor Morris In the Chair

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Policy Development Group held on 7th February ,2007 were submitted and signed as a correct record .

16. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR REVIEW

The Chief Executive submitted a report that outlined options regarding the Council's Voluntary Sector Grants programme as part of a wider review of support to the Voluntary and Community sector in Bolton .

The review was being undertaken within both a policy and financial context in terms of the focus by Government on the relationship between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, in particular through the Treasury's Third Sector Review and proposals laid out in the recently published Strong and Prosperous Communities – Local Government White Paper, and as part of the Council's wider policy and financial context.

The report explained that there were three distinct elements to the review ;

- Wider role of the voluntary and community sector –the sector in Bolton was stable and strong but needed to develop locally to

respond to the changing national agenda in particular regarding public service delivery. Two facilitated sessions had been held, one for the public sector and one for the voluntary sector to explore this future role with a combined event being undertaken to bring together a shared vision for this new role.

- Examine financial support to the voluntary and community sector across Council departments – this was a complex piece of work that would encompass all areas of support including grants and commissioned services. Further information would be submitted to the PDG.
- Consideration of grant programmes including the Council's own Voluntary Sector Grants programme .

The Voluntary Sector Grants programme had been in existence for many years with voluntary, community and non profit-making organisations being able to apply for assistance towards projects that benefited the people of Bolton. There were two levels of grant aid available:

- Main grants of up to £2,500
- Small grants of up to £500 – the majority of which were awarded via the nine Area Forums towards small, locally-based projects. Small grants had been awarded since the start of Area Working and an amount of £30,000 had been allocated over the past few years from the Voluntary Sector Grants pot to the Area Forums for this purpose based on an amount of £1,500 per ward. Some money was also available to support Borough wide schemes at up to £500 per award.

In addition to the Voluntary Sector Grants programme, the Council had one-year Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with ten revenue funded organisations that reflected the service provided by each organisation and the funding (approximately £621,000 for 2007/2008) granted by the Council.

Following an increase in the number of groups requesting the maximum grant of £5,000 the Voluntary Sector Grants programme had been over-subscribed in recent years. Consequently ,amendments had been made to the scheme in 2006 including a reduction in the maximum amount that could be awarded to £2,500 .

The report highlighted a number of key issues as part of the evaluation of the current position including ;

- Area forums – a large number of groups had been supported via the grants awarded by forums allowing members to support local groups in their areas and the area support officers undertook some elements of administration of the Voluntary Sector Grants Programme;
- Reduction of funds available – members noted that the administration costs of the scheme were now disproportionate to the monies available through the programme ;
- Additional Grant Programme from other sources ;
- Bolton Community and Voluntary Service – the service offered advice and assistance and operated a number of grant schemes for other organisations .

In light of the issues highlighted above the report set out a number of options for consideration ; viz

		Pros	Cons
	1. Voluntary Sector Grants remained the same for 2007/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Council contributing to grant-making for small voluntary and community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Costs of administering the scheme versus the limited awards made – limited value for money; ▪ Range of alternative grants now available to groups.
	2. Remove Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme altogether	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Saving for Council in terms of scheme itself, staff costs and Principal Officer time (free to concentrate on strategic issues for example the revenue funded organisations with which the Council had an SLA with) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loss of opportunity to influence grant making locally ▪ Loss of £50,000 grants to the voluntary and community sector in Bolton

	<p>3. Discontinue Voluntary Sector Grants but continue with the Area Forum grants element – potential to raise allocation from £30,000 to £40,000 and provision for activity that covered one or more Area Forum or was Borough wide</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More local area based community activity ▪ Potential to increase allocation to Area Forums ▪ Build on successful area forum scheme ▪ More Member involvement in grant decisions ▪ Option to ‘invest to save’ in sustainable grant making for the local voluntary and community sector in 2007/08 (Big Bolton Fund* to be managed and administered by Bolton CVS) ▪ Good balance between local / Boroughwide grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential loss of borough wide grants – but provision could be made for activity that covered one or more Area Forum area ▪ Reduction of grants programme, and loss of larger grant availability
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Members were informed that the Big Bolton Fund was being developed by Bolton CVS to support sustainable grant making for the voluntary and community sector. The Big Bolton Fund would be based on a number of sources including payroll giving, private and company donations, legacies and fundraising events and an endowment, the interest of which would provide grant aid to voluntary and community groups in Bolton.

The report concluded by requesting members to consider the current arrangements and look at the above options to streamline the Council’s grant aid programme with a focus on more locally based grants and increased scope for Members to make local decisions. Consideration also needed to be given for the Council to make a one off investment into the Big Bolton Fund that would realise a more sustainable future for local grant making.

Members felt that the best option was to continue with the provision of grants via the Area Forums and to give the Forums discretion to provide larger grants than the current level . It was considered that better coordination between forums was required ,particularly with respect to applications that covered more than one forum area and that suitable criteria and decision making procedures needed to be developed which provided flexibility to allow such applications to be judged on their merits.

The issue of closer monitoring was highlighted ,particularly as to the other grants the groups were in receipt of or applying for.

It was noted that ,if this option was agreed ,the current officer who dealt with voluntary sector grants would work closely with the area forum support officers until the scheme was fully operational .

The Policy Development Group requested the Chief Executive to submit a report to the Executive Member Corporate Strategy and Finance recommending that the voluntary sector grants scheme be discontinued and that the funds be distributed between the area forums to be allocated via their grants schemes ,along the lines now indicated ,together with a suitable contribution to the Big Bolton Fund .