

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: November 2020	Meeting Name: Cabinet member for Communities and Equalities
Report title:		Beormund Community Centre	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Katherine Pitt, Commissioning Officer	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Cabinet Member for Communities and Equalities approves the termination of the Common Purpose grant funding to the Beormund Community Centre as the organisation has closed and that no further payments will be made to the Centre including the suspended payment which was due on 1 October 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Beormund Community Centre is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. It is a multi-use community centre providing services for residents across the borough and particularly residents of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.
3. The building is owned by the council and at the time of closure the Beormund were in prolonged negotiations with the council's Property Team regarding the renewal of their lease.
4. In recent years the role of the Beormund has been primarily that of a hiring facility. The building is well-equipped with an IT suite, training rooms, large hall, gym, exhibition space and reception. It also hosts an OFSTED-registered nursery. Hiring organisations included training organisations and small local community groups and tenants and residents organisations.
5. The Beormund Community Centre are currently funded via a 2-year Common Purpose grant which is due to end at the end of March 2021. The grant amount is £49,749. The grant award letter was dated 11 January 2019 and the Centre returned a signed acceptance of the Conditions of Grant Funding included in this on 22 February 2019.
6. Their annual grant has twice between reduced in recent years as follows:

Year	Grant
2015-16	£92,999
2016-17	£69,749

2019-20	£49,749
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7. Their most recent financial information provided in autumn 2019 shows they are not in receipt of funding from any other sources. It is a requirement of the Common Purpose grants programme that funded organisations are in receipt of funding from other grant funding sources and are not solely dependent on council funding. The Beormund has received little or no income from other grant funding sources for a number of years and monitoring officers were not aware of any attempts at fundraising from other sources.
8. The Beormund generate income from hall hires and rental. In 2018-19 this accounted for 27% of their total income. They are also in receipt of income from the attached nursery which accounted for 5% of their total income.
9. Their annual rent to the council is approximately £23,000 and have a full repairing lease.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

10. Whilst we recognize the contribution over time made to the community, In recent years, monitoring officers have become aware of dwindling attendance at the centre and very low attendance at the AGM events. The website is rarely updated.
11. The council has continued to monitor the grant as part of its annual monitoring cycle under the Common Purpose programme. Monitoring information provided by the Beormund has been minimal and governance documents such as the equal opportunities policy do not appear to have been reviewed for many years. This is in spite of officers sending a number of emails including requests for updates and for monitoring information.
12. In January 2020 the Centre Manager informed the commissioning team that, in the light of the funding cuts, they will not be providing outcomes monitoring data which is required under the Common Purpose grants programme.
13. During lockdown, the Beormund did not communicate with the commissioning team or with the Property Team and did not respond to a number of emails.
14. Since the start of lockdown officers in the council's Education team have also attempted to contact the nursery but their telephone calls and emails have gone unanswered.
15. On 27 July an officer in the commissioning team was finally able to make contact with the Chair who informed her that:

- The centre was closed and there was no date for re-opening
 - Since the start of lockdown they had not been able to provide any services either by telephone, online or by any other means owing to lack of resources
 - They had not furloughed any staff
 - The centre manager was visiting the centre once a week where she was working on the annual accounts. She was unable to work from home.
 - The Chair was not yet in a position to state what the financial impact on the centre would be.
 - The officer advised that they take a look at Community Southwark's resources and guidance on re-opening the premises.
16. There has been no update on their services on their website www.beormund.co.uk and no recorded message about their current services on their answer machine.
 17. They have been the only Common Purpose grant funded organisation that hasn't adapted some element of their services in response to the pandemic.
 18. During the COVID 19 pandemic the council has adopted a position of funder flexibility in respect of grant monitoring to take account of the level of uncertainty and in recognition that it will not be possible for organisations to provide services in the usual way. This has been communicated to the Beormund.
 19. On 19 August 2020 council officers wrote to the Centre setting out details of breaches of the Conditions of Grant Funding by the centre and requesting details of how the Centre would deliver services for the remainder of the financial year and outcomes monitoring for the 2019-20 financial year.
 20. No response was received to this and the council wrote a further letter suspending any further grant funding. The letter indicated that the next quarterly grant payment of £12,437.25 due on 1 October would not be made.
 21. On 29 September 2020 an officer in the commissioning team received a call from the centre manager informing him that they were closing the centre and would be handing back the keys to the council.
 22. The Property team have confirmed that the Beormund currently owe the council £11,115.08 or approximately 2 quarters' rent. These arrears appear to have been incurred in 2017.

Policy implications

23. The Beormund did not engage with the council or other VCS organisations to co-produce 'Common Purpose Common Cause' voluntary sector strategy in 2016, though they were kept up to date about it via email and officers described and gave them a copy of the new strategy at monitoring visits.
24. A key ambition of the strategy is better partnership working to improve outcomes for residents with an expectation of engagement through wider voluntary sector networks. The Beormund have not engaged with this ambition.

Community impact statement

25. As described above the Beormund are primarily a hiring facility and usage of the centre appeared to be dwindling. The area is served with a number of organisations providing effective services to local residents and community groups, including Age UK, Bede House, Bermondsey Community Kitchen, Big Local Works, London Bubble, Salmon Youth Centre, and Time and Talents. Some of these, for example London Bubble, Salmon Youth Centre and Time and Talents, provide hire space and there are also a number of TRA halls which may be available for hire. Whilst it is anticipated that the impact of the closure on local communities will be minimal a full consultation and assessment of community provision in the area will be undertaken and no decisions taken on the future of the building without community consultation

Resource implications

26. None.

Legal implications

27. See comments from the Director of Law and Democracy below.

Financial implications

28. The Common Purpose grant in 2020-21 is £49,749. Of this the first two quarterly payments of £24,874.5 have been paid. The Beormund are not in receipt of any other funding from the council.
29. Consideration will be given to possible recovery of the grant. Further information will be sought to establish the financial position and any outstanding liabilities and what funds remain. After the position has been established appropriate next steps will be taken.

Consultation

30. As described above, communications with the Beormund Community Centre have been challenging. In recent years the Beormund have had numerous invitations to take part in council consultations on VCS strategy

and development of the Common Purpose grants programme, as well as invitations to funding workshops but have chosen not to participate.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Democracy

31. A grant was awarded to Beormund Community Centre as part of the Common Purpose Grants programme in January 2019 for the financial years 2019-2021. This was made in accordance with the council's standard conditions of grant which were acknowledged and signed up to by the Centre in February 2019.
32. The letter sets out details of a number of ways in which the Centre have failed to comply with the conditions, and attempts by council officers to elicit necessary information. Council officers have taken the steps necessary in accordance with these conditions prior to suspending the grant in October 2020 and have now received confirmation that the Centre has closed its operation and the continuing grant should therefore be discontinued. No further payments will be made to the Centre including the 1 October quarterly payment. This is all being done in line with the conditions of grant.
33. Given the value of the grant, this report is being presented to the Cabinet member for determination.
34. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, in making this decision, the Cabinet member must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) which requires having due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The report at paragraph 25 has indicated how community groups affected by the closure of the Centre could access other resources- and some of these will be providing a service particularly relevant to individuals with protected characteristics.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Beormund Community Centre grant summary sheet	Environmental & Leisure / Communities Division	Katherine Pitt 020 7525 1579 Katherine.pitt@so uthwark.gov.uk
G:\Communities\Commissioning\Groups\Beormund Community Centre\Beormund grant summary sheet 2019-20.docx		
Common Purpose grants programme 2019-20 IDM report	Environmental & Leisure / Communities Division	Environmental & Leisure / Communities Division
(Insert hyperlink here) G:\Communities\Commissioning\Commissioning 2019-20\Recommendations IDM\Common Purpose recommendations IDM 2019-20.doc		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	None
Appendix 2	None

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Caroline Bruce, Strategic Director of Environment & Leisure	
Report Author	Katherine Pitt, Commissioning Officer	
Version	Final	
Dated	November 2020	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		21 December 2020