

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 14 February 2012	Decision Taker: Cabinet Member for Equalities & Community Engagement
Report title:		Community Support Voluntary Sector Commissioning Programme 2012/13	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Cabinet member for Community Engagement & Equalities agrees the funding recommendations for voluntary sector organisations delivering services under the Community Support programme for 2012/13 subject to Council Assembly agreeing this level of budget. The recommendations are set out at Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Cabinet member for Community Engagement & Equalities approved the community support commissioning plan for 2012/13 in September 2011. The commissioning plan is attached as Appendix 2. The plan sets out the business case for funding voluntary sector providers, the expected links between the Council's corporate plan, council policy and priorities and the outcomes that are to be delivered by the voluntary organisations that receive grant aid. The plan also sets out the funding mechanism for commissioning services (via contract or grant aid).
3. Oversight of the council's relationship with the voluntary sector, the council's conditions of grant aid and the overall processes for commissioning services from the voluntary sector comes within the portfolio of the Cabinet member for Community Engagement & Equalities. Approval of the commissioning plan and approval of grants over £2,500 under the community support programme is a matter for the Cabinet member through individual member decision-making. (Constitution: Clauses 2 and 5 Part 3D).
4. The Council's commissioning approach is set out in the VCS Framework which was agreed by the former Executive in 2007. This document sets out the policy and principles governing the council's arrangements for partnership with and resourcing of the sector. Building on this framework in 2010 a set of high level principles and proposals for future ways of working were developed and are outlined in Appendix 2. In June 2011 the Council's Cabinet also approved the Medium Term Resources Strategy which incorporates further principles which underpin the council's approach to the VCS to strengthen the resilience of the sector in the context of budget reductions. These principles are also outlined in Appendix 2.

5. The main objective of the Community Support programme is to improve community relations and to empower and enable diverse communities and those who experience discrimination, to achieve a better quality of life. The programme is divided into 3 categories:
 - a. **Category One: Supporting Diverse Communities. This category relates to support for organisations that promote specific cultural, social, faith and personal identities in ways that contribute to the development of confident communities able to play a full role in public and civic life.**
6. The purpose of this category of the community support programme is to ensure that communities that may face exclusion and disadvantage have access to support and services that enable them to fully participate as active citizens. Funded organisations should contribute to building mutual understanding and shares ways of working across different faiths, culture and ethnic identities. They should also seek to promote community cohesion, participation, volunteering, advocacy and mediation and consultation between communities and public services.
 - b. **Category Two: Specialist Capacity Building & Infrastructure Support. This category relates to support for organisations that build the capacity of the voluntary sector to enable it to play a full and effective role in the development and delivery of the Council Plan.**
7. The purpose of this element of the community support programme is to promote an effective and vibrant voluntary sector which is capable of sustaining long-term service delivery in a rapidly changing climate.
8. Capacity building organisations provide services to other voluntary sector organisations delivering frontline services through a range of specialist services such as acting as a voice for the sector or providing support services such as legal, financial, IT, business planning. Funding is targeted at those aspects of capacity building that cannot be funded through other sources that demonstrate added value and can provide evidence of effectiveness in supporting smaller organisations.
 - c. **Area based resources for tackling social exclusion. This category relates to support for organisations that provide a core resource base for work that tackles social exclusion in the deprived areas and neighbourhoods of the borough.**
9. The purpose of this element of the community support programme is to support a range of community based resources within localities on the areas of greatest deprivation which act as a focus for community engagement, engage with marginalised communities and provide a physical base and support to voluntary sector organisations and communities. This includes settlements, community centres and faith based organisations.
10. Funding will be targeted at those organisations that can show evidence of strengthening local areas and neighbourhood partnerships between local agencies and people. It will contribute to core costs that enable organisations to act as a local focus for the community and enable funds from other sources to be levered in.

11. Particularly important in the current financial context organisations are expected to demonstrate evidence of fundraising efforts; how they add value including partnership activity; value for money; innovation/transformation; reduced back office costs, fitness for purpose, building social capital and potential to meet new and emerging needs.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

12. Facing an unprecedented cut in its budget settlement from Government of £34m in February 2011 Council Assembly agreed the revenue strategy for the period 2011/12 and 2012/13. Despite this reduction for 2011/12 the Community Support programme remained at the same level as the previous year. However, this strategy also set out a proposed budget reduction of £245,000 to the commissioning team budget for 2012/13. This reduction was to be met through £45,000 reduction in administrative costs, with the balance of £200,000 being met from the community support programme for 2012/13. This equates to just under 17% of the total budget.
13. After careful consideration of the impact of this reduction on 7th February 2012 Cabinet agreed an updated budget proposal that uses £123,000 of the savings in 2012/13 from the London Councils Levy (agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 24 January 2012) to offset part of this £200,000 budget reduction. The total available for allocation proposed, subject to approval by Council Assembly, is therefore £1,150,963.
14. All organisations currently funded through the community support programme were warned of the likely budget reduction at various stages throughout the year. This proposed reduction was also set out in the community support programme report recommendations for 2011/12.
15. In addition, in order to elicit the views of the VCS and to explore ways in which the programme could be reconfigured, a consultation exercise was launched in July 2011 and distributed via departmental commissioners, CAS e-bulletin and the council's website. The closing date for this consultation was 15 August 2011 and a total of 28 responses were received, 5 of which were from organisations not currently funded by the council. A summary of the findings arising from this consultation is available as a background paper and has been taken into account in the revision of the commissioning plan. In responses from the sector to this consultation there was strong support for an approach that targeted funding to priority organisations and removed funding from organisations which were less of a priority, rather than 'salami-slicing' budget reductions across all funded groups.
16. The voluntary sector was also invited to input to the revised commissioning plan for the programme with representatives from Southwark Voice and from each of the funding priority areas i.e. Communities of Interest, Area Based Resources and Capacity building. These representatives attended two half day sessions with the objective of recommending a revised commissioning plan and funding priorities for 2012/13.
17. In November 2011 the council again notified all groups in writing that the programme was subject to reduction and advised on the process and timetable for the programme. An assurance was also provided that 3 months notice of implementation of the decision would be provided.

18. In addition to the above as part of the council's ongoing efforts to improve the effectiveness of the relationship with the VCS the council undertook the following:

- The establishment of a Task & Finish group to review commissioning processes and propose improvements. The final recommendations will be presented in a report to CMT.
- The Council's Policy & Resources Strategy included a £1.5m Transition Fund for 2011/12 and 2012/13 to provide interim support to VCS organisations facing budget reductions and to promote modernised ways of working in order to develop a more sustainable sector. To date there have been 3 rounds of the Transition fund with £742,584 allocated to 54 groups. A further round is proposed for February 2012.

19. As a result of openly advertising the Community Support programme in September 2010 a total of 51 applications were received totalling £2,351,952. 33 of these applications were from existing funded groups with 18 new applications. The applications can be categorised as follows:

- 33 applications from existing funded organisations. One organisation in the programme Blackfriars Settlement has submitted a combined bid for both its core costs and older people's projects.

A range of new applications from the following:

- Applications that do not meet the Community Support priorities (11 in total) mainly because they focus on a specific service area such as children's services, health & community services, education, employment and training.
- Applications which do meet the Community Support priorities (7 in total) providing support to diverse communities, intergenerational work, peer support, role modelling, promoting active citizenship, community cohesion and integration.

20. The new applications which meet the Community Support priorities were assessed alongside the applications from the existing 33 funded organisations. Where the organisations were not previously known to the council visits were made to them in order to obtain additional information and to observe their service delivery.

21. The 11 applications which fall outside the Community Support priorities. These relate to departmental service themes. Contact details of these groups have been forwarded to the relevant departmental commissioners where appropriate and fundraising advice will be available from both Community Action Southwark (CAS) and the Commissioning & Voluntary Sector Support Unit.

Assessment and proposals for funding.

22. In revising the commissioning plan for 2012/13 representatives from Southwark Voice were invited to input and scoring criteria were drawn up based on the revised plan and additional criteria required to be met by organisations applying. This consisted of 2 stages designed to inform the final recommendations, the criteria for which, are set out in Appendix 3 to this report.
23. Factors also taken into account include the equalities impact, the financial health of the organisation, the level of dependency on council funding, the impact of withdrawal of services on particular groups and the scope to refer beneficiaries to alternative service providers.
24. Funding recommended to the Cabinet member for Community Engagement & Equalities totals £1,149,911 for 40 organisations, five of which are completely new applicants to the programme. These organisations are listed in Appendix 1 of this report.
25. Funding in 2012/13 is not recommended for five organisations which are currently funded through the Community Support programme. They are St Judes, St Mathews, Clubland, Rockingham Somali Support group and the Vietnamese Women's Group as detailed in Appendix 1. These are the organisations with the lowest scores against the criteria and where there is minimal or no evidence of fundraising from other sources.
26. In order to comply with the Compact and the undertaking given to the sector the council is required to give 3 months notice to existing funded groups where funding is not recommended for 2012/13. If recommendations for 2012/13 are approved the 3 months notice would run for the period March – May 2012. Funding during the notice period will be met within existing departmental resources. Organisations will also be given the opportunity to request making either a written or verbal representation to the Individual Decision maker before the decision is made.
27. In addition, officers will schedule visits to each of these organisations in order to discuss the recommendations in person and set out the reasons. Groups will also be offered support with fundraising from other sources from both Community Engagement and Community Action Southwark and explore options for continued service delivery or exit strategies. These organisations will also be invited to apply for Round 4 of the council's Transition Fund launching in February 2012 but will be required to demonstrate evidence of transition and transformation.

Community impact statement

28. The organisations funded under the community support programme play a vital role in promoting the diversity agenda and ensure that communities that may face exclusion because of discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability or faith, have access to support and services that enable them to fully participate as citizens. As with any grants process there is the potential for there to be winners and losers, some organisations awarded funding and some not.

29. The council recognises the importance of having specific organisations that support and enable specific communities to access mainstream services that enable them to fully participate as citizens. In arriving at recommendations account has been taken of both established need as well as responding to changing needs and critical immediate needs i.e.
- Integration of specific communities of interest;
 - Support for particularly marginalized communities e.g. refugees and asylum seekers;
 - The impact of regeneration and redevelopment on communities and the need to support the infrastructure of such communities;
 - Community engagement and the promotion of community cohesion.
30. An Equalities Impact assessment of the Community Support programme was previously completed in 2009/10 which in terms of practical changes proposed a number of recommendations to increase access to wider numbers of people and communities, to eliminate negative or differential impact and to promote community cohesion. Account has been taken to meet recommendations as far as possible within the current resource constraints enabling the funding of new services for residents of the borough.
- In addition, with the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 and the unprecedented cuts to Local Authority resources, the Council adopted a refreshed approach to equality and human rights in 2011 and made an explicit commitment to conduct an equalities impact assessment (EqIA) for all budget proposals. For 2011 – 2014 the EqIA of budget savings proposals for the Community Support programme outlined the potential impact of the proposed reductions concluding that applying that reduction across the 33 currently funded organisations would threaten the viability of all organisations. The impact of a 17% reduction was noted as potentially resulting in grants not being awarded to up to 7 organisations. This level of impact has been mitigated by the proposal that £123,000 savings from the London Councils levy be used to offset the proposed reduction of £77,000.
31. . The new equalities scheme “ Southwark Council’s approach to equality delivering a fairer future for all is available on the council’s website at: http://www.southwark.gov.uk/downloads/download/2921/southwark_councils_approach_to_equality_delivering_a_fairer_future_for_all
32. Equalities analysis was also carried out with currently funded organisations to ascertain where their target groups fall within the protected characteristics i.e. religion, age, gender and gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage & civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity. This analysis was carried out to determine whether there was a disproportionate effect on any of those target groups. The recommendations contained in this report have taken into account the results of this analysis and there are no significant equalities issues arising as alternative services are available to those target groups.

33. An important consideration in relation to future service delivery under this programme will be how changing needs will be addressed in the context of the economic climate and budgetary constraints.

Resource implications

34. For 2012/13 the council's base budget to fund the Community Support programme is £1,150,963 subject to agreement of the budget at Council Assembly on 29 February 2012. The council has determined this level of resources within the context of tight financial constraints imposed by the 2011-14 local government settlement and through the council's annual policy and resources process.

Consultation

35. All organisations were notified in 2011/12 of the proposed reduction to the Community Support programme for 2012/13. A consultation exercise was carried out with the voluntary sector to elicit their views and explore ways in which the Community support programme could be reconfigured. The voluntary sector was also invited to input to the revised commissioning plan for the programme with representatives from Southwark Voice attending 2 half-day workshops. The Forum for Equalities & Human Rights (FEHRS) also commented on the consultation and has been briefed.
36. Each of the groups recommended for funding have been sent a copy of their project summary and asked to sign their acceptance of the written representation of their organisation. Copies of this report have also been sent to Community Action Southwark (CAS), FEHRS and the individual groups. Those organisations not recommended for funding have been contacted and offered the opportunity to get feedback on their application, reasons for the recommendation, other sources of funding and referral as appropriate to other departments or to CAS for support. They will also be given the opportunity to request a representation before the decision is made.
37. In addition where applications were unsuccessful or where funding is proposed to be reduced organisations will be invited to apply to Round 4 of the council's Transition Fund but will be required to provide evidence of transformation and modernisation in those proposals.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Finance Director

38. The Finance Director notes that the overall grant programme allocation for 2012/13, at £1,149,911 and detailed in Appendix 1, is within the department's currently available resources, subject to the budget approval process. This commissioning programme achieves the revised savings target following the reduction of the London Councils levy.
39. The Finance Director also notes the commitment to provide three months notice to groups where funding is not recommended for 2012/13. The commitment will be funded from existing departmental resources.

40. Rental payments relating to an organisation's occupation of a Southwark Council property are included in the grant allocation programme. A robust estimate of rental charges will need to be withheld at source by the commissioning service to prevent an over allocation of funding.

Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance

41. Officers from the Contracts and Employment Section of Legal Services have reviewed this report and confirm that under the provisions of Part 3D of the council's Constitution the Cabinet Member for Equalities & Community Engagement may approve the recommendations that are set out in this Report.
42. The report notes that the budget for the Community Support Commissioning Programme is to be reduced by £200,000 in 2012/13, but that £123,000 of the savings in 2012/13 from the London Councils Levy is to be used to offset part of this budget reduction, so that the actual reduction in spending is £67,000.
43. The Equality Act 2010 introduced a single public sector equality duty. This duty requires us to have due regard in our decision making processes to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct;
 - (b) Advance of equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it
 - (c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those that do not share it.
44. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. It also applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in relation to (a) above.
45. The Council is required to act in accordance with the equality duty and have due regard to the duty when carrying out its functions, which includes making decisions in the current context.
46. The report author refers at paragraphs 30 to 32 to the fact that equalities have been considered whilst developing the recommendations an equalities impact assessment and analysis has been undertaken in accordance with Southwark's Approach to equality and steps have been put in place to mitigate impact in accordance with good practice.
47. The equality duty requires public bodies to have an adequate evidence base for our decision making; consultation/engagement is a useful tool to provide an adequate evidence base. Case law has shown how important it is for public bodies to consult/engage to ensure that we understand the impact our decisions have on our community. In addition the "Southwark Compact" agreement between statutory agencies and voluntary, community and faith organisations in Southwark notes that such consultation can inform decision making.

48. In paragraph 35 to 37 above, the report author confirms that consultation has been undertaken with the voluntary sector to ascertain their views and assist with developing a reconfigured programme in accordance with good practice.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Community Support Commissioning Plan 2012/13	Community Engagement	Bonnie Royal 020.7525.7389
Community Support programme recommendations 2012/13	Community Engagement	Bonnie Royal
Equality Impact Assessment	Community Engagement	Bonnie Royal

APPENDICES

No.	Title
1.	Community Support Programme 2012/13
2.	Community Support Commissioning Plan 2012/13
3.	Scoring Criteria for Community Support Programme 2012/13

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	
Report Author	Bonnie Royal Commissioning & Voluntary Sector Support Manager	
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Key Decision	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
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