

BANKSIDE RESIDENTS FORUM

Overview and Scrutiny Call-in 20 April 2009.

The decision by the Executive member for Equalities, Communities and Citizenship to agree a recommendation to fund Bankside Residents Forum for the financial year 2009-10 has been called in by OSC. The specific issues raised by OSC are as follows:

1. inadequate reasons given for the grant being uniquely justifiable in respect of one area of the borough only and/or one residents organisation.
2. disproportionate benefit to one area/organisation
3. inadequate information as to the financial resources of the particular residents forum and as to how the proposed grant is to be spent.

The background briefing below addresses the issues raised by OSC in the context of the historical and current funding position with BRF.

The Forum was set up in 1995 as regeneration projects and developments in the area accelerated in number and pace, with a corresponding increased impact on the lives of local residents. The number and extent of the changes continue to be exciting and challenging, but can also affect local residents in ways which can seem to conflict with the aim of regeneration. The BRF exists to ensure that these and many other issues are responsibly addressed, taking into account the needs of those who live in Bankside.

Originally BRF received voluntary sector grant funding administered via the Strategic Partnerships Team in Economic Development. Funding commenced in 2002. In line with the Council's Community Strategy (2002-06) its Ratification Committee in 2002 agreed to fund BRF originally for a three year Service Level Agreement. They were then funded for a further year during 2005/6 and then in 2006/7 before being transferred over to CIDU. Funding has continued since. Funding has not increased during this period other than by annual inflationary uplift.

In 2006, colleagues in the Economic Development Unit (EDU) asked the Community Development and Involvement Unit (CIDU) to consider taking over the grant management duties for the BRF, because the Forum's aims had more synergy with the Community Strategy objectives as delivered by CIDU rather than those related to the EDU. At the time both CIDU and the EDU were based within the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Department. Since this time the budget has been managed by CIDU. Executive responsibility for decision making on the BRF grant transferred from the Executive member for Regeneration and Economic Development to the Executive member for Equalities Communities and Citizenship on transfer of CIDU from R&N to the Social Inclusion Division in June 2007.

The rationale for historic and current funding of BRF is essentially based on the fact that the area is one where there is an unprecedented level of development pressure and this has the potential to considerably adversely affect the quality of life in the area. The area is not within the Major Projects portfolio, nor does it benefit from the more intensive community development support offered by, for example, the Peckham Programme. Bankside has undergone significant development transformation over the past ten to fifteen years: indeed the Bankside of today is unrecognisable from that which existed at the time the Forum was set up. New residential, retail and leisure facilities line a transformed riverside. Developments have sprung up throughout this time within the area. The Bankside community has been living in the centre of all this, with development after development quite literally on their doorstep. Bankside continues to be one of the areas of Southwark most attractive to developers. There are currently 4 large-scale, high profile projects underway.

CIDU staff have met with BRF on an approximately quarterly basis since taking responsibility for the grant in the first financial quarter of 2007. In line with usual grant monitoring arrangements BRF provide a quarterly report to CIDU in order to demonstrate achievements against the agreed targets. In particular, CIDU monitored basic work delivery levels (number of meetings held, people attending, etc) and improvements to greater participation of local residents.

During 2008, monitoring of the Forum has identified that BRF continued to demonstrate its commitment to community engagement in relation to involvement in local planning issues. It surveyed 2,000 homes via the 'door knocking project' to obtain views on affordable shopping in the area. This information will be used to lobby for more affordable provision. BRF developed a quarterly e-news that goes out to 350 local residents and organisations.

In addition to regular meetings with council staff, BRF provides the council with a quarterly monitoring report, setting out achievements against agreed quarterly milestones. The list below is not exhaustive but includes for example:

- to run 1 organised Open Forum Meeting on local issues or an AGM which is open to local residents (i.e.4 p.a)
- To run 2 Management Committee meetings which are open to local residents (i.e.8 p.a.)
- To produce a newsletter or update on local issues (i.e.4 p.a.)
- To produce quarterly reports on milestones/outcomes for LBS
- Evidence of active engagement with local area management

meetings, committee/steering group meetings and community councils to represent the views of local residents

- Evidence of consultation with local people on significant local developments, regeneration and community involvement on behalf of organisation
- Evidence of continuing to promote and increase BRF membership.

The ongoing disruption caused by 10 years plus of regeneration means that BRF enjoys widespread local support. As of April 15th 2009, BRF has more than 700 resident & stakeholder members.

BRF continues to represent local views on key planning documents. More recently, BRF has hosted well attended open forum meetings (minimum 4 per annum) where local residents had the opportunity to meet with major developers to raise issues or concerns. BRF is also showing its presence at local events and forums to increase awareness of BRF work and also to engage with the wider community.

The council is satisfied that BRF is meeting the requirements of the grant aid it is receiving and that it provides a valuable and well “bought into” local resource. LBS funding allows BRF, which is managed by local resident volunteers, to employ a Coordinator 3 days per week and contributes to running costs. The funding recommended for this financial year is for the continuation of activities currently undertaken by the Forum. As with last year, the Forum will be required to report quarterly to the Council on achievements against milestones.

BRF is a Community Partner of Better Bankside which currently provides £3,000 per annum for agreed projects – most recently a retail survey across Bankside. They receive no other funding.

As part of the Government’s “Taking Part” pathfinder programme, Southwark’s Active Citizens Hub has commissioned a consultant to map all resident groups of all types in Southwark, and this information will be available in June 2009. This mapping will allow us to take an overview of all residents forums across the council and will help inform future funding.