

ITEM 15a

Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting – 18 February 2009.

Scoping Report – Possible review of Grants to Voluntary Bodies.

1. Introduction

Chief Officers feel that there is a need to review the Council's policies and practices on grants to voluntary bodies, including community grants and major arts grants.

It was considered that a review of grants was a potential Overview and Scrutiny topic review that would cut across the portfolios of several Overview and Scrutiny Commission and could involve the Change Management and Performance Unit.

The aim of the review would be to see whether the grants provided are in line with the Council's Corporate Priorities and if they provide value for money.

The Co-ordination team has been asked to produce a discussion paper.

If the Chairs and Vice Chairs are minded to undertake a review of grants to voluntary bodies, the following paragraphs outline the possible scope of a review.

2. Outline of the Review

It is thought that any Commission(s) undertaking the review would need to:

1. Determine the sources of funding for grants and any limitations applying to the provision of that funding
2. Confirm and understand the Council's current criteria for making grants to voluntary bodies and the reasons for those criteria.
3. Identify all the voluntary bodies to which grants were made in the financial year 2007/08, the amount of the grants that were given to voluntary bodies, and the purposes for which the grants were made.
4. Undertake a representative audit to establish:
 - a. How the grant monies were used by the voluntary bodies,
 - b. What the voluntary bodies achieved by using their grant monies,
 - c. Who benefited from the grant and what form that benefit took
5. Having completed (4) above the Commission(s) would need to assess the overall benefit to the people of Derby of the grants that have been made and then to make a reasoned judgement about alignment with the Council's Corporate priorities and the value for money represented by the grants process.

3. Issues that would need to be addressed

- A review of grants to voluntary bodies would be complex and protracted. The time taken to complete the review would depend very much on the resources that were allocated to it. It is very difficult to make any reasonable estimate, but unless all other scrutiny activities were curtailed it is thought unlikely that the review could be completed in much less than one year.

- It is anticipated that there might well be problems in obtaining the necessary information from voluntary bodies and there might in some instances be resistance to the provision of such information.
- Public benefit and compliance with the Council's Corporate Priorities will require the development of robust assessment criteria.
- The assessment of 'value for money' may prove problematical and will need to be carefully defined at the outset of the review. Any definition could probably be open to challenge and this may ultimately detract from the value of the review.
- In view of the above issues it will be necessary to agree the methodology in advance with representative bodies, eg. Derby Compact, Derby CVS.

4. Level of Member involvement

Any review of grants to voluntary bodies would require a significant level of member involvement and a larger than usual number of review meetings. The Co-ordination team has experience of conducting big reviews and if it is decided to proceed with the review the necessary officer time can be made available. However depending on the methodology adopted, it is estimated that any members engaging in the review should anticipate having to attend between 10 and 30 additional meetings over the period of the review. They would also have to spend a significant amount of time assessing the evidence from review meetings.

5. Provisional Timetable

If Chairs and Vice Chairs are minded to proceed with the review the Co-ordination team will be able to start the preliminary work, detailed scoping, identification of voluntary groups, identification of sources and amount of funding, etc, in March/April 2009. The evidence gathering phase of the review could then in theory start in April/May. However there will be periods throughout the summer when members, officers, and witnesses are unavailable due to holidays.

The aim would be to try to complete evidence gathering by the end of November 2009 and to complete the report by January/February 2010.

Despite the challenges it is felt that a comprehensive review of Grants to Voluntary Bodies could result in significant benefits for the Council and the services delivered through the voluntary sector.

DRR 16 February 2008.