

Cheltenham Borough Council
Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee -
12 July 2010

Final review of the council's community investment grants
2008-2011

Report of the Social and Community Overview and
Scrutiny Committee Community Investment Review Group

1. Executive Summary and recommendation

1.1 The issue

1.1.1 The following report details the findings and recommendations of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee's community investment grant review group which was tasked by the Committee with the responsibility of reviewing the current round of community investment grants awarded by the council's Community Services Division.

1.1.2 The aim of the final review, which was a backward looking review, was to determine and identify the following principles:

- the overall performance and achievements of these organisations during the funding period, against the outcomes and expectations detailed in the community investment grant
- how these organisations have used the investment grants to help build and secure the capacity of the organisation, and its internal governance procedures, to a position where it could compete for any future contracts
- whether the organisation is providing much needed community resources, and a resource (service) which is clearly meeting the demands and aspirations of its users and/or its community as a whole
- whether the organisation has, and is continuing to demonstrate value for money, best practice, as well as savings and economies of scale

1.1.3 The O+S review group recommends that the O+S Committee endorse the findings of the O+S review group as detailed in Section 4 of this report, and agree to submit these findings to the Cabinet for their due consideration

1.1.4 The O+S review group recommends that the O+S Committee endorse the representations made in section 5.6 of this report for Cabinet to take into due consideration when considering future funding arrangements and levels

1.1.5 The O&S review group recommends that O&S committee endorses the recommendation for future reviews to include a visit to the relevant organisations' sites as part of the process as per section 6

1.2 Summary of implications

1.2.1 Financial

Funding at existing levels is currently built into the council's medium term financial strategy; this will always be subject to the annual budget setting process and satisfactory performance.

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1.2.2 Legal

All of the community investment grants will expire through lapse of time, so no formal notice needs to be given. However, under the Compact, the service of a notice of termination should be done as a matter of courtesy and good practice. There have been no problems with the Community Investment Grant format of documentation since it was introduced following the last review of grants. This format will continue to be used for any new grants that are agreed.

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1.3 Implications on corporate and community plan priorities

All three organisations contribute to the following outcomes and activities in the Corporate Strategy 2010 to 2015:

- **Strengthening our communities:**
 - Communities feel safe and are safe
 - People are able to lead healthy lifestyles
 - Our residents enjoy a strong sense of community and are involved in resolving local issues

1.4 Statement on Risk

The loss or reduction in current levels of grant funding will impact on the level and delivery of services and provisions offered by the organisations and/or the sustainability of the organisation receiving grant funding.

The ability to deliver to the outcomes in the corporate strategy would also be affected if funding removed or reduced and alternative capacity is not identified.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The council's three year funded community investment grants, awarded by the Community Services Division are now in their final year of a three year funding agreement (2008-2011) and are therefore subject to final review, by the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.2 The review process was agreed by the O+S Committee, as detailed in the report dated 1st March 2010.
- 2.3 On 7th June 2010 the O+S Committee agreed the membership of the final review group
- 2.4 The following table details the final reviews which were undertaken by the review group and also provides information about the level of funding which has been awarded to these organisations by the council:

Organisation	Current 2010-2011 funding	Total funding awarded 2008-2011
Hesters Way Regeneration Partnership	£42,200	£126,600
Oakley Regeneration Partnership	£42,200	£126,600
Cheltenham Voluntary and Community Action	£34,000	£102,000

3. Background

- 3.1 In accordance with the community investment grant review process, agreed by the O+S Committee in the report dated 1st March 2010, the O+S Committee established a review group to co-ordinate the final review of the current round of community investment grants which are co-ordinated by the Community Services Division.
- 3.2 Review meetings were held during the last week of June and first week of July and involved the following councillors Cllr. Diggory Seacome, Cllr. Rowena Hay, Cllr. John Rawson and Cllr. John Webster, Cabinet member Finance and Community Development. The review group was also assisted by appropriate council officers.
- 3.3 To assist the review, the group utilised a performance monitoring pro-forma along with the assessment of performance and monitoring information covering the first two

years of operational delivery, submitted by each of the organisations as a requirement of their grant.

- 3.4** The review group held review interviews with each of the organisations being funded, where presentations were made by each of the organisations and questions and queries were raised by the review group's members in response to both the presentation and the submission of the organisation's monitoring and performance information

4. Summary of key points and issues raised during the review process

4.1 Hesters Way Regeneration Partnership

Hesters Way Partnership is an umbrella organisation comprising partners whose aims are to facilitate a sustainable community in greater Hesters Way.

4.1.1 The following achievements and successes were particularly recognised:

- The delivery of a second resource centre in the Springbank area fully occupied and providing a significant resource for the local community
- That the Partnership is a learning organisation; identifying activities that have not delivered expected outcomes and making necessary changes to improve. In particular it was evident that there had been considerable learning from managing the Hesters Way building that had been incorporated into the arrangements for the new Springbank building
- The value of a community development approach to all planning to ensure delivering to the needs and aspirations of the community and making themselves more available
- The Partnership has been remarkably good at leveraging in other funding and sources of income thereby increasing their viability and sustainability.
- The strength of the Partnership itself as an entity
- The benefit of a localised presence and knowledge in relation to better informing investment decisions, thereby reducing duplication of services, supporting a wide range of activities and supporting the sustainability of existing social infrastructure; demonstrated with examples including children centres, child care and extended services

4.1.2 Identified challenges and suggested areas for action/ improvement

- To improve performance monitoring and reporting with specific regard to evidencing outcomes of actions and distinguish delivery of the Partnership and Neighbourhood Project respectively
- continue to increase and maximise affect of partnership working with other organisations

- work with the new academy to look at how best to incorporate services they provide within the school setting to address needs in the community
- ensure adequate contingency budgets to deal with programme maintenance of resource centres

4.2 Oakley Regeneration Partnership

Oakley Regeneration Partnership primary role is to act as a lead organisation in stimulating regeneration activity to address local need in Oakley area.

4.2.1 The following achievements and successes were particularly recognised:

- Delivery of high levels of education and training opportunities specifically designed to raise the skill levels of the community, e.g. job club, practical skills
- The production and distribution of Oakley Live
- Client histories demonstrated the value of a community based hub, operating to assist people practically to identify their needs and provide support and assistance for people to access relevant services either directly provided at the centre and/or ensure appropriate referrals to additional services
- Acknowledgement that the Neighbourhood Project was well positioned to understand the changes in society and what could this mean for the community, and their recognition that more collaborative working with partners was required to address issues that arise
- The realistic assessment of the financial context of statutory partners, the limitation of the current financial context, the subsequent potential impact on the Partnership and the need to identify alternative funding streams.

4.2.2 Identified challenges and suggested areas for action/ improvement

- To consider how to secure continued investment in adult education opportunities
- To continue to explore additional funding streams and opportunities
- In recognition of potential increased demand from community due to impact of recession, to maximise capacity via volunteering
- To undertake a risk assessment of partnership working, particularly in the context of impact of recession requiring increased reliance on collaborative working at a time where partners' capacity to take part is likely to diminish. To take appropriate action to strengthen the Partnership arrangements, particularly for the areas of health, and to develop a more detailed business plan for delivery and measurement of outcomes

4.3 Cheltenham Voluntary and Community Action

Cheltenham VCA is a service of GAVCA (Gloucestershire Association for Voluntary

and Community Action) which works to strengthen local voluntary and community action in Gloucestershire. The main functions of the service in Cheltenham are to support the development of the voluntary and community sector (VCS), facilitate the collective voice of the VCS through the Cheltenham VCS Forum, to be the VCS Compact champion, and to co-ordinate the representation of VCS on strategic partnerships in the town.

4.3.1 The following achievements and successes were particularly recognised:

- Recognition of the development of infrastructure services since the establishment of new arrangements instigated since 2006
- Recognition that the support and development of voluntary and community groups does ultimately secure an affect and outcomes for the residents of Cheltenham – examples included the Cheltenham Horse Show, Cheltenham Festivals and the PCSO initiative in Hesters Way.
- Supporting groups enabled positive contact and potentially long term engagement with hard to reach communities – such as recent work with the Sikh community
- Supporting voluntary and community organisations to reduce duplication and maximise impact of collaborative resources such as supporting the St Georges & St Vincents Associations merger
- Strong links developed with voluntary and community organisations through the VCS Forum facilitated by CVCA, the Stronger Community Partnerships and the Round table, with examples of improved partnership working developed as a result e.g. local neighbourhood projects instigated as a result of such networking.

4.3.2 Identified challenges and suggested areas for action/ improvement

- Concerns were raised regarding the current limited range of funding opportunities available for infrastructure services and the likely further reduction in such opportunities.
- The limited capacity of the higher level of support service the CVCA can provide due to small number of staff and the limited ability that volunteering can directly contribute to such functions
- To consider roles that volunteers could directly support in order to increase capacity of CVCA

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 The O&S review group was impressed with the considerable commitment and enthusiasm that all organisations demonstrated for delivering improved outcomes for Cheltenham residents

5.2 The review group was satisfied that all the organisations had met the conditions of the council's investment grants and were assessed as having provided a satisfactory level of

performance throughout the term of the funding period

5.3 The review group was satisfied that all the organisations were providing much needed community resources, and a resource (service) which is clearly meeting the demands and aspirations of its users and/or its community as a whole

5.4 Other notable issues which all 3 organisations held in common included:

- Evidence of improvement in governance arrangements to ensure fit for purpose and strengthen position for future contractual arrangements
- A strong ethos of community development approach to support planning and delivery of outcomes, with all 3 organisations identifying desire to secure further dedicated resources to finance further community development work to maximise impact
- A recognition and awareness of current financial context and potential impact on future funding arrangements

5.5 In recognition of the current uncertainty surrounding the council's financial position, the O&S review group felt that they were not in a position to make specific recommendations regarding future funding levels regarding the community investment grants but felt that the following representations and recommendations should be made to Cabinet for due consideration when the council's financial situation and budget requirements were fully understood

5.6 The O&S review group recommends that Cabinet consider the following representations when considering future funding arrangements and levels:

- **That further consideration with regard to potential collaborative arrangements between the Regeneration Partnerships be fully explored with the aim to achieve improved processes, maximising outcomes and where possible deliver efficiency savings**
- **That the importance of helping community and voluntary organisations to strengthen their infrastructure should be recognised, given their potential future role in the commissioning process.**

6. Evaluation of review process

6.1 A number of recommendations to improve the review process were made following the previous final reviews of the council's previous conditional offers of grant undertaken in 2007 as detailed in the report to O&S on 15th October 2007. These improvements were incorporated into this review process to the benefit of all parties involved. It is the view of the review group that this process would be improved further if future final reviews incorporate a visit to each organisation's place of business to get a sense of place and better understanding of how services are delivered in practice.

Appendices**NONE**

Background Papers

O&S report 15th October 2007 – Final review of the council's 2005-2008 conditional offers of grant

O&S report 1st March 2010 - The final review of the council's three year community investment grants (2008-2011)

O&S report 7th June 2010 - Review of Community Investment Grants – Election of representatives

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Accountability

Councillor John Webster

Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development

Scrutiny Function

Social and Community