

Introduction

Hastings Borough Council recently completed a comprehensive review of its financial support for community and voluntary organisations. This review was undertaken in light of the magnitude of the impending permanent reduction in the Council's annual budgets and the impact on the Council's services and ongoing support for community based activity. The review included gathering information from community organisations about the value and impact of the Council's support on their activities. It also involved a number of meetings that enabled community and voluntary organisations to contribute their ideas and comments and which have helped to identify improvements to the approach that the Council intends to take in relation to the Community Partnership Fund (CPF).

The survey revealed that the level of support which the Council provides for community based activity is higher than that of any other borough and district in East Sussex. This is a reflection not only of the Council's appreciation of the value of community based services, but also of the high levels of need for these services, particularly in the most disadvantaged parts of the town. The Council is committed to minimising the impact of the budget cuts on the provision of such services and last year determined to cap the reduction in CPF at just 8.8% annually over a three year period, despite a reduction of 47.4% in the Council's core grant funding from government over the period 2010/11 to 2013/14.

Priorities for 2013/14 and 2014/15

The Council's corporate priorities will continue to serve as the overarching framework for CPF priorities, and the Council proposes to continue with an outcome-based approach to CPF. Supporting economic growth; tackling high levels of poverty, unemployment and debt; and improving the quality of life for residents in the most disadvantaged parts of town all remain priorities for the Council.

In this context, it is proposed that the priority outcomes that were established for the CPF last year will remain priorities for the following two years. It is also proposed, however, that more weight will be given to some outcomes than others. There are three primary reasons for this:

- i) The impact of the poor economic climate on local conditions – e.g. rising unemployment and individual debt, high number of business closures, increasing demand for advice services.
- ii) Changes in other funding streams – e.g. funding streams for some types of activity have all but disappeared, whereas there are continuing or even some new funding streams, for instance through

- the BIG Lottery, for other services (e.g. community development, skills development, and employability)
- iii) The need to focus reduced funding on activities where the need and impact is greatest.

The table below sets out the thematic areas, and the outcomes that will be prioritised for CPF support.

| Thematic areas | Priority outcomes |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Job creation / Employment | Services that result in business start-up and job creation. |
| Advice services | Services delivering financial, debt, welfare, legal, housing and general advice in response to demand. |
| Safer communities | Support for victims of domestic violence, and support for rough sleepers. |
| Active involvement of residents | Services that result in vulnerable or disadvantaged residents being able to access services and improve their quality of life. |

Process

Three key messages from community and voluntary organisations in relation to the CPF programme came out of the recent review:

- i) There was wide recognition of the Council's very difficult budget situation, but organisations wanted to know as soon as possible about CPF decisions.
- ii) Funding for more than one year is preferable to help organisations in their business planning.
- iii) The application and monitoring process should be more streamlined and more proportionate to the level of funding.

In response to the first point, the Council has determined a timeframe and process for the next round of CPF that will enable Cabinet to make grant decisions in December 2012 (subject, of course, to the Council's final budget setting meeting in February 2013).

In response to the second point, the Council proposes that the next round will be for a two year period, with the second year of CPF funding being indicative and subject to budget decisions in February 2014.

In response to the third point, the application and monitoring process will be based on the level of funding requested/granted. Grant requests of up to £5k will be subject to a light touch process only, and a proportionate approach will be taken with applications of between £5-£50k, and those over £50k. The aim will be to strike a closer balance between the need to ensure effective use of

public funds and value for money, and an overly complex application and monitoring process.

As in the past, it is anticipated that there will be a large number of initial applicants for CPF. In order to minimise the amount of wasted time for unsuccessful applicants, we propose to retain the 3-stage process but request slightly more information at the first stage. This will mean that fewer organisations are asked to complete detailed applications.

The Council remains committed to the principle of full cost recovery where organisations are involved in delivering multiple projects/services.

Application timeframe

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| Invite Expressions of Interest. Publication of application forms and guidance notes on Council's website. | Week commencing 27 th August. |
| Deadline for submission of Expressions of Interest | 14 th September |
| Shortlisted candidates invited to submit detailed applications | 21 st September |
| Deadline for submission of detailed applications | 19 th October |
| Interviews with final shortlisted applicant organisations | 30 th October |
| Cabinet decision (subject to Council budget meeting in February) | 3 rd December |

The Council welcomes any comments on the above proposals **prior to 20th August**. Please send your comments to: regeneration@hastings.gov.uk

31st July 2012