

Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th April 2014

Briefing Note: Commissioning Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector

1. Introduction

To provide an update on the review of the current grants process, including the Small Grant Process and the Partnership Grant Process. To maximise resources, improve efficiency and avoid duplication of effort to deliver against the Corporate Priorities of Northampton Borough Council (NBC).

There is an existing budget for the Partnership Fund of £550k which is administered through a grant application process. This is an open process which is available for all community and voluntary organisations to apply. The process is conducted annually and runs from July-June. A Service Level Agreement has been signed, between each of the funded organisations and NBC and a number of outcomes have been developed, to which 6 and 12 monthly monitoring is expected. CEFAP (Community Enabling Funding Advisory Panel) administers the grants process. The Panel is made up of 6 elected members, Partnerships and Communities Manager for NBC, Local Infrastructure Organisation (NVC), 2 Community representatives, including Deaf Connect and Age UK.

In addition there is £50k available through the small grants process, which is administered by Northampton Community Foundation (NCF) on behalf of NBC, for a fee of 6%. The process is ongoing throughout the year and runs from July-June There is a small grants panel made up of elected members who make decisions about which applications will be funded. There is a service level agreement in place between NBC and NCF. The Small Grants Panel administers the grants process. The Panel is made up of 4 elected members, Partnerships and Communities Manager for NBC, and NCF.

2. Context

Partnership Grants:

NBC currently grant fund 25 organisations, through the Partnership Grant. The service level agreements that are currently in place with these organisations are due to end on the 30th June 2014.

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The review identified the following:

1. The current priorities are determined on the type of service that is being provided, such as advice and guidance rather than the outcomes that are being delivered.
2. The historic allocation of grants over recent years has tended to result in the majority of funding being allocated to the same broad group of organisations which limits the scope for new applicants to successfully attract funding.
3. Elected members that sit on the CEFAP meeting feel they have a limited understanding of what the organisations do.
4. A lot of overlap between the organisations and duplication of activity.
5. Universally accepted move to encourage the sector to work more collaboratively and to deliver outcomes more cost effectively.
6. The principals of 'working together with the community and other agencies to provide services based on needs and joined up and accessible services that offer value for money and focus on the customer ' are particularly important in raising confidence and understanding of the commissioning process
7. Core funding for a lot of the organisations we are funding – providing back office support, rent, management costs etc.
8. Initial discussions have taken place with some of NBC internal services and external organisations, looking at need, overlap, duplication, gaps in service etc.
9. There is a clear overlap with the services that NBC grant fund and the services to be commissioned through the adult prevention contract

Small Grants:

The funding was underspent last year by 9k. Proposal to shorten the grant to 40k. This would leave £10k which could be aligned to the Forums to aid the delivery of action plans that we would look to develop and have in place for June 2014.

3. Conclusions

The process for 2014/15 was open between 6th January and 21st February 2014. It is now closed and we are currently working through the evaluation process. 67 Applications have been received, totalling 1.6million.

The following changes have been agreed and implemented for 2014/15:

1. Adopt a commissioning approach to directly support organisations of Northampton to improve the quality of life for residents, to build on and enhance plans and services which NBC currently provides or supports.

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Northampton Borough Council has clearly identified the outcomes that they would like to see delivered and asks that organisations link their outcomes to the ones defined by NBC

2. Outcomes to be defined against the Priorities within the Corporate Plan and include:

Priority	Outcomes
Northampton on Track	Successful and vibrant town, increased job opportunities
Invest in safer, cleaner neighbourhoods	A clean Town, tidy neighbourhoods, increased use and enjoyment of our parks and open spaces, increased feeling of safety and reduction in crime
Celebrate our Heritage and Culture	Celebration and enjoyment of the Town's heritage and culture
Making every £ go further	Shared services, delivery of value for money services, resources targeted to areas most in need
Better Homes for the future	People provided with timely advice and information to enable them to make informed choices, local housing needs provided, vulnerable people supported
Creating empowered communities	Empowered local communities with a greater capacity to become involved in community life, promote integration and cohesion
Promoting health & wellbeing	Improved public health, widen participation in leisure activities across all sections of the community
Responding to your needs	Appropriate support provided to those in most need, services are fair, accessible and responsive to individual needs residents and customers feel informed and engaged in service quality and design

3. Ask organisations why their service/project is needed and how they know it is (evidence/intelligence led)
4. Assessment process to be amended, scoring matrix introduced, each application will be scored by members of the CEFAP Panel. Recommendations will be made by the panel to the service director and portfolio holder for final approval.
5. Encourage future applications to involve collaboration between different organisations to deliver different elements of a service in partnership and look at developing a themed approach.

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4. Recommendations

The following has been agreed:

Partnership Grant:

For 2015/16

The process will be developed further. Explore options to Split the funding pot, to include a tender process and a grant funding process and allocate the pot into themes (aligned to the corporate priorities) i.e. safer communities, health, environment etc

1. Tendering process – developing a specification is most effective where it is possible to determine the required services and invite organisations to apply to deliver them, i.e. information, advice and guidance services. This would enable a more stringent assessment process against specified outcomes and ensure that organisations are being funded to deliver services that are required rather than those they wish to or that are nice to deliver.
2. Grant process – In other areas of priority like community engagement and community based projects it is more difficult to determine what is required as these tend to develop from localized community need rather than broader service requirement.

Small Grants:

For 2014/15

Reduce the allocation to NCF by 10k to support the delivery of the Community Forums events calendar and supporting action plans.

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Date 10 March 2014