Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – Our Manchester Voluntary and Community Sector Fund Task and Finish Group

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2018

Present:
Councillor Rawlins – In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Clay, M Dar and Kirkpatrick

Councillor S Murphy, Statutory Deputy Leader

Mike Wild, Macc
Sarah Whitelegg, Macc
Nigel Rose,Macc
Toni Good, Barlow Moor Community Association
Becky Elliott, Barlow Moor Community Association
Belay Kahsay, Manchester Refugee Support Network
Sam Turner, Back on Track
Graeme Urlwin, Harpurhey Neighbourhood Project

Apologies:
Councillor Russell

CESC/OMVCSF/18/03 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2018.

CESC/OMVCSF/18/04 Evidence From External Stakeholders

Macc

Members welcomed Mike Wild, Sarah Whitelegg and Nigel Rose from Macc.

Nigel Rose informed Members about his involvement in the co-design process and ensuring the assessment process was followed correctly. He reported that there had been a good co-design process, that communication had been good, that the governance arrangements were robust and that the Our Manchester principles were embedded in the process.

In response to a question on what could be improved, Mr Rose recommended clearer criteria for selecting participants for the co-design process, a more efficient decision process, a clearer discussion beforehand on how much organisations could bid for and better scenario planning for previously funded but unsuccessful organisations.

Sarah Whitelegg informed Members about the support which Macc had provided to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations during the process, including

information sessions, one-to-one support and support in completing the online application process, all of which, she reported, had received positive feedback.

Mike Wild welcomed the co-design process and that a significant grant fund was being made available at a time of austerity; however, he recognised that there were always lessons to be learnt, including how VCS groups could be better supported through the process. Ms Whitelegg added that feedback on the process before the announcement of the decisions had been positive.

Some of the key points that arose from the Task and Finish Group's discussions were:

- To welcome that the new funding scheme had been developed through a co-design process;
- To ask whether Macc had supported successful and unsuccessful groups following the decision;
- Whether support for VCS groups could be delivered differently;
- What could be done to develop the VCS sector in parts of the city which did not currently have a strong VCS sector;
- What opportunities there were for different VCS organisations to work together;
- Concerns that grants went to organisations which were experienced at writing grant bids, while other groups which did good work but did not have this expertise could miss out; and
- Whether funding could be targeted at groups which were not receiving funding from other sources, as some large organisations were receiving money from several sources.

Ms Whitelegg confirmed that Macc had provided support to successful VCS groups and advised that she could provide Members with a list. She advised Members that Macc had offered up to three hours of support to unsuccessful groups but that only a small number had responded and some groups had then struggled to attend sessions with Macc due to other commitments; however, she informed Members that Macc was working with the previously funded groups which had been unsuccessful in the first round and had received 12 months of funding. She reported that Macc had delivered workshops in different localities and was looking at how it could do things differently, for example, offering support sessions on evenings or weekends.

The Programme Lead informed Members that his team would work with Macc to build capacity in north Manchester and also build the capacity of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) VCS groups. Mr Wild reported that VCS groups in north Manchester tended to be less formal and outlined work Macc had been involved in to build the capacity of VCS groups in that part of the city. Ms Whitelegg advised that it could be challenging to get VCS groups to work together but that some groups were working together, sometimes as a result of funding requirements. The Programme Lead advised that there were plans to look at how organisations which had successfully obtained funding could support or partner with other organisations in future funding rounds. Mr Rose advised that, as part of the co-design process, the grant application form had been simplified to make it easier for groups which were doing good work but did not have expertise in writing grant applications.

Mr Wild advised Members that Macc published data on what funding VCS organisations were receiving. The Deputy Leader reported that the Council was encouraging groups to seek funding from a range of sources and not to rely solely on funding from the Council.

Decision

To thank the representatives from Macc for attending.

Groups which were awarded funding

Members welcomed Toni Good and Becky Elliott from Barlow Moor Community Association, Belay Kahsay from Manchester Refugee Support Network and Sam Turner from Back on Track, all organisations which had successfully bid for funding in the first round.

Toni Good informed Members that it had been a good, streamlined process, highlighting good communication, clear timescales which were adhered to, a good launch event and having the security of three years of funding. She advised that areas which could be improved were transparency on how members of the co-design team were chosen and for the follow-up event to be delivered by the Council rather than Macc. She reported that the follow-up event repeated some information from the launch event and some conflicting information was provided.

Belay Kahsay informed Members that information on the process was widely available and the application form was straightforward but that the number of words that could be entered under each section was limited. He advised that communication was better than in previous funding schemes and timescales were kept to. He praised the support provided by Macc. He also commented that organisations were required to provide evidence to back up their claims and that he felt the steps taken to validate the information provided was a strength of the process.

Sam Turner reported that it was generally a good process and better than most grant processes he had experienced. He praised the information received beforehand, the support from Macc and the robustness of the process, including the evidence which groups were required to provide. He reported that there were two different prospectus documents online and it would be simpler to have everything in one document.

Some of the key points that arose from the Task and Finish Group's discussions were:

- VCS organisations' capacity to support smaller VCS groups;
- Whether the groups felt the parameters of the scheme were clear; and
- Why Ms Good had commented that she would prefer the follow-up event to be delivered by the Council.

Ms Good informed Members that Barlow Moor Community Association already provided support to some smaller local groups. She reported that there had been uncertainty over whether VCS organisations could apply for more than they already received under the previous funds in order to plan for growth. The Chair requested that this be made clear in future. Ms Good commented that it would be better if the follow-up event had been delivered by the Council in order to ensure that all the information provided was clear and correct. The Programme Lead commented that his team had not been established at that time but, in future, would be able to ensure that consistent messages were communicated.

Decision

To thank the guests for attending.

Groups which were not awarded funding in the first round of applications

Members welcomed Graeme Urlwin from Harpurhey Neighbourhood Project (HNP), a previously funded VCS group which had been unsuccessful in the first funding round.

Mr Urlwin informed Members that HNP undertook asset-based work with local people, the nature of which was dependent on the individuals involved, so it was difficult to complete an application form asking what the group would do in future. He criticised the email sent to the group informing them that their bid was unsuccessful, which he stated was an impersonal, standard email. He advised that it would have been better to have received feedback on any problems with their bid and funding to address those issues, rather than to just be rejected. He reported that it was challenging for local people to understand how the funding process worked and expressed concern that the morale of the volunteers had been affected by the decision made. He informed Members that feedback on their bid had been received late and that he felt it was still unclear why the bid was unsuccessful. He also expressed concern that HNP had not been invited to take part in the co-design of the new process.

Some of the key points that arose from the Task and Finish Group's discussions were:

- Whether HNP had approached Macc for support and what support Macc should provide;
- Whether their experience would deter HNP from applying for funding in future; and
- Whether HNP had subsequently been awarded 12 months of funding and, if so, how this was being used.

Mr Urlwin informed Members that Macc had only been able to offer HNP a "health check", which would have been time-consuming, whereas what they wanted was help to diversify their funding. The Programme Lead reported that there were limits to the amount of support Macc could provide, due to limited resources. The Deputy Leader advised that the infrastructure contract (currently awarded to Macc) was coming to an end soon and that the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee would receive a report on the co-design of the new infrastructure contract. A

Member asked whether basic information on other sources of funding could be made available to VCS groups, to which the Programme Lead agreed.

Mr Urlwin advised that this experience would not deter HNP from applying for funding again in future but that they wanted greater clarity on the process and more consideration of what would happen to unsuccessful groups. He confirmed that HNP had subsequently been awarded 12 months of further funding and that this was being used to employ him as a part-time project director, to provide training to the management committee and to cover some running costs. He advised Members that he was employed on a temporary basis and that the skills of the volunteers were being developed so that they could run the organisation themselves in future. The Programme Lead reported that HNP had taken ownership of the situation and had developed an action plan to address this.

The Chair noted that representatives from two other unsuccessful groups had been invited to attend, one of whom had sent their apologies and one of whom had not arrived. She asked the Programme Lead to contact these organisations to ask why they had decided not to attend and whether they would be willing to provide written responses to the Task and Finish Group's questions. The Programme Lead advised that he would send the questions to the previously funded unsuccessful groups. The Chair requested that their responses be circulated to Members.

The Chair commented that the Programme Team had not been in place until towards the end of the process and that it would have been better if the team had been established earlier. The Deputy Leader advised that most VCS groups had found the process to be quite good but that there were lessons to be learnt on how to deal with previously funded organisations which were unsuccessful. The Programme Lead reported that the 16 unsuccessful organisations which had been granted 12 months funding all had an action plan in place (14 of which were developed with support from Macc). He advised that plans were being developed in relation not just to the organisations but also the service users which the organisations supported.

Decisions

1. To thank Mr Urlwin for attending.

2. To request that the Programme Lead send the Task and Finish Group's questions to the previously funded unsuccessful groups and that their responses be circulated to Members.

CESC/OMVCSF/18/05 Terms of Reference and Work Programme

The Task and Finish Group reviewed its terms of reference and work programme and discussed the issues Members wished to consider at future meetings.

Some of the key points that arose from the Task and Finish Group's discussions were:

- That, when the Task and Finish Group considered Members' input in the process at its next meeting, it was important to ensure that any revised

process was fair and transparent, utilising Members' knowledge of good work going on in their ward without allowing unfair influence in favour of any "pet projects";
- Concern about how the membership of the co-design group was decided;
- The importance of considering how funding particular VCS groups could positively impact on Council budgets by reducing demand for Council services; and
- How VCS groups could be encouraged to work together.

The Programme Lead recommended that at the next meeting Members consider what communication should take place with all Members of the Council as part of the funding process, what the role of the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee should be, the governance arrangements and the extent of Member involvement prior to the decision-making process. He advised Members that some VCS groups were already working together and that funding criteria could be used to encourage this. The Deputy Leader reported that a newsletter would shortly be sent to all Members of the Council informing them about the work the funded VCS groups were doing.

The Chair advised Members that she would meet with the Programme Lead and the Deputy Leader to discuss how to take some of the issues raised further and to discuss the issues to be covered at the next meeting, which would be held on Thursday 3 January 2019 at 10.00 am.

Decisions

1. To agree the work programme, subject to the above comments.

2. To note that the next meeting of the Task and Finish Group will take place on Thursday 3 January 2019 at 10.00 am.