

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

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 January 2019

Present:

Councillor Rawlins – In the Chair
Councillors Andrews, Clay, M Dar and Russell

Councillor S Murphy, Statutory Deputy Leader
Councillor Craig, Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing

Apologies:

Councillor Kirkpatrick

CESC/OMVCSF/19/01 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2018.

CESC/OMVCSF/19/02 Recap of Previous Meetings

The Programme Lead (Our Manchester Funds) provided an overview of the Task and Finish Group's previous two meetings, noting that Members had received a lot of background information at its first meeting and had then, at its second meeting, heard from guests from Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations about their experience of the process.

Decision

To note the overview provided of the previous meetings.

CESC/OMVCSF/19/03 Our Manchester Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Decision Making and Communications

The Task and Finish Group received the following documents for consideration:

- The Decision Making Flow Diagram;
- The Co-design of Grant Programmes Policy;
- The Grants Programme Booklet;
- An example of the Our Manchester VCS Fund newsletter; and
- An example of the Our Manchester VCS Fund Twitter account.

The Programme Lead informed Members that he had been planning to bring the Draft VCS Infrastructure Recommendations to this meeting but that they had not been available in time. He reported that he would circulate them to Members after the meeting.

Members discussed the way in which decisions from the first funding round had been communicated to unsuccessful groups. The Programme Lead reported that one of the lessons learnt from the first funding round was that the communication of the outcomes to organisations, particularly those which had been previously funded, could have been better and that this needed to change for future funding rounds. Members also discussed the timing of the communication of the information, before Christmas, but noted that it was important to give sufficient notice (current guidance 90 days) and not to delay informing the relevant groups.

Members discussed at what stage local Ward Councillors should be involved in the process, including when they should be informed of the decision made in relation to VCS organisations in their ward. The Programme Lead proposed that they be informed after the group had been informed but before the information was shared more widely. He advised that grants were awarded subject to a due diligence process and that Ward Councillors could provide evidence-based feedback as part of this. Members noted that this would only give Ward Councillors the opportunity to provide evidence to prevent an unsuitable group from obtaining funding, not to provide evidence to support a suitable group to obtain funding. A Member also expressed concern that it would be politically difficult for a Ward Councillor to intervene to stop a group obtaining funding. The Chair advised Members that decisions were taken based on evidence submitted and would not be influenced by lobbying from Ward Councillors. She also reported that groups were informed that any grants awarded were subject to a due diligence process.

The Programme Lead reported that the process had been co-designed by a range of stakeholders and that decisions were made based on this process and the evidence provided. The Deputy Leader advised that Members had been invited to be involved in the co-design process. The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing informed Members that the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee had received reports on the co-design of the new process so Committee Members had been aware of what was happening; however, other Members might not have read this information, despite it being available to them. Therefore, she advised that it was important to communicate effectively with all Members, rather than assume that they were aware of this, and she suggested that a fact sheet for Members could be helpful. She emphasised the importance of clarity about when and how Ward Councillors would be engaged in the process and also highlighted that some groups were based on communities of interest rather than geographic areas. The Deputy Leader reported that, although information had been provided to Members during the co-design process, it had been a long process and the information had been sporadic and that it was important to have a better flow of information and for it to be more straight-forward.

Members discussed whether other Ward Councillors could feed into the review of the process, highlighting the issues that this could raise, for example, noting that some Members were dissatisfied because of the outcome of the funding applications, rather than the process. A Member advised that Ward Councillors should only be able to have their say on the future process for the fund, not on any decisions which had already been taken. He further advised that having a clear procedure for Members' involvement in the process should remove the problem of Members trying to obtain information or have influence outside of that process.

A Member expressed concern that smaller local groups could be disadvantaged when competing for grants against groups which were part of larger national organisations. The Programme Lead reported that the grant application process had been designed to enable all groups to demonstrate their work, rather than to favour organisations which had expertise in writing grant applications. He also advised that it was important to have support sessions for local groups at different times and in different locations. The Chair suggested that anonymised versions of successful bids from the first funding round could be used as examples to show to groups in future funding rounds. She also suggested that some groups might benefit from presenting their application orally rather than through an application form.

In response to a Member's question, the Programme Lead reported that it was valuable to have a wide representation of different groups, such as large and small organisations, and groups from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities involved in the co-design and assessment processes. The Executive Member for Adult Health and Wellbeing advised that it could be useful to involve people with particular expertise on the Assessment Panel, for example, people with knowledge of a particular community or area of the city which had received less funding or people with expertise on carers. This could be done via briefings leading up to the Assessment Panel itself.

The Deputy Leader reported that the right decisions had been made regarding the groups which it had been unsuccessful but that the Council had learnt how to work with these groups to strengthen them and she reported that some of them were now in a stronger position than if they had just been awarded a grant.

Decision

To note that the Programme Lead will circulate the draft VCS infrastructure recommendations to Members of the Task and Finish Group.

CESC/OMVCSF/19/04 Improving Communications with Members

This was discussed as part of the previous item.

CESC/OMVCSF/19/05 Final Recommendations

A Member advised that the Task and Finish Group was not in a position to agree final recommendations at this meeting. He recommended that the Chair and the Programme Lead work together on a final report and recommendations, based on the discussions at the three meetings, which could be discussed and agreed at a further meeting of the Task and Finish Group. The Chair agreed to this.

Decision

To ask the Programme Lead and the Chair to work together on a final report and recommendations which can be discussed and agreed at a further meeting of the Task and Finish Group.

CESC/OMVCSF/19/06 Terms of Reference and Work Programme

The Task and Finish Group considered the Group's Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

Decision

To have a further meeting on 31 January 2019 at 2.00 pm to agree the Task and Finish Group's final report and recommendations.