

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

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2019

Present:

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

Councillor S Murphy, Deputy Leader

CESC/OMVCSF/19/07 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2019.

CESC/OMVCSF/19/08 Final Report and Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group considered the Group's draft final report and recommendations, which they were invited to comment on and agree. The report set out the background to the establishment of the Task and Finish Group, its objectives and the draft final recommendations, which related to communication, co-design, decision making and programme management and strategic development.

A Member advised that it was important that the co-design process was not dominated by larger organisations and that grassroots, local community groups were able to contribute. The Programme Lead agreed that this was important, stating that this was already built into the programme but that this could be made more explicit in the report.

Members discussed the recommendation that consideration be given to holding back some funds for allocation to underfunded and underrepresented areas and communities. A Member suggested that this could be more accurately described as money which was ring-fenced or reserved, rather than held back. Another Member suggested that this should be a percentage of the available funding. The Programme Lead agreed that the recommendation should be amended to state that a percentage of the funding would be ring-fenced. The Deputy Leader advised that, where the funding was from another organisation, this would have to be done with that organisation's agreement.

A Member reported that it was important that the Assessment Panel came from a wide range of backgrounds and requested that Members be informed of who was on the Assessment Panel before this was made public. He also stated that it was important that small grassroots groups did not unfairly miss out where larger organisations were providing services across multiple wards. The Programme Lead advised Members that this was built into the process as decisions were made based on the evidence provided and on groups having a Manchester-based connection, rather than larger organisations being favoured. The Deputy Leader informed

Members that organisations had to state on the application form which wards they would be working in.

Members discussed situations where the plans of a VCS group conflicted with other Council priorities, for example regeneration plans, and how collaborative working between different Council services and VCS groups should be used to identify a solution. The Deputy Leader advised Members of cases where creative solutions had been identified to such issues and reported that the Council would try to find solutions wherever possible. In response to a Member's question, the Programme Lead informed Members about discussions taking place with housing providers and the Council's Corporate Property service about how different partners could align their strategies and work together better on asset development and Community Asset Transfers. A Member advised that this work should also include parks. The Chair commented that the rent charged to community groups needed to be more transparent and consistent.

A Member asked how Members' knowledge of VCS groups in their wards could be captured. The Deputy Leader reported that Ward Councillors usually informed her if they had any concerns about VCS groups in their ward. A Member expressed concern that new Members were not aware of who they should contact about this, to which the Deputy Leader suggested that this be included in the induction process for new Members.

A Member commented that, while he did not think that Members should be able to take part in the decision making process, they should be made aware if VCS groups in their ward were applying for funding. The Group discussed the most appropriate timing and method for communicating this information. The Chair suggested that the application form could encourage applicants to inform their Ward Councillors that they had applied; however, a Members advised that this could create a barrier for groups who did not have a good relationship with their Ward Councillors. The Programme Lead advised that it was only practical to provide this information after the closing date, rather than on an individual basis as and when applications or enquiries were received.

The Deputy Leader recommended that all Members be informed that funding was being made available so that they could share this information with VCS groups in their ward. She further recommended that, after the closing date and once the first sift of applications had been completed, Members could be informed of the groups being considered for funding. She advised that, if Members had serious, evidence-based concerns about any of these groups, they could raise it at this point. The Programme Lead recommended that the timing of communication with Members be subject to further reflection due to the issues which could arise, for example, if VCS groups that Members felt deserved funding had not applied, had missed the deadline or had been removed from the list on the first sift. A Member reported that sometimes VCS groups in a ward could request funding for the same thing but that a Ward Councillor could help to reduce this duplication and encourage groups to work together.

The Chair thanked Members for their contribution to the work of the Task and Finish Group and a Member thanked the Chair for her work.

Decision

To agree the final report and recommendations, subject to the above amendments.