



SUPPORTING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is twofold:
 - To seek approval for funding from the Grant Aid budget to provide a package of financial support to struggling voluntary and community groups including Community Resource Centres in Nottinghamshire
 - To seek approval to support a programme, in conjunction with the Big Lottery to work with voluntary and community organisations to provide technical, business and financial investment to help embed business acumen and thereby greater sustainability across the sector in Nottinghamshire

Information & Advice

Maximizing County Council Grant Aid

2. Members have, at previous meetings of this Sub Committee, discussed options for allocating any remaining unallocated monies in the grant aid budget. Members have been particularly keen to maximise the grant aid budget to provide support to locally based voluntary groups working with communities, who are at risk of reducing or, at worse closing their service and so in many cases creating greater difficulties for vulnerable citizens who rely on these voluntary services.
3. At a previous meeting of this Sub Committee, Mick McGrath, East Midlands Regional Head of the Big Lottery made a presentation on the work of The Big Lottery in Nottinghamshire and discussed with Members opportunities for working with the County Council to support the voluntary and community sector in Nottinghamshire.
4. As a result, the Community and Voluntary Sector Team Manager has met with The Big Lottery to develop a programme of support and funding to struggling groups across the county.

Community Resource Centres [CRCs]

5. Over previous years, the County Council has supported as many as 20 CRCs in any one year through both financial investment and with technical support. During 2011/12, 10 CRCs received County Council support. This support focused on enabling these facilities to make the journey from a full dependency on grant aid support to one where trading income is to the fore, making them more resilient in changing times. The County Council's investment has been made both financially and practically.

6. Unfortunately as the economic climate has worsened, the impact on the voluntary sector, including CRCs has resulted in them refocusing their priorities, whilst facing more demand from local communities. The CRCs generally are organisations that act as a key link between the people within a community, the delivery of local services and a wide range of statutory, voluntary, private and indeed faith-based sector activity – and generally provide bases for “making things happen”.
7. They all use a mix of volunteer and staff time to effectively manage these facilities whilst allowing people to be involved directly from their community. They do this whilst seeking to maintain their facilities through the employment of business models and the securing of trading income, a solution which for some is a constant struggle due to barriers such as location, the quality of the facilities, local income patterns and a generally difficult financial environment.
8. While CRCs vary in their objectives, they share a number of commonalities in that mostly they are:
 - locally owned and managed as independent organisations and as such are registered with Companies House as companies limited by guarantee and / or have charitable status;
 - can be differentiated from those community centres run directly by the statutory (eg District and Parish Councils) sector;
 - provide a wide and diverse range of services and facilities for their respective local communities – a one-stop-shop approach – which differentiates them from single-focus agencies;
 - in general CRCs mostly have assets in the form of the community building, being in their direct ownership or on long leases and they serve communities where local people are keen to make things happen and to respond to local issues
9. A review was commissioned by the Grant Aid sub-committee has found significant projected financial shortfalls and a gap in support for vulnerable communities in ever increasingly difficult times, it is recommended that given the valued and important role these CRCs play within communities that the Centres are invited to apply for support from the grant aid budget.
10. The CRCs identified are organisations that the Community & Voluntary Sector team are aware of and continue to work with to varying degrees – offering what can be described as “in-kind” support. There may be other groups across the county that would meet a broad definition of Community Resource Centre/Community Hub.
11. This will be supported by a joint programme of help, guidance and investment with the Big Lottery as outlined above

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

12. To maximise targeted joint working at locality level to support the voluntary and community sector, including the CRCs, to continue to support vulnerable individuals and communities. This programme, whilst requiring a ‘one off’ contribution from the Grant Aid Budget will provide a model of good practice and a legacy for collaborative working

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. It is recommended that

- A joint approach between the County Council and the Big Lottery to developing a programme of practical and financial support to struggling VCS groups in Nottinghamshire is approved
- The sum of £94,000 is allocated from the Grant Aid Budget to support this programme
- This funding is made available from a transfer from the underspend in the staffing element of the Grant Aid budget 2012/2013

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Constitutional Comments

The Grant Aid Sub-Committee has authority to approve the recommendations set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference. (NAB 16.01.13)

Financial Comments (DJK 15.01.2013)

The contents of this report are duly noted; the saving of £94,000 has been verified and will be utilised temporarily in 2012/2013 to fund the voluntary and community groups.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

ALL