

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF GRANT AID REVIEW TASK AND FINISH SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 14 MARCH 2016
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.05 - 7.35 PM**

Members Present: C P Pond (Chairman), J Knapman (Vice-Chairman), A Mitchell, G Shiell and B Surtees

Other members present: H Kane

Apologies for Absence: A Boyce and S Murray

Officers Present J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services)), G Wallis (Community, Health & Wellbeing Manager) and G J Woodhall (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance: -

32. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that no substitutes had been appointed for this meeting.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct.

34. MINUTES

Resolved:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2016 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

35. GRANT AID REVIEW - FINAL REPORT 2015/16

J Chandler introduced the draft final report of the Panel for 2015/16.

J Chandler reminded the Panel that it had reviewed one-off major grants during 2014/15 and had reported its findings to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 27 April 2015. Those findings were agreed and the Panel was requested to review those Grants issued as part of a three-year Service Level Agreement during 2015/16.

The Panel noted that it had considered the various criteria for the distribution of funding, the monitoring and evaluation for each Grant awarded, and the Service Level Agreements applied. More detailed consideration had been given to the higher level funding agreements for Voluntary Action Epping Forest and Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau, both of whom had given presentations to the Panel. In addition, visits were made by the Panel to various organisations in receipt of Grant Aid funding. Five recommendations had been proposed by the Panel:

- (1) *That the current level of Grant Aid funding be maintained;*
- (2) *That, from 1 April 2016, Grant Aid funding of less than £5,000 per annum for three years be provided for Voluntary Groups without the need for a formal Service Level Agreement, but subject to the receipt of an annual report from each Group outlining the benefit to the District from the funding;*
- (3) *That the revised Service Level Agreement as agreed by the Panel be adopted by the Council;*
- (4) *That provision for longer term funding by the District Council to Voluntary Action Epping Forest and Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau be maintained from 2016/17 onwards, based upon performance management benchmarking closely monitored on an annual basis; and*
- (5) *That a more rigorous approach of monitoring be adopted for the higher Grant Aid awards currently in operation for Voluntary Action Epping Forest and Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau.*

The Panel had concluded that the recommended revisions to the Service Level Agreements and improved monitoring of performance management would ensure that the Council was obtaining best value from the Grants awarded. The Panel particularly felt that the level of the remaining Grant Aid funding should remain at current levels to ensure that support of the essential services provided by the voluntary sector could be continued.

The Panel was requested to consider the draft Final Report for 2015/16, and whether any further amendments should be made prior to its consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 19 April 2016.

The Panel felt that Cllr Murray and N Wilkinson (Grant Aid Clerical Assistant) should be added to the acknowledgements in the Chairman's Foreword, and that the Recommendations should be in bold text. The Panel then reviewed the draft Final Report, page by page, and made a number of typographical revisions.

Cllr Surtees suggested that a chart explaining the different levels of Grants available to applicants should be made available to accompany the application forms. G Wallis accepted that this should have probably been done during the first stage of the Review; however, Cllr Kane emphasised that this information was explained in full on the application forms, along with the disclaimer that applications were not guaranteed to be approved for the full amount requested. Cllr Pond highlighted that there needed to be effective service monitoring for all Groups receiving Grant Aid funding from the Council, particularly Voluntary Action Epping Forest and Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau.

J Chandler stated that the Panel had now completed all aspects of its work relating to the review of the Council's Grant Aid Scheme, and that there were no further meetings of the Panel scheduled. If the Panel's report was agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee then it would be submitted to the meeting of the Finance & Performance Management Cabinet Committee scheduled for 16 June 2016.

Resolved:

- (1) That the draft Final Report of the Panel for 2015/16 be agreed, subject to the

following revisions:

- (a) adding Cllr Murray and N Wilkinson to the acknowledgements within the Chairman's Foreword;
- (b) displaying the Panel's Recommendations in bold text;
- (c) amending paragraph 3 to read "...across a range of *District, Borough, City and Unitary* Councils in Essex...";
- (d) replacing the word "...*suggested*..." in paragraphs 4 and 5 with the word "...*decided*...";
- (e) amalgamating paragraphs 4 and 5;
- (f) removing paragraph 7 as there was no reason to accentuate the activities of certain groups ;
- (g) revising the start of paragraph 10 to read "It was *found* that simpler...";
- (h) revising the first sentence of paragraph 11 to read "It was *recognised* that the...current form *would be* terminated on 31 March...";
- (i) removing "*As agreed at the scoping meeting,*" from the start of paragraph 12;
- (j) removing "*Following the presentation and*" from the start of paragraph 15;
- (k) revising the first sentence of paragraph 17 to read "*Members considered the current funding ...*";
- (l) removing paragraph 18 as it actually contradicted the recommendations; and

(2) That, as amended above, the approved Final Report of the Panel for 2015/16 be submitted to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and recommended for adoption at its meeting scheduled for 19 April 2016.

36. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Panel noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration.

37. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Panel noted that there was no business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press.

38. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted that this was their last scheduled meeting.