

Report to Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Panel



Report Reference: GAR-003-2015/16

Date of meeting: 28 September 2015

Subject: Review of Grant Aid Scheme – Service Level Agreements

Responsible Officer: Chris Overend (01992 564247)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1)) That, having considered the information received from the various groups and comparative data from other local authorities, Members recommend whether to maintain provision for longer term funding by way of Service Level Agreements (SLAs), from 2016/17 onwards, through the Grant Aid Scheme and, if so, the criteria for determining whether an SLA might be applicable.

Reason for decision:

When the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Panel were determined, it was agreed that the review of arrangements in respect of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) would be dealt with during the second stage in 2015/16. At the first meeting of the Panel during this Council year, on 20 July 2015, it was decided that consideration should be given to the various SLAs (other than in respect of the CAB and VAEF) at this, the second meeting. To assist Members in that regard, it was agreed that further information in relation to the groups and comparative data with other Essex authorities should be made available, with arrangements made for Members to be able to visit a small selection of the groups concerned.

Report:

1. The present 'two-tier' Grant Aid Scheme was set up in the 1990s. This was in response to a growing recognition that there were a number of well-established voluntary groups which, to develop their services further, were in need of a degree of financial security over a longer period. At the time, many other local authorities also entered such agreements with local voluntary groups.

2. The then Grant Aid Panel determined the eligibility criteria for receiving three year funding through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the District Council. Such groups must have received at least one previous 'one-off' grant of £1,000 or more; be the main or an important provider of the service within the District; be able to sign a formal three year agreement with the Council; be already working in partnership with the Council (or developing a partnership with it) and ideally have done so for a number of years. The criteria have remained unchanged since the two-tier scheme was set up.

3. The list of groups funded through an SLA has changed over the years. Some groups have been in receipt of funding by way of an SLA throughout the time that such agreements have operated. Some groups have been added to the list, whilst others are no longer on it. The range of services provided by some of the groups has altered over the years and in some instances the organisational structure may have changed. For instance, some groups have moved towards a more regional or wider-area approach, often for reasons associated

with economies of scale.

4. At present there are 15 voluntary groups in receipt of SLAs and they provide a variety of services. The groups concerned and the amounts they receive per annum are indicated below. There has been no increase in these amounts since 2010. Information in respect of all but one of those groups with regard to their objectives, the impact they feel they have on the District, how grant funding contributes to their activities/services, plans in respect of future provision and copies of the latest income/expenditure accounts are attached to this agenda:

(a)	Alzheimer's Society	£1,722
(b)	British Red Cross	£3,982
(c)	Carers' Trust	£4,529
(d)	Lambourne End Centre	£2,765
(e)	Loughton Voluntary Care Association	£2,990
(f)	North Weald Airfield Museum	£2,265
(g)	Ongar & Villages Voluntary Care	£1,772
(h)	Rural Community Council for Essex	£1,272
(i)	Samaritans	£2,765
(j)	VAEF Gardening	£1,772
(k)	VAEF Home Safety	£4,529
(l)	Victim Support	£3,982
(m)	WAY 2000	£4,529
(n)	Zinc Arts	£4,529

5. There are a number of standard features in each of the SLAs in terms of requirements of the groups e.g. the supply of accounts, minutes of meetings and publicising the fact that support is being given by the District Council. The service specification will obviously vary dependent on the nature and objectives of the group as will some of the information requirements. For instance, some groups might be required to provide client figures whilst others supply attendance figures.

6. Information regarding the current arrangements at other Essex Districts/Boroughs is shown in the attached schedule. Overall, the number of local authorities having SLAs with voluntary groups has declined, as has the total number of such funding agreements. Nonetheless, as it will be noted, arrangements for SLAs still apply in a number of Districts. Sample copies of the SLAs used by this Council and others in Essex will be circulated at the meeting.

7. Having received the information requested and the opportunity to visit some of the groups, Members are now asked to consider the existing arrangements and make recommendations with regard to SLAs from 2016/17 onwards. There are a number of options in that regard and these include (with possible variations), maintaining the criteria similar to those which exist at present, reducing the number of SLAs, perhaps with amended criteria regarding the impact of the group's services on the District, or dispensing with SLAs altogether. In that regard, Members are reminded of the decision made in the first stage of the review that, any group in receipt of an SLA from 1 April 2016, would be required to show 'added value' through their services on a year by year basis.

Resource implications:

Budget Provision:

The Grant Aid Budget for 2015/16 is set at £83,453, of which £43,453 is committed on the existing SLAs.

Personnel:

The Community, Policy and Grants Manager and Assistant are responsible for administering

the scheme. They do so in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services and with the involvement of officers from Community Services and Finance.

Land:
N/A.