

AGENDA ITEM: 11

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Meeting	Cabinet Resources Committee
Date	16 February 2006
Subject	Grant Application, 2005/06
Report of	Cabinet Member for Policy & Performance
Summary	This report attaches an assessment of an application by Barnet Voluntary Service Council for a three-year grant, for decision by the committee in accordance with the procedure for approving voluntary sector grants of between £20,000 and £50,000 pa.

Officer Contributors	Community Partnerships Manager
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards affected	Not applicable
Enclosure	Grant assessment - Barnet Voluntary Service Council: Volunteer Support and Promotion Service
For decision by	Cabinet Resources Committee
Function of	Executive
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in (if appropriate)	Not applicable

Contact for further information: Ken Argent, Manager, Grants Unit, 020 8359 2020

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That, subject to the council's standard conditions of grant aid and to the special conditions set out in the assessment, the grant recommended be approved.**

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet Dec 21/5/2001-6: adoption of scheme of delegated powers, reserving to the Cabinet Resources Committee approval of grants of between £20,000 and £50,000.
- 2.2 Cabinet Dec 3/9/2001-16: review of the grants programme, 1999 to 2002, and approval of principles and criteria for grant aid over the four years, 2002-06, with the primary aims of targeting support to facilitate the council's policy framework and continuing to create resources to promote new initiatives developed either by new organisations or those currently receiving grant support.
- 2.3 Council 1/3/2005-185: approval of Borough Treasurer's Service Performance Management Plan and budget for 2005/06.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Corporate Plan sets out as one of the council's key priorities 'Supporting the Vulnerable in our Community', acknowledging that every sector of every community has a right to lead full and independent lives. Importance is attached to working with the voluntary and community sector in support of this objective, and to promoting the value of volunteering, self-help and good citizenship. Giving people the opportunity to participate in volunteering contributes to building a socially cohesive society and to developing an involved community of active citizens.
- 3.2 The grant recommended with this report supports the development of volunteering opportunities in the borough and recognises the synergy that exists between the strategic promotion and support of the voluntary and community sector and volunteer recruitment and placement. It accords with the existing Service Performance Management Plan and the four-year development programme, which includes offering a mix of funding types to ensure that the grants programme remains flexible and responsive to changing priorities, and focusing on meeting quality standards and attaining outcomes.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 All grants are made subject to the council's Standard Conditions of Grant Aid, with which applicants are required to signify their compliance by signing a written undertaking. Amongst other things, the conditions cover how awards are spent, allowing council officers a right of access to proof thereof, and requiring notification of any change in an organisation's circumstances which significantly affect its finances, operations or grant entitlement. The council reserves the right to withhold payment of any approved grant, or to demand full or partial

repayment, if it appears that an organisation has failed to comply with any of the conditions attached to the award.

- 4.2 In common with all revenue grants of £10,000 and above, the award recommended herewith will be released in quarterly instalments, subject to monitoring to demonstrate satisfactory compliance with targets and outcomes agreed in advance.

5. FINANCIAL, STAFFING, ICT AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Set out below are details of the funds available for 2005/06, showing the sums allocated to date by the Cabinet and the Cabinet Resources Committee and in delegated grants reports 1 to 9:

Budget item	2005/06 budget £	Approvals / Commitments to date £	Funds available £	Recommended to this meeting £
General Fund:				
main fund	779,010	329,810*		
less reserve for fixed-term grants		370,370	78,830	36,750
small grants	70,000	40,840	29,160	0
contracts	440,870	440,870	0	0
TOTAL	1,289,880	1,181,890	107,990	36,750
Edward Harvist Charity:				
community fund	55,000	20,775	34,225	0
training fund	5,000	2,310	2,690	0
TOTAL	60,000	23,085	36,915	0
Borough Lottery:				
TOTAL	15,000	3,950	11,050	0

(* This sum incorporates an award of £17,500 approved by the Cabinet in July to Hornsey YMCA towards implementation of a new youth project at Church Farm, for

which no provision was made in the 2005/06 grants budget. The Cabinet agreed that any consequent overspend on the budget up to an equivalent sum will be re-imbursed).

6. LEGAL ISSUES

6.1 None.

7. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS

7.1 Paragraph 3.8 of Part 3 of the Constitution reserves to the Cabinet Resources Committee the power to approve grants to voluntary organisations to the value of between £20,000 and £50,000 per annum.

8. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8.1 Attached is an assessment of an application by Barnet Voluntary Service Council for a fixed-term grant in support of its new Volunteer Support and Promotion Service.

9. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 Grant application and monitoring data.

9.2 Anyone wishing to inspect the background papers should telephone 020 8359 2020 or 2092.

Legal: VWR
CFO: MG

GRANT APPLICATION 2005/06 – ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

Corporate Priority	Supporting the Vulnerable in our Community	
Organisation	BARNET VOLUNTARY SERVICE COUNCIL - Volunteering Support & Promotion Service	Ref 21/C/UMB
Address	52 Moxon Street, Barnet	

Contribution to policy

The council attaches a high priority to working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and to promoting the value of volunteering, self-help and good citizenship. An active, vibrant and well-resourced voluntary sector provides opportunities for people to help others; apply and develop their skills; and contribute to an improved quality of life in their local communities. The development of volunteering in the community contributes to encouraging active citizenship and to building a socially cohesive society.

As the main umbrella body open to all voluntary and community groups in Barnet, Barnet Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) aims to promote, co-ordinate and support voluntary and community activity across the borough. By offering a range of information, advice, resources, consultancies and training to its 280 member groups, encouraging and supporting new voluntary activity and providing a voice for the sector in strategic partnerships, it helps underpin effective and efficient joint working.

The addition of a Volunteering Recruitment and Promotion Service to BVSC's core functions recognises the natural synergy that exists between support for voluntary and community organisations and volunteering, and brings the arrangements for volunteer recruitment/placement and the strategic co-ordination and support of voluntary and community activity in Barnet into line with the majority of other local authorities, where one organisation handles both functions rather than two, as was previously the case here.

Outline of activities/project and service evaluation

BVSC's principal functions are to:

- * provide a focal point for local voluntary/community groups to co-operate and discuss local needs;
- * act as a primary channel of communication with statutory agencies;
- * represent and co-ordinate the involvement of the voluntary/community sector in strategic multi-agency partnerships;
- * collect and distribute information of interest and relevance to the sector;
- * provide access to training courses on management and development issues;
- * maintain and improve standards of financial control through training and practical support;
- * promote and support the development of new initiatives;
- * produce newsletters and a quarterly magazine ('Link'), and organize photocopying/printing at low cost for local groups;
- * provide professional administrative support to special interest networks.

In addition to these core functions, BVSC operates various specific projects designed to meet the needs of vulnerable or under-represented sections of the community, including:

- * an organisational development service, offering advice and support to new and developing groups;
- * a community accountancy project ('BECAP') (in conjunction with Enfield Voluntary Action), offering training on setting up accountancy and financial management systems and one-to-one advice and consultancy;
- * a funding advice service, providing help, guidance and training on identifying and accessing external sources of funding; and
- * the co-ordination of sub-regional working, training and learning (across Barnet, Enfield, Haringey and Waltham Forest) as hosts of the North London CVS Development Project.

It also acts as the lead agency for Barnet Children's Fund and one direct service project, 'Advocacy in Barnet'.

This application seeks to extend the council's support for re-establishing a volunteering recruitment and development service in Barnet.

The closure of Barnet Volunteer Bureau (BVB) at the end of March 2004 left the borough without any strategic support for volunteers and the organisations working with them. Many willing volunteers struggled to find suitable opportunities in Barnet and were lost to local groups. In view of the impact on many of its members experiencing problems in recruiting suitable volunteers, not only to help with frontline service delivery but also to serve as trustees or members of management committees, BVSC commissioned an independent study into the range of support that was required.

The outcome demonstrated a clear need for a new volunteer support service, especially amongst groups with limited resources, and, in particular, a brokerage function that matched volunteers to opportunities; supported and advised them; and provided information on volunteering.

Following the recommendations of the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service that volunteering support becomes a generic infrastructure function of member organisations, BVSC took the decision last year to add a volunteer support and development service to its core activities. Incorporating the key functions of a volunteering development service recommended by the national parent body, Volunteering Development England (VDE), the new service seeks to:

- * broker local volunteering opportunities, searching out volunteers and linking them with local organisations;
- * maintain and develop an accessible and up to date database of volunteering opportunities, computer based with Internet application;
- * promote and support good practice for organisations using volunteers to ensure flexible and high quality placements;
- * increase awareness of the value and benefits of volunteering to the wider public, local businesses and the statutory and public sectors;
- * provide a central point of contact and expertise, informing strategic policy-making and planning regarding volunteering at a local level.

The framework for, and design of, the new service has followed extensive research into national volunteering policy and database tools; advice from VDE; visits to established volunteer centres; and meetings with major stakeholders in Barnet who rely on volunteers to deliver their services. A full-time manager to run the service was appointed in September. Since then, work has focused on developing procedures, such as to enable volunteers and organisations to

register, and drafting a policy manual; an information pack for volunteers; and best practice guidelines for organisations employing volunteers.

The promotion of the service commenced in earnest in January, and will lead up to its official launch on 2 March 2006. A series of marketing events are planned, and there will be features in BVSC's 'Link' magazine and the local press, plus outreach sessions at various public locations. Full information, including a proforma for registration purposes, is to be placed on BVSC's website, which will carry regular updates. There will also be a link on the relevant web pages to the National Volunteering Database, which will include details of all new volunteering opportunities in Barnet.

Informal publicity has already resulted in over 50 requests for placements from volunteers, all of whom have been signposted to local organisations. The brokerage element of the service is gathering momentum following the recent recruitment of a part-time co-ordinator, whose responsibilities include conducting a full vetting procedure on new organisations seeking volunteer help.

The new service will integrate with the work of Barnet Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme, which arranges volunteering opportunities for people aged 50 and over, and with the national 'Millennium Volunteers' scheme, aimed at encouraging volunteering amongst young people aged between 16 and 25 and currently being promoted in secondary schools in Barnet. Discussions are also under way with a view to targeting students at Barnet College and Middlesex University.

Future proposals include the recruitment of volunteers to assist in administering the service; the establishment of a volunteer co-ordinators' network to share good practice and raise awareness of national and local developments; and a special event during Volunteers Week in June to build on local interest.

Besides the advantages of having one point of contact in the borough for all voluntary sector and volunteering enquiries, increasingly funding agencies are looking for greater collaboration amongst local groups to improve effectiveness and sustainability, and to minimise duplication and address gaps in services. This is especially true in the case of the Home Office's Active Community Unit, applications to whose Infrastructure Funding Scheme, 'ChangeUp', have had to demonstrate compliance with this criteria and greater capacity for volunteer engagement and management.

The Community Partnerships Manager comments that the development and expansion of volunteering opportunities is embedded in local strategic plans, and is identified in the draft Community Strategy, for publication in April, as one of the measures of success of the objective of creating communities in which local people play an active part in the life of the borough and generate civic pride.

Quality and equality

As the principal support agency for the voluntary/community sector in Barnet, BVSC aims to be a model of good practice and is committed to participation, partnership, accountability and community involvement, and to working towards continuous improvement in all aspects of its work. Quality assurance is addressed through independent surveys; individual and group comments on services; training course evaluation forms; feedback on fundraising successes; and levels of participation in BVSC activities. It is fully committed to equal opportunities in service provision and recruitment of staff and committee members.

In the latest membership survey, 66% of respondents thought that BVSC was providing an effective service (33% did not comment) and all of its services except two were given an average rating of "3" on a scale of one to four.

As a newly emerging volunteer centre, BVSC is now a member of VDE and the Greater London Volunteer Network, through which most of the training needs of the two new members of staff will be met. The Volunteering Support & Promotion Service reflects national policy on volunteering, downloaded from the Institute for Volunteering Research's website, and best practice as recommended by VDE. The operation of the service is being supervised by BVSC's chief executive and monitored by its board of trustees, which is to be strengthened by the recruitment of one or more new members with experience of managing volunteering services.

Work on achieving quality accreditation for the service from VDE will begin later this year and will take up to six months. Thereafter, it will be subject to re-evaluation every three years.

Cost and financial need

BVSC's annual turnover has grown to more than £700,000, of which over 90% is funded from grants and contracts, which include fixed-term awards from a variety of sources for most of its projects. The balance of expenditure is largely met from membership fees and charges. Net current assets at 31/3/2005 were £202,161, of which £200,153 were restricted or designated funds, leaving an uncommitted balance of £2,008 (less than 1% of total expenditure).

The council's annual core funding, secured by a rolling three-year contract, this year amounts to £86,647, and constitutes 12% of its total revenue. BVSC is also in receipt of three fixed-term project awards from the grants budget. These comprise £30,250 (extending to June 2006) for the community accountancy project (match funded by the London Boroughs Grants Scheme); £52,920 (extending to February 2007) towards the development of community engagement; and £106,830 (extending to October 2008) as renewed support for the funding advice service, approved by the Cabinet Resources Committee at its last meeting.

Service agreements with Adult Social Services and the Children & Families Service support BVSC's specific activities in those areas, including administration of the Children's Fund.

In March 2005, it was awarded a start-up grant of £40,750 for the Volunteer Support & Promotion Service, of which £4,000 was towards one-off costs of setting up and equipping an office. The grant was made on the understanding that BVSC could re-apply for a further grant in the light of progress and success in securing matching funding.

The request is for a three-year grant of £36,750 pa, replicating the revenue element of the existing year's award.

The budget for 2006/07 shows expenditure of £84,539, of which £69,069 are staffing costs comprising the salaries of the full-time manager and part-time co-ordinator; an apportionment of the salary of an administrative worker; on-costs; training; and travelling expenses. The balance includes a contribution to premises overheads; administrative and other support costs; and project management.

£47,781 has been secured for the project in three tranches of funding for 2006/07 from 'ChangeUp', which will defray 57% of projected expenditure. The 'ChangeUp' grants are for one year only. No information is currently available concerning the continuity of Home Office support for voluntary sector infrastructure development via a successor funding regime.

Grant recommendation, type and conditions

£36,750 (year one of three-year project grant)
**+ approval in principle to replicating the award
in 2006/07 and 2007/08**

Project grant *
One-year revenue grant
One-off/start-up grant

Special conditions:

The award should be made subject to (i) agreement on targets and outcomes; (ii) regular monitoring and satisfactory compliance with the targets and outcomes set; and (iii) matching funding and budgetary provision for supporting the service, as agreed in principle, in years two and three.

Duration of project and exit strategy (project grants only)

The grant is for a three-year period extending to March 2009. The continuation of the Volunteer Support & Promotion Service thereafter will be subject to review in the light of ongoing demand and performance, and in the context of BVSC's financial management strategy, involving a variety of funding streams to maintain specific elements of its work.

Target grant outcomes (for monitoring and evaluation)

To establish a new volunteering centre in Barnet, involving the brokerage and development of volunteering opportunities; support and advice for organisations using volunteers; and promotion of the value and benefits of volunteering.

Date: February 2006