

OPEN SPACES GRANTS REVIEW WORKING PARTY

Wednesday, 16 September 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Open Spaces Grants Review Working Party held at the Guildhall EC2 at 9.30 am.

Present

Members:

Verderer Peter Adams	Alderman Ian Luder
Deputy John Barker	Virginia Rounding
Councillor Bryan Collier MBE	Graeme Smith
Martyn Foster	Jeremy Simons

Officers:

Natasha Dogra	Town Clerk's Department
Sue Ireland	Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	Superintendent, Epping Forest
Andy Barnard	Superintendent, Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common
Bob Warnock	Superintendent, Hampstead Heath
Esther Sumner	Open Spaces Business Manager
Edward Wood	Controllers and City Solicitor's Department
Mark Jarvis	Chamberlain's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Alderman Haines and George Abrahams.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

There were no declarations.

3. OPEN SPACES GRANTS REVIEW - PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION PAPER

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces informing Members that following the corporate cross cutting review of grants, the Open Spaces Committees agreed to establish a working party to consider the current position and to make recommendations in respect of establishing a 'jointly governed and accessible to all' grants programme for open spaces.

Members noted that the definition of a 'grant' for the purposes of the review was "*an award to an external organisation or individual to undertake an activity or produce an outcome which the City Corporation is not required to do under statutory obligation – or which furthers the charitable objects of the charity from which the payment is made - and which has been (or should be) awarded as a result of an openly publicised and transparent process of prioritisation against clearly pre-defined objectives.*" This definition excludes internal transfers between different parts of the City Corporation, commissioned services, discretionary donations, subscriptions, sponsorship, ongoing legal commitments and unallocated Community Infrastructure Levy.

Members thanked Officers for compiling the report and noted that the City of London, acting through the Common Council was the corporate trustee of the open spaces charities and under the current Committee terms of reference delegated the exercise of those trustee functions to various Committees of the Common Council.

Members noted that currently there was very limited monitoring in place and grants were given without outcomes being specified and agreed. The report noted that Members may find it helpful to consider instructing Officers to develop a consistent and proportionate framework for specifying and monitoring outcomes for grants. Although Members were supportive of this, particularly in respect of the small scale grants, Members gave a clear steer in respect of the role of the Open Spaces being one of open space provision rather than grant giving.

The Working Party noted that currently the open spaces committees provided some £90,000 of grant funding to local groups, however Members noted that a number of these grants could be considered 'commissioned activity or services' or 'events supported by the City of London Corporation' / 'events jointly run'. Members noted that the majority of the grant funding was provided to the Field studies Council, Lower Mole Countryside Management Project and Downlands Countrywide Management Project. Members noted in particular that there may be cases where it would be appropriate to consider alternative, strategic sources of grant funding rather than grants through the Open Spaces charities.

In response to a query, Members noted that the open spaces charities did not all benefit from endowment funds to meet the relevant charity's objects and where they did those funds were inadequate to meet the current costs of administering the charity and funding current activities. That deficit was met by the City from City's Cash. Resource allocation was the responsibility of Policy and Resources Committee, and budgets for Departments and Spending Committees were set by Finance Committee.

The Director said that a further £140,000 was provided through benefits in kind. The Superintendent of Epping Forest informed Members that some of the amounts listed were currently being reviewed, such as the benefit of providing land for parking; this would be considered by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee in due course. In response to a query regarding providing insurance to friends groups and volunteer organisations, Members suggested that Officers should investigate the use of protocols signed by all major groups obliging the group to provide insurance for their volunteers.

The Chairman of the Committee drew Members attention to the amount of money granted to the Heath Hands groups which Officers said was spent on employing a Volunteer Development Officer. Members agreed that it would be beneficial to receive a report outlining the breakdown of funding granted to volunteer groups on a biannual basis. Officers agreed that this would help

inform discussions regarding benefits in kind within a broader corporate perspective.

Discussions ensued regarding the development of a grants policy statement and the potential to adopt a “de minimis” position in respect of small scale grants which were in line with this agreed policy. Membered noted that in effect grants would be removed from the Open Spaces local risk budget and management committees would be asked to make a bid to the Resource Allocation Sub Committee to support the new grants programme. Members agreed that Officers should be instructed to investigate the possibility of developing this policy and update Members at the next meeting of the working party on 25th November 2015 at 3:30pm.

Resolved – that Members views and guidance were received on the following issues, mindful of the Charity Commission guidance:

- The current position in respect of grant giving;
- The development of a grants policy statement and the potential to adopt a “de minimis” position in respect of small scale grants which were in line with this agreed policy;
- Monitoring and effectiveness; and
- Operation of a grants programme.

4. QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE WORK OF THE GROUP

There were no questions.

5. ANY URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 10:45am.

Chairman