

Committee:	Dated:
Community and Children's Services	07/11/2019
Subject: Stronger Communities and Small Grants Programme	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Decision
Report author: Jack Joslin, Head of Central Grants Programme, Central Grants Unit	

Summary

The integration of the Small Grants Scheme into the Stronger Communities Programme took place in February 2018. The Central Grants Unit (CGU) devised a new and accessible online application form for the Small Grants Scheme with a lighter touch, but still robust assessment process. After consultation with officers, the CGU will be able to offer the Small Grants Scheme on a rolling basis. The Stronger Communities main grants programme will still maintain its two deadlines each year for larger applications.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- approve the new Small Grants process
- approve delegated authority to the Director of Community and Children's Services on all Small Grant applications
- note the revision to the criteria for the Stronger Communities Programme.

Main Report

Background

1. The Stronger Communities theme is a strand of the City of London Corporation's (CoLC) Central Grants Programme (CGP) that awards grants to projects or services that are being delivered for the benefit of communities or beneficiaries within the City of London and its housing estates across London.
2. Members of this Committee agreed in May 2016 that the award of grants will be determined by Officers of Community and Children's Services in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Grand Committee.

3. The grant assessment process for this and other themes in the programme is overseen by the CGU; it draws on the unit's expertise in the field of grant-making, and demonstrates good practice.
4. Grant applications are subject to a series of due diligence checks by the CGU to ensure compliance with the established eligibility criteria and will pass a financial assessment by the Head of Charity and Social Investment Finance (Chamberlain's Department). All eligible applications are then considered by a panel of expert officers.
5. In February 2018, the Community and Children's Services Committee agreed to add a Small Grants Scheme to the Stronger Communities Programme, as there was no longer resource in the department to deliver this scheme. A discreet budget was made available to ensure that Small Grants applications would be available under the main programme.
6. Since the Stronger Communities Small Grants programme has been managed by the CGU, it has increased opportunities for applicants by adding an additional deadline each year, and has ensured that the scheme complies with best practice in grant-making.

Stronger Communities

Grant Criteria

7. In September 2019, this Committee requested clarity on what 'certain circumstances' would enable an applicant to apply for a £20,000 grant over a two-year period. This has been further clarified as projects that can demonstrate that the increased funding will create a substantial difference to the community they work with, and that the project aligns with the Departmental Business Plan. Members are asked to note these amendments in **Appendix 1**.

Small Grants Programme

8. In February 2018, the Community and Children's Services Committee agreed to add Small Grants to the Stronger Communities Programme, as there was no longer resource in the Department to deliver a Small Grants Scheme of its own.
9. A proportion of the Stronger Communities funding was agreed to be allocated to smaller projects.
10. The CGU developed a new online application form for small grants of £3,000 or less, and agreed a lighter touch financial assessment with the Chamberlain's Department. This application is the same as the previous form used by the Department, but in online format. Due diligence checks are in line with grant-making best practice and to protect against fraud.

11. In September 2019, the Community and Children's Services Committee requested to see further amendments made to the Stronger Communities Small Grants Programme that would enable more frequent opportunity to bid to the programme.
12. Since the programme has been managed by the CGU, it has become more accessible to communities wishing to access funding by offering two deadlines a year, as opposed to the one annual deadline under the old departmental scheme. There is also a larger funding pot available, which increases the scope of the programme, as well as an increase in the size of Small Grants available. The CGU is also on hand throughout the year to provide advice and support to applicants and grantees.
13. After consultation with officers, it is proposed that a Small Grants Programme can be offered on a rolling basis. As the Stronger Communities Programme currently has a deadline on 22 November 2019, it is proposed that we will be able to open the rolling small grants scheme from 1 April 2020. This will be revisited subject to the outcome of the Stronger Communities round. An earlier deadline will be agreed if there is budget to do so.
14. Discussion has taken place between the CGU and the Community Engagement team about support that can be offered to applicants. This will be developed further, with an established offer for applicants when the programme launches.
15. The Small Grants Programme will be available to applicants throughout the year to ensure that community activity can be supported with a shorter planning period. Applicants can expect to be able to:
 - a) apply online throughout the year
 - b) apply for a grant of up to £3,000 in line with the Stronger Communities eligibility criteria
 - c) access advice and support on applications from the CGU throughout the year
 - d) receive support with applications provided on request from the Community Engagement team
 - e) engage in a proportionate but robust assessment process
 - f) receive a decision within 10 weeks of applying for a grant
16. To ensure that decisions on the rolling Small Grants process can be made punctually and within the outlined timeframe, members are requested to delegate decisions on these grants to the Director of Community and Children's Services.
17. If agreed, the CGU will work with departmental officers and community organisations to review the Small Grants application form and criteria to ensure that it meets the needs of organisations. The results will be brought to this Committee for approval in January for decision, with further clarity provided on the launch of the year-round programme. Further clarity will also be provided on the type of support available to organisations looking to make applications to the scheme.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

18. The CGP Stronger Communities funding strand was created to promote a fair system of grant-giving by the CoLC.
19. The Small Grants Programme will become a rolling programme, making it more accessible to the City of London communities and those that live on its housing estates across London.

Conclusion

20. The Small Grants Programme will be established on a rolling basis to ensure consistent access to the community. A revised application will be looked at in line with best practice, and a package of support will be explored for small organisations that may have issues accessing funding.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Stronger Communities: criteria for funding (with track changes)

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