

Report – City Bridge Trust Committee

Report of Urgent Action Taken: COVID-19 Response and Temporary Amendments to City Bridge Trust Thresholds for Grant Approvals under Delegated Powers and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (Chief Grants Officer)

To be presented on Thursday, 21st May 2020

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons
of the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

SUMMARY

Following the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak in the United Kingdom, your City Bridge Trust Committee proposed two actions be taken which required the approval of the Court of Common Council, in accordance with the City Corporation's urgency procedures. These actions were intended to assist with the immediate response to the crisis and are set out below.

RECOMMENDATION

We **recommend** that the actions taken under urgency procedures be noted.

SUMMARY OF ACTION TAKEN

(A) Covid-19 Response: Grant to London Funders

1. London Funders, the umbrella body for any corporate, independent or governmental organisations who fund civil society in London, determined to co-ordinate a response to the Covid-19 crisis for London's funding community. The City Bridge Trust and the City of London Corporation are Members of London Funders, along with 148 other organisations, and the Chief Grants Officer & Director of City Bridge Trust (CGO) is the current Chair of London Funders.
2. Building on previous experience, London Funders explored the potential to develop a pooled fund to which organisations in need of additional resources in order to adapt their activities and services in response to Covid-19 could apply. The fund was to be London-focussed, necessarily flexible and would be vigilant that agreed grants would not be supplanting or deterring additional governmental money for London's civil society.
3. A proposal for a pooled fund was subsequently devised, the purpose of which would be to provide support to civil society organisations adversely impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak. The administration would be undertaken by London Funders who would operate a user-friendly grant application software platform:

this was developed and successfully deployed after the Grenfell Tower fire, enabling simple single-point-of-entry grant applications to access funds from a multi-funder pooled fund. It was proposed that this approach be adapted in order to respond to the Covid-19 situation, in order to facilitate a fast, unbureaucratic way of getting funding out to groups in need.

4. It was further proposed that the City of London Corporation (acting as trustee of the Bridge House Estates charity) hold the pooled funds which would sit behind the single portal.
 5. The CGO sought agreement for City Bridge Trust to allocate £1 million (out of its agreed 'Bridging Divides' grants budgets) towards this pooled fund and for the City of London Corporation (acting as trustee of the Bridge House Estates charity) administering the fund through City Bridge Trust. Prioritisation and focus were worked through with other members of London Funders with Members informed on discussions.
 6. Agreement was sought under urgency procedures as the development of the Covid-19 outbreak was fast-moving, with the number of cases rising daily. London's civil society works with some of the most vulnerable citizens; should services need to be adapted this would need to be done swiftly which meant, in turn, that the funding to do so would need to be made available at speed. It would also provide reassurance to the sector and catalyse other members of London Funders to commit funds to this collective response.
 7. Approval was, therefore, granted by the Court of Common Council under urgency procedures to approve the allocation of £1 million of City Bridge Trust's agreed Bridging Divides Funding Strategy budget towards a pooled fund: to support London's civil society organisations adversely affected by the Covid-19 outbreak; and approve that this pooled fund is held by the City of London Corporation (as trustee to the Bridge House Estates charity), administered by CBT working with London Funders and its members.
 8. The City of London Corporation as trustee of Bridge House Estates (1035628) consequently established the London Community Response Fund, a separate trust fund within the ancillary object of Bridge House Estates.
- (B) Temporary amendments to thresholds for grant approvals under delegated powers and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (Chief Grants Officer)**
9. Following the establishment of the London Community Response Fund outlined above, decisions on the first wave of applications were due during the week commencing 6 April 2020.
 10. Ordinarily, the Chief Grants Officer & Director of City Bridge Trust (CGO) would consider and approve grants up to a certain threshold. However, the CGO was seconded full-time to the London-wide COVID-19 response and the ordinary tempo of decision making by Committee was disrupted by the cancellation of meetings and the redeployment of staff who would ordinarily support the decision-making process.

11. Therefore, it was proposed to both amend the threshold of delegation to allow the Deputy Director of City Bridge Trust (DCGO) to act in the CGO's absence and increase the threshold at which the CGO or DCGO can approve grants, without recourse to the City Bridge Trust Committee or the Town Clerk.
12. The proposed amendments would be subject to review after three months of operation. Moreover, a report for information would be submitted to The City Bridge Trust Committee summarising grant making made under these arrangements. The CGO and the Comptroller & City Solicitor were content with the proposals following consultation.
13. In line with procedure pertaining to the amendment of the Scheme of Delegations, approval was also sought from the Policy & Resources Committee before the proposals were submitted for the approval of the Court of Common Council.
14. With the first wave of applications to the London Community Response Fund ready for decision during week commencing 6 April 2020, approval was sought under urgency to enable the DCGO to take the decisions necessary for grants to be disbursed in a timely and effective manner, given the CGO's full-time secondment to the pan-London COVID-19 response.
15. The Court of Common Council was, therefore, asked to amend the threshold of delegated power for grant making so that:
 - Applications of up to £50,000 may be approved by the Chief Grants Officer (CGO) in their absence, the Deputy Chief Grants Officer (DCGO);
 - Applications of between £50,001 and £100,000 to be approved by the CGO or in their absence the DCGO, in consultation with the Chamberlain.
 - Applications of between £100,001 and £250,000 to be approved by the CGO or in their absence the DCGO in consultation with the Chamberlain and the Chair and Deputy Chair; and
 - Applications of more than £250,000 to be approved by The City Bridge Committee.
16. It was also asked to amend the Scheme of Delegation to Officers as follows (amendment underlined):
 - Authority to be delegated to The Chief Grants Officer & Director of City Bridge Trust or, in their absence, the Deputy Director of City Bridge Trust, to be exercised either:
 - a) at the direction of the Town Clerk & Chief Executive or
 - b) in the absence of the Town Clerk & Chief Executiveto act in consultation with any relevant Chairman and Deputy Chairman in cases where urgent decisions may be required as provided for in Standing

Order No. 41, in respect of Bridge House Estates and/or any other charity in which the City of London Corporation has a material interest, and also in cases (whether under Standing Order 41 or otherwise) where action may be taken under authority delegated by a Committee in respect of Bridge House Estates.

17. This approval was obtained under urgency procedures in accordance with Standing Order No.19.

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 7th day of April 2020.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Dhruv Patel, O.B.E.
Chairman, City Bridge Trust Committee