

Committee:	Date:
The City Bridge Trust Committee	19 June 2014
Subject:	Public
More Effective Grant Making	
Report of:	For Decision
Chief Grants Officer	

Summary

With the primary purpose of City Bridge Trust being to provide effective funding and support to alleviate disadvantage in London, we have reviewed critically some current practices:

It is considered that more time needs to be carved out to keep up-to-date on the grant-giving context; to analyse and act on the lessons and trends from our grants portfolio; and to take a strategic view on the most effective grants spend and support activities.

As part of this, themed officer leads have been established. It is proposed that Committee meetings have themed updates; that the Committee has a strategic away half-day; and that the number of Committee meetings is reduced to provide more time for reflection and learning to inform funding decisions, whilst also making the processing of applications more effective.

Recommendations:

1. That the current cycle of ten CBT Committee meetings per year is reduced to six;
2. That one strategic away half-day meeting for Committee Members is added;
3. That at each Committee meeting there is a focused update on one of the programmatic areas from the Investing in Londoners grants programmes, e.g. older people; mental health;
4. That the meeting schedule for the current year is amended as follows:
 - a) This year (2014/15), we take out the October and February meetings – so that, after July, we meet in September, November, January and March; but that we put in a strategic away half-day on October 23rd (the current day for the Committee meeting); and
 - b) From April 2015, we aim to meet in: May, July, September, November, January and March – with a strategic away half-day in October;
5. That the impact of the above recommendations, if implemented, is reviewed by the Committee in January 2016.

Main Report

Background

1. The City Bridge Trust Committee has responsibility for determining all grant awards from Bridge House Estates up to £500k; the Committee makes recommendations to Court for amounts above £500k. A description of the role of the Committee is attached at Appendix A.
2. At each Committee meeting, typically between £1m and £1.5m of grants are agreed; and the total number averages 22.
3. The Committee currently meets ten times a year and does not have dedicated strategic thinking time together, apart from the five-yearly review, known as the Quinquennial. The lion's share of the Committee time is spent deciding on individual grant applications. These decisions are based on papers prepared by officers, summarising their assessments, with recommendations of the level of funding to award to each applicant or a recommendation to reject an application.

Rationale

4. As custodians of the Bridge House Estates grant funds, you always wish to look for ways to improve on the quality of your grant making.
5. At present, you are recognised within the sector as having a strong grant-making operation with robust assessment of grant applications - and officers are confident at presenting the Committee with quality assessments.
6. At any one time, there are between five hundred and six hundred grants in your live portfolio. There is expertise and learning embedded in that portfolio which we are currently not utilising as fully as possible.
7. There is, unsurprisingly, a fast-changing London context; and keeping up-to-date with that context and supporting the Committee to understand that context involves an investment of time by officers which is not available currently.
8. Making progress on this could involve various changes. For example, one step which has already been implemented is that each grant officer has now taken on a themed lead for certain policy areas, whilst also continuing to assess applications and manage a mixed grants portfolio of around one hundred active grants. A list of policy lead officers is attached at Appendix B.
9. A further key step is to enable grant officers to have more time to keep themselves, the team and the Committee up to date and to consider the implications for your grant-making of changes in the policy context within which we operate; further, to have more time to reflect on the trends arising from your grant-making.

10. Additionally, the Trust is commissioning two programme evaluations (of Older Londoners and of Making London Safer), in order to capture and act on information emerging from the wider environment.
11. Currently, the cycle of Committee meetings and paper deadlines is relentless, with one or other falling every two to three weeks and gives little time or space for considering the lessons/trends from existing reporting. Grant officers are rather like hamsters on a wheel. They need time to step off the wheel and reflect on whether the wheel is the right one!
12. The situation is mirrored at Committee level. The meeting structure and grant volume leaves little time for consideration of the grant-giving context.

Implications

13. With the proposed new cycle, there would never be more than a two-month gap between meetings, so the target of four months' turnaround from receipt of applications and all supporting information, to final decision should still be possible.
14. With fewer meetings, it will have to be accepted that the meetings that are in place may be longer. This should, to some extent, be mitigated by a more efficient presentation of papers.
15. If Members are in any way concerned that there was business that needed to be considered before the next Committee meeting, this could be dealt with in various ways, including: calling a short notice meeting; establishing a reference sub-group; or using urgency procedures.

Conclusion

16. It is thought that the benefits of a reduced meeting cycle outweigh the potentially negative impacts and that these are a small price to pay for better grant-making.
17. Introducing a strategic away half-day to include all Committee Members would enable the Committee to have time to stand back and reflect on the funding in its entirety. This would build on the recent improvements in statistical analysis and reporting, and the greater knowledge of context gleaned from officer updates at regular Committee meetings.

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Report written: 30th May 2014