

MEETING: 23/09/2015

Ref: 12823

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Making London More Inclusive

Children's Discovery Centre, East London

Adv: Tim Wilson

Amount requested: £100,000

Base: Newham

Benefit: Newham

Amount recommended: £100,000

The Charity

Established in 2000 by a group of local schools, parents, and the Borough Council, the Children's Discovery Centre (Discover) was designed as a place for primary-school aged children to play and explore. Discover welcomes around 85,000 visitors to its building in Stratford each year, where a series of activities encourage children to spend time with books and to hear stories. In addition, Discover delivers a number of outreach programmes through its community programmes.

The Application

Visitor numbers have doubled since Discover opened, and this means the charity has outgrown its current space. It plans to expand its facilities to new floors of its Stratford building, and to use the development process to update access facilities for its street-level space. Having commissioned an independent access audit and secured quotes for work, Discover now seeks funding from City Bridge Trust towards improvements to toilet facilities, signage, and the inclusion of new multi-sensory elements of the charity's Story Trail. This latter element will help children with a broad range of disabilities engage with the core activities of the organisation's work.

The Recommendation

Discover is a highly-regarded facility, opened initially for local children and now drawing in visitors from across Greater London. Regeneration of the Stratford area as a result of the 2012 Olympics has boosted visitor numbers by 22% and the charity wishes to make better use of its existing building in order to accommodate this demand. The charity holds a long-term lease on the building from the Borough Council from whom it has secured some of the development funding for this capital project. This is a large initiative, however, and Discover is seeking support from a number of grant-makers. City Bridge Trust's donation would significantly enhance the charity's ability to welcome and engage disabled visitors. Works are scheduled to begin in April 2016 and conclude in the August of the same year. Funding is advised as follows:

£100,000 for access and improvement works at Discover's Stratford site.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
16/02/2012	£24,000 for a third and final year towards the staffing and running costs of the Saturday Arts Club.
06/09/2007	£34,000 over two years (2 x £17,000) for the costs of providing a programme of arts and creative activities for disabled children.

Background and detail of proposal

Discover estimates that over 1,500 disabled children visit the Centre each year. As well as catering for drop-in visitors the charity runs a weekly Mighty Mega Arts club for children with disabilities and special needs. Numbers are expected to increase as the organisation delivers more outreach work to special schools, and through the availability of a more welcoming space resulting from the access improvements themselves.

The charity consulted parents, children and staff in 2013 to identify possible improvements to the current space. These highlighted overcrowding, queues, and limited toilet facilities and led to the expansion programme of which this application forms part. This is not the first time Discover has made access improvements, having completed initial works when it was first given lease on the building and then again in 2010 when it made changes to its street-level access. The proposed 2016 works are ambitious, and will almost double the amount of space Discover can offer its visitors. Plans reflect the findings from a recent access audit.

Financial Information

Forecast income for the year ending March 2016 is £1,618,022, of which £1,034,330 (64%) had been confirmed by August 2015.

The 2015-16 budget provided below covers the charity's day to day services and does not include the capital works. These are estimated to cost £1.1m and of which £655k has been raised to date, this application for £100k to City Bridge Trust would go towards the balance to be raised.

Year end at 31 March	2014 - 15 Audited accounts	2015 - 16 Current Year Budget
Income and Expenditure	£	£
Income	1,579,384	1,618,022
Expenditure	1,367,301	1,608,871
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	20,328	25,175
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	191,755	(16,024)
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	212,083	9,151
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	13.4%	0.6%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	181,696 (11.5%)	160,241 (9.9%)
Free unrestricted reserves		
Unrestricted free reserves held at Year End	383,391	408,566
How many months' worth of expenditure	3.4	3.0
Reserves Policy target	341,825	402,218
How many months' worth of expenditure	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	41,566	6,348