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| Committee: Policy and Resources Committee | Date: 19 October 2015 |
| Subject: Co-Exist House | Public |
| Report of: Town Clerk | For Decision |

Summary

1. This report informs members of progress of the “Coexist House” initiative which aims to create a centre for multi-faith understanding and education to be delivered through a charitable company. The initiative is being developed by a Co-exist House Advisory Board. The City Corporation’s relationship with the initiative was initially led by the Court of Aldermen and the City of London Corporation is represented on that Board by Alderman Sir Roger Gifford. A bid is made for a grant of £150,000 over three years from your Policy Initiatives fund (City’s Cash) which is to be used to support further work in developing the Co-exist House initiative.

Recommendation

2. Members views are sought on a request from the new charitable company for a grant in the sum of £150,000 phased over three years (£70,000 in 2015/16, £50,000 in 2016/17 and £30,000 in 2017/18), to be allocated to the communities section of the Policy initiatives Fund and charged to City’s Cash, to support the implementation of the Co-exist House project and to match-fund the financial commitments of the majority of the remaining Founding Members.

Main Report

Background

1. In June 2015, the Policy & Resources Committee was informed that the General Purposes (GP) Committee of the Court of Aldermen had considered a request from the Co-exist Foundation and the University of Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme to support an inter-faith initiative, Coexist House, which had a vision to create in London "*one of the most significant interfaith centres in the world*" for the purposes of deepening understanding of different religions amongst secular and religious audiences.
2. The Cambridge University Inter-Faith Programme undertakes high quality academic research around the “Abrahamic faiths” of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Coexist Foundation is a charity devoted to the improvement of inter-faith relations and was incorporated in 2006. The Coexist Foundation was the brainchild of Dr David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and founder of Cambridge University’s Inter-Faith Programme.

3. The GP Committee of Aldermen agreed that the City of London Corporation should join an Advisory Board for the project. Alderman Sir Roger Gifford was nominated by the GP Committee of Aldermen as the City of London's representative. The other institutions represented on that Board are the University of Cambridge, the Victoria and Albert Museum (the V&A), the Honourable Society of The Inner Temple and the Coexist Foundation.
4. In June, the GP Committee of Aldermen and the Policy & Resources Committee agreed that the City Corporation should continue its support for the project and that the Advisory Board be reconstituted as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. In addition, it was agreed that Alderman Gifford should continue as the City Corporation's representative. Authority was delegated to the Comptroller and City Solicitor to negotiate and agree the relevant legal documentation to establish the charitable company.

Current Position

5. The vision for the project remains to create a landmark learning institution and centre in London dedicated to promoting understanding of religion in the United Kingdom and beyond, to encourage respect and tolerance for religious belief and practise, to engage a broad audience (secular and religious) through innovative programmes and engagement, and to challenge religious ignorance and prejudice at all levels of society.

Support for Co-Exist House

6. As reported previously, the proposals for Coexist House have received cross-party political support, as well as being welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Chief Rabbi, the Attorney General, Princess Badiya bint El Hassan of Jordan and the Prince of Wales. Leading academics and other faith and City leaders have also welcomed the project.
7. The partner organisations on the Advisory Board for the Coexist House project have made significant contributions to support the initiative thus far. £200,000 was raised from a number of benefactors following a Mansion House event in October 2013 during Alderman Sir Roger Gifford's tenure as Lord Mayor. The Coexist Foundation has committed £150,000 for the next three years, Cambridge University and the Inner Temple are committing similar sums, and whilst the V&A has not committed finances it has pledged in-kind support.

Proposals

8. The Policy & Resources Committee endorsed in June the Coexist Advisory Board's proposal for the five members, including the City Corporation, to form a company and be named as Founding Members. As a company limited by guarantee the liability of all of its members is limited to £10 each. As a corporate Member of the company the City Corporation acts through a nominee and also has the right to nominate a Trustee to serve on the Board of Trustees. Consistent with the decision of the GP Committee in 2013 the

City Corporation's nominee in both instances is Alderman, Sir Roger Gifford. The new company now focuses on bringing its vision to fruition.

9. The new charitable company has now approached the City Corporation for funding. As stated above, the majority of the Founding Members have each committed to support this initiative financially and the City is now being asked to match that of the others concerned in the sum of £150,000 spread over three years.
10. If Members are minded to support such a grant, funding could be met from the Policy Initiatives Fund (City's Cash) and categorised under the communities section of the Fund as a tapered grant over three years. It is suggested that each year's funds should be paid in 12 month increments, subject to satisfactory reporting back to the City on the use to which that expenditure has been put, with the following grant schedule: £70,000 in 2015/16; £50,000 in 2016/17; £30,000 in 2017/18. This schedule would enable the new company to focus on early fund raising and thus to gain a sustainable financial footing by the end of the grant cycle.
11. The current uncommitted balance available within your Committee's Policy Initiatives Fund (PIF) for 2015/16 amounts to £187,300 prior to any allowance being made for other proposals on today's agenda. If Members are minded to approve the proposal, the balance of the Fund for the remainder of this year would decrease significantly. There are, however, sufficient PIF funds currently available for the proposed future funding of this project in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Conclusion

12. The Bishop of London stated that "*London is the only place that Coexist House could happen as it has the most diverse population in the world*". The City Corporation's involvement in this project demonstrates a leadership role in supporting community cohesion within London and more generally.

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