

MEETING: 18/03/2016

Ref: 13016

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Strengthening London's Voluntary Sector

Bexley Voluntary Service Council

Adv: Julia Mirkin

Amount requested: £118,775

Base: Bexley

Benefit: Bexley

Amount recommended: £118,800

The Charity

Bexley Voluntary Service Council Ltd (BVSC) supports local voluntary and community groups, providing them with training, advice and support. It also facilitates networks and forums and promotes partnerships with statutory service providers. BVSC runs Bexley volunteer service, which delivers volunteer training and brokers volunteer placements. The Chief Executive of BVSC formerly worked for NCVO, with a focus on collaboration and management of change within the voluntary sector.

The Application

BVSC proposes to deliver a capacity building programme, focussing on evaluation and the evidencing of impact. The project will lead to the establishment of six 'beacon' organisations which are evaluation champions, establishing an infrastructure through which evaluation knowledge will be cascaded.

The Recommendation

BVSC has been focussing on the capacity needs of small groups for the last 11 years and the Chief Executive, who has been employed since 2013, brings considerable expertise in change management and collaboration. The quality of BVSC's work is recognised in its 'Investors in People' status, its 'Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation' mark and in its 'Big Assist Beacon for Change' status. This project sees BVSC working strategically to align the work of the voluntary sector with the needs of commissioners, helping to sustain voluntary services in Bexley.

£118,800 over three years (£40,350; £42,650; £35,800) towards the part-time (4 dpw) Development Officer (Outcomes & Impact Champion), training and on-costs associated with the Measuring Impact to Improve Performance project.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
20/01/2011	£67,430 over two years (£33,280; £34,150) for continuation of support for volunteering.
03/04/2008	£98,200 over three years (£32,000; £33,000; £33,200) towards the salaries and running costs of the Volunteer Support Project.

Background and detail of proposal

Research into the state of Bexley's voluntary sector in 2014 found only 55% of respondents had procedures in place for collecting data or evidence of outcomes and impact. BVSC claims that the importance of evaluation is underestimated and that there is considerable need for a more strategic approach to evaluation to be taken, which can inform organisational development, fundraising and planning.

BVSC proposes to deliver three levels of evaluation training: the most intensive of which will be offered to six organisations identified to become evaluation 'beacons'. These organisations will receive eight day-long courses, followed by a programme of peer learning, comprising: action learning sets; facilitated peer-to-peer mentoring; and the establishment of a forum. In addition, each group will receive one-to-one

support from BVSC to address their specific training needs. A learning zone on the BVSC website will be developed, allowing groups to access learning materials after the training has finished. Three of these six beacon organisations will be small groups.

This intensive programme will also be offered to eight organisations that commit to the training and collaborative learning elements but cannot realistically take on the responsibility and commitment to be a 'beacon' organisation. BVSC also intends to open the eight day-long training sessions to an additional 15 groups that are interested in receiving less intensive evaluation training. As BVSC aims to include a significant proportion of small groups in the cohort, it recognises the need to incorporate general capacity building alongside the focussed work on evaluation to ensure the training is fully implemented. This element will cover governance, finance, fundraising, communications and collaboration and is likely to represent no more than 20% of the programme's content. Finally, BVSC proposes to work strategically with commissioners in Bexley to establish consistent expectations in relation to outcomes and impact. Through this engagement, BVSC aims to establish a mechanism through which the quality of impact reporting submitted to commissioners by community groups can be monitored.

Financial Information

Forecast income for the current year ending 31st March 2016 is £328,251, all of which had been confirmed as at 1st March 2016. Budgeted income for the following year ending 31st March 2017 is £292,988, of which £274,001 (94%) had been confirmed as at the same date. The reduction in income and expenditure in 2015/16 is mainly due to £61,265 restricted project income and expenditure, and a £16,650 reduction in core funding from the London Borough of Bexley, which resulted in associated redundancies that reduced expenditure. A prudent budget has been produced for 2016/17, whilst the organisation implements a new business plan and staffing structure. Free unrestricted reserves were £196,636 as at 31 March 2015, which is equivalent to 5.4 months' worth of total expenditure. This is higher than the organisation's reserves policy target to hold £115,350. The charity has advised that there will be further cuts to their core funding and these reserves will help support them through this period. The charity did not disclose its cost of generating funds in its 2014/15 year-end accounts. The charity has provided an estimate for the current year to 31 March 2016 and will review this value and its disclosure when preparing its year-end accounts.

Year end at 31 March	14/15 Independent Examined Accounts £	2015/16 Current Year Forecast £	2016/2017 Budget £
Income and Expenditure			
Income	401,441	328,251	292,988
Expenditure	440,160	356,852	325,347
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(10,522)	12,517	(11,346)
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(28,197)	(41,118)	(21,013)
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	(38,719)	(28,601)	(32,359)
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	(9.6%)	(8.7%)	(11.0%)
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	-	16,000 (4.3%)	-
Unres free reserves held at Yr End	196,636	209,153	197,807
months' worth of expenditure	5.4	7.0	7.3
Reserves Policy target	115,350	147,794	142,674
months' worth of expenditure	3.1	5.0	5.3
Free reserves over/(under) target	81,286	61,359	55,133