

MEETING: 24/05/2016

Ref: 13212

## ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Making London More Inclusive

Poetry Society

Adv: Shegufta Rahman

Base: Camden

Benefit: London-wide

Amount requested: £100,000

Amount recommended: £100,000

### The Charity

Founded in 1909, the Poetry Society connects people to the transformative power of poetry. The Society's work includes: working with vulnerable teenagers on traveller sites in Brent and Ealing; working with Pupil Referral Units in Camden; and creating poems for the annual lighting up of the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square. The charity's writing competitions receive entrants from every postcode area of the UK, with 20,000 people writing new work through their talent development activities each year. With a network of 4,000 members comprising professional poets, poetry experts and educators, it publishes the leading magazine *The Poetry Review* with an audio version for people with visual impairments. As an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation it is funded to act as the poetry sector lead organisation.

### The Application

The Society's premises in Covent Garden, Poetry Place, is the UK's only full-time dedicated venue for poetry, open six days a week for 48 weeks a year. The charity plans to increase disability-focussed activities in 2017 and requires major capital works to make the premises fit for purpose to allow everyone to enjoy poetry without barriers. Purchased in 1994, Poetry Place has not received any significant capital investment, whilst the activities of the organisation have grown and developed. The wider refurbishment project includes essential repair and maintenance; venue space improvements; and – the purpose of this request - improving access throughout the building. This will include rationalising space within the café and venue area and providing a new platform lift and staircase that meets best practice standards.

### The Recommendation

The Society commissioned an independent access audit in which four priority areas were identified, but due to budgetary constraints, three have been incorporated into the project. The recommendation would significantly enhance the Society's ability to welcome and engage disabled visitors. Works are scheduled to begin in July 2016 and conclude in January 2017.

***£100,000 for access and related improvement works at Poetry Place In Covent Garden.***

### Funding History

None

### Background and detail of proposal

Poetry Place has 36,000 visitors a year, with specific events bringing 8,644 audience members and 1,781 performers. The need for access and improvements has been established through: feedback from the audience; disabled performers who have declined invitations to events due to access issues; and clear physical manifestations e.g. a broken ventilation system in the basement. The Society

engages disabled poets and audiences through its existing programmes. A two-year collaboration with the Autism Society has been agreed for a large scale artistic project; however the venue is inadequately suited for disabled access.

Currently, the basement is used as a performance venue; the ground floor operates as a café; and the upper floor offices are inaccessible to anyone with severe mobility issues. Creating an acoustically separate space in the basement along with a new platform lift and staircase will enable the charity to hold meetings, workshops and conventions with disabled poets, which is currently done offsite in other venues. The access audit identified the need for an accessible WC at both ground floor and basement levels. Due to funding restrictions, a ground floor WC falls outside the scope of the project – the basement level accessible WC forms part of this request.

### Financial Information

Total forecast income for the current year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 is £924,649 of which £840,160 (91%) had been confirmed by February 2016. Budgeted income for the following year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 is £1,339,051 of which £759,338 (57%) had been confirmed at the same date.

The charity advised that income for 2016/17 is forecast to be 45% higher than 2015/16 due to a significant capital project to upgrade Poetry Place. The total cost of the project is £402,000, of which £252,000 (63%) had been secured by February 2016, with an application for £50,000 awaiting a decision from another trust.

Unrestricted free reserves held at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 were £126,890, which is equivalent to 1.7 months' worth expenditure. Whilst the charity has a reserves policy to "retain a small level of funds in order to protect the Poetry Society's current activities and to ensure that it continues to operate on a going concern basis" it has not set a reserves policy target. This was discussed with the charity which advised that its holding as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 of £126,890 was sufficient as it equated to approximately 3 months' worth of core operating costs. However, as a result of the enhancements to Poetry Place, in 2017/18, the charity plans to generate increased income to build unrestricted free reserves.

Year end at 31 March	2014/15 Audited Accounts £	2015/16 Current Year Forecast £	2016/17 Following Year Budget £
<b>Income and Expenditure</b>			
Income	924,033	924,649	1,339,051
Expenditure	904,500	912,183	1,333,832
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	19,533	12,466	5,219
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	0	0	0
Total Operating Surplus / (Deficit)	19,533	12,466	5,219
Gain/ (loss) on revaluation of investments	202	0	0
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	19,735	12,466	5,219
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	2.1%	1.3%	0.4%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	52,564 (5.7%)	-	-
<b>Free unrestricted reserves</b>			
Free unrestricted reserves held at Year End	126,890	139,356	144,575
How many months' worth of expenditure	1.7	1.8	1.3
Reserves Policy target	-	-	-
How many months' worth of expenditure	-	-	-
Free reserves over/(under) target	-	-	-