

MEETING: 24/11/2016

Ref: 13045

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Improving London's Environment

Forest School Harrow

Adv: Tim Wilson

Amount requested: £72,000

Base: Harrow

Benefit: Harrow

Amount recommended: £36,000

The Charity

Based in the old, and now overgrown, gardens of All Saints Church in Stanmore, Forest School Harrow (FSH) opened in 2012 following a programme of ground restoration by a group of local volunteers. Today FSH offers a range of natural learning activities to mainly primary school children. The outdoor space is available for six half days per week for groups of up to 15 children, many of whom are chosen by their schools due to additional needs such as learning difficulties. Apart from the value of the natural learning available, FSH activities are also designed to help build confidence and self-esteem as well as closing the attainment gap of the participant children. Many of the volunteers involved in FSH are qualified teachers.

The Application

FSH wishes to expand its current capacity through the work of a paid Manager. This post holder will update the learning materials provided by FSH, prepare a business plan with recommendations for fees, engage more schools and local voluntary groups with the space, oversee weekend provision, and look to expand the current site by bringing currently disused areas into use. In time, FSH would like to extend its reach beyond Harrow and engage children in neighbouring boroughs. It hopes to make more regular use of its facilities, but is currently constrained from doing so by limited staff capacity.

The Recommendation

The proposed funding will help to give FSH valuable 'breathing space' in which it can plan for the future. Given the charity's current turnover and board capacity, a lower recommendation for a part-time position is proposed to Committee and your officer has discussed this with FSH trustees who are in agreement. Funding is advised as follows:

£36,000 over three years (3 x £12,000) towards the costs of a Manager for Forest School Harrow. Funding will cover 0.5 FTE. The award to be subject to the following conditions:

- ***The Manager should be employed by the charity rather than any third party organisation***
- ***The charity should recruit a suitably qualified treasurer to its board***
- ***The charity's constitution should be updated to include an appropriate dissolution clause***

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
23/09/2015	Following receipt of a three year grant from another major funder the charity withdrew its application in order to update its plans.

Background and detail of proposal

FSH courses typically run for five to ten weeks with children attending from local schools, pupil referral units, or voluntary groups. Much of the work is dependent on volunteers who provide delivery of workshop services with children as well as oversight through their role as trustees. Whilst the charity currently has part time tutors, it does not have management capacity and consequently very little capacity to plan for the future. FSH believes there is much wider interest in the services it offers, and that it will be possible to attract a greater number of participants to the site if it can raise awareness of current facilities. It also wishes to generate more revenue through running activities at the weekend and reviewing its pricing policies. Much of the proposed work will build on pilots already run by FSH, so the plans appear achievable.

Financial Information

At 21st October 2016 the charity had confirmed £36,000 (69.1%) of its forecast income for 2016-17. Relatively recently established and only latterly raising funds from Trusts and Foundations, the table below shows significant variation in turnover rather than sustained growth. FSH ended 2014-15 with free reserves substantially over the trustees' own target, and used half of this to cover running costs in the following year. Whilst the charity expects to end 2016-17 with free reserves above current target, your officer has discussed the value of setting a policy based on number of months' expenditure rather than a fixed amount (as FSH currently does). The expected position of £9,599 is equivalent to 2.24 months' worth of expenditure which appears reasonable. The 2016-17 forecast shown in the table does not include any expected grant from City Bridge Trust, nor the related expenditure.

Year end at 31 July	2014-15 Independently Examined	2015-16 Draft	2016-17 Forecast
	£	£	£
Income and Expenditure			
Income	64,970	24,613	52,110
Expenditure	29,044	59,846	51,440
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(4,479)	(11,868)	1,570
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	40,405	(23,365)	(900)
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	35,926	(35,233)	670
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	55.3%	(143.18%)	1.3%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	2,307 (3.6%)	3,615 (14.7%)	4,000 (7.7%)
Free unrestricted reserves			
Unrestricted free reserves held at Year End	19,897	8,029	9,599
How many months' worth of expenditure	8.2	1.6	2.2
Reserves Policy target	6,000	6,000	6,000
How many months' worth of expenditure	2.5	1.2	1.4
Free reserves over/(under) target	13,897	2,029	3,599