



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Tuesday, 22nd March 2016

PRESENT : Cllrs. Lugg (Chair), Hampson (Vice-Chair), H. Norman (Spokesperson), Haigh, Gravells, Lewis, Dee, Field, Hansdot, Pearsall, Randle, Toleman, Etheridge, Brown and McLellan

Others in Attendance

Gill Ragon, Head of Public Protection
Donna Marks, Solicitor One Legal
Edward Pomfret, Health Partnerships and Engagement Manager
Tony Wisdom, Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. S. Witts and Beeley

111. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Randle advised that although she had been appointed to the GL Communities Group she had not had any contact from the group.

Councillors Brown, Dee and Norman declared personal interests as members of the Grants and Community Services Forum.

112. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION REGARDING VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR FUNDING 2014-16 AND PROPOSALS FOR 2016-17 FUNDING

The Chair invited Councillor Haigh as first named Member on the Call In request to explain the reasons for calling in the decision of Cabinet made on 9 March 2016 in respect of Voluntary and Community Sector Funding 2014-16 and proposals for 2016-17.

Reasons for Call In

Councillor Haigh referred to her statement in the addendum pack (Document 1).

She noted that she first saw the proposals when the papers were published for the Cabinet meeting on 9 March 2016.

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The decision maker had not consulted the Grants and Community Services Forum which was the body set up by Council to advise the Cabinet Member.

She expressed her concerns that grants made through the Members' Allocation should be in line with Council priorities and the 'top slicing' of the budget to fund Community Builders had not been properly explored or explained.

She was concerned on the impact of the cap on grants which would mean that larger groups would have to deal with a number of Members and noted in particular the impact on organisations such as St James City Farm; GAVCA and Gymnasion/Friendship Café.

She believed there would be much detriment to groups across the City and noted that the proposals would result in funding being moved from areas of high deprivation to less deprived areas.

She stated that the report had not taken into account any impact on equalities issues which these grants were often used to address.

She believed that Member Allocations would increase the burden on Councillors. Members often like to wait before reaching a decision which could create uncertainty and some groups could cease to exist. She also believed that Member Allocations may not be consistent.

In summary, she stated that the Call In had been made because a People Impact assessment had not been completed and the Grants and Community Services Forum had not been consulted.

Councillor Pullen, who had also signed the Call In request, stated that under the current system, Officers assessed applications against Council priorities and ensured that funding was properly used and addressed equalities, fairness and transparency. He believed that these issues could not be guaranteed through the Members' Allocation Scheme and the previous arrangements had ensured accountability, and protected the good name of the Council.

The Chair invited to Councillors to ask questions on matters of clarification.

Councillor Randle asked if the Councillor Haigh believed that the Matson Centre received too much funding. Councillor Haigh noted that the centre had received large grants for two years but the proposals would mean that the work of the Centre would need to be funded by other means or cease.

Councillor Gravells asked if Councillor Pullen was implying that Members were incapable of deciding how to allocate the funding. Councillor Pullen stated that under the present system officers were able to ensure fairness and transparency.

Councillor Haigh believed that it was difficult to tell how Members' Allocations had been used or how they aligned with Council priorities from the information in the report.

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Councillor Gravells stated that it was not correct to imply that Councillors would have a blank cheque book and referred to an instance where Officers had intervened in a Member Allocation.

Statement of the Decision Maker

Councillor Dallimore, Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods, referred to her statement in the addendum pack (Document 5).

She believed that the grounds for the Call In were based on a technicality. She apologised that the report was not taken to the Grants and Community Services Forum. She explained that the Forum met twice each year and the Council's budget plans were not sufficiently developed by the January meeting because details of government funding were not released until December.

She noted that there had been considerable discussion including the joint workshop held with GAVCA on 24 November 2015. She stated that the voluntary sector was a broad church ranging from large organisations to small unconstituted groups.

She explained that she had started as a voluntary sector activist and had entered local politics as a result. She had championed Asset Based Community Development (ABCD).

She had not been aware of any problems with the Members' Allocations Scheme in the two years since its introduction.

She noted that the Council had signed up to devolution in Gloucestershire and she questioned the difficulty in devolving grant allocation to Members. She believed that Councillors would get the best for their communities as small unconstituted groups could approach Members whose allocations would support their communities at grass roots.

Larger groups had been told that grant funding from Local Government was changing and that Community Building and ABCD were Council priorities with the aim of redirecting resources to align with Council priorities supported by partner organisations.

She asked how many faith groups had received funding under the old scheme.

She had not received any representations from disgruntled groups or any complaint regarding equalities issues.

She disputed that the proposals would take funding from areas of high deprivation and stated that the intention was make the money available to go as far as possible.

She advised that a People Impact Assessment had been completed and would be circulated.

She noted that the proposals would involve Members in the process more than they have been in the past.

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The People Impact Assessment (PIA) and minutes of the joint workshop with GAVCA were circulated.

Councillor Haigh raised a point of order and asked if these documents were admissible.

The Chair adjourned the meeting for twenty minutes to enable the documents to be studied.

The Chair reconvened the meeting and noted that the PIA had been e-mailed to Members at 5.45 pm when most Councillors would have been on their way to the meeting.

Councillor McLellan noted that the PIA was dated yesterday so would not have been available to the Cabinet.

The Head of Public Protection advised that a PIA would be undertaken for each grant application.

Councillor Haigh believed that the Cabinet should have to take into account the cumulative impact of the proposals. The Head of Public Protection noted that the cumulative impact would be dependent on the individual applications.

Councillor Haigh believed that the cap of £10,000 should have been impact assessed.

Councillor Dallimore questioned how the impact could be assessed without knowing who was applying for what.

Councillor Haigh noted that Councillor Dallimore had not attended the workshop on 24 November and the minutes made no mention of the top slicing of £30,000 and the increase of £42,000 in Members' Allocation.

The Chair asked if the voluntary sector had been asked about the existing Members' Allocations.

Councillor Dallimore said that feedback would be sought from Councillors. She had announced the intentions at Budget Council.

The Chair accepted that the circulated documents were material to the issues raised.

The Vice-Chair enquired about the number of Community Builders envisaged and Councillor Dallimore stated that she aspired to more and was in discussion with partner organisations.

Councillor Lewis believed that the increase in the Members' Allocation would do nothing but enhance small groups as the process was quick with adequate controls and checks. The funds would be used in the community with the benefit of Councillors' local knowledge.

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Councillor McLellan noted that the debate was not about the merits of the scheme but the process of the Cabinet decision. He cited the following:-

- GAVCA had not been consulted in the way that they should have been.
- Councillors had not been consulted.
- There had been no overall PIA.
- There had been no assessment of the impact of the £10,000 cap.
- Could money be used across ward boundaries?

Councillor Gravells noted that Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members were asked if there was anything they wished to scrutinise at the end of every meeting. No Member had suggested that voluntary sector funding should be scrutinised.

Summing Up

Councillor Dallimore

Councillor Dallimore stated that she was more than happy to attend this meeting and she had learnt from the Call In.

Evaluation of the Members' Allocation Scheme would be presented to the next meeting of the Grants and Community Services Forum in July.

She noted that the three representatives that had attended the Forum in January were from larger organisations and there had been no representation of grass roots organisations.

She also noted that the future of the Forum would be considered by the Constitutional and Electoral Working Group as the voluntary sector had considered it not to be fit for purpose.

She reiterated that the proposals were not removing money but redistributing resources. She asked how a system which could not be accessed by small unconstituted groups could be regarded as being fair?

She reminded Members that funding was only part of the advice and support provided by the Council to the voluntary sector and this challenge, which had been driven by Members rather than the voluntary sector would only serve to delay funds to the voluntary sector.

Councillor Haigh

Councillor Haigh stated there would be no delay to organisations to start preparing applications.

She reiterated that the decision had been made without a PIA and the evaluation was not clear.

The proposals had not been fully discussed at the workshop and the voluntary sector was not clear about the way forward.

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She noted that Cabinet were entitled to make this decision if it was made properly and this had not been the case. She asked the Committee to refer the decision back and expressed a preference for it to be referred to Council.

The Chair asked the Committee to determine whether, in the light of the case presented by the Members making the Call In and other points raised during the debate, they wished to refer the decision for further consideration.

A motion to refer the decision for further consideration was lost and the Call In was therefore ended.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm

Time of conclusion: 7.55 pm

Chair