Deputation – small grants report 2016/17

Convenor thank you hearing LAYC's deputation and I appreciate you have a full agenda so I will seek to be brief as to the comments we would wish to make on the Small grants report Item 7.1 on your agenda.

In the process of re-casting the revenue grants programme, the report of which approved at your last meeting, it saw the introduction of a small grants scheme which, as we understood it, sought to distinguish itself from the main grants programme by:

- Enabling awards of between £1k up to £10k for a single year
- A less prescriptive approach albeit still based on an outcomes approach
- Providing funding opportunities to test new ideas; set up new projects; contribute to revenue costs and help capacity build
- A lighter application process and proportionate reporting back

However, it is important to recognise that the previous revenue grant programme effectively awarded small grants awards even though it didn't have a discrete scheme. Indeed in last year's third party grant report some 21 organisations, all of which could be described as Edinburgh or locally based organisations, received awards of under £10k at a total spend of £97,237 with an average award of £4,630.

For the new small grant programme, who's report you are considering this morning, it has a comparable budget of £108k with 11 awards with an average award of £9,818, just light of the maximum award of £10k. Out of those 11 awards 4 are from major charities with a combined income last year of over £404 million.

I'm not seeking to comment on the worthiness or impact of any of the projects that are being recommended. Your officers have made those judgements. But I am concerned that if the intention of this committee was to provide a discrete fund for small/community based organisations to seek some Council support to set up, sustain or develop local work then it has failed to achieve this. As an organisation that has some 100 community based youth and children groups in membership in Edinburgh we are concerned that the near absence of small grants to small organisations sets a worrying precedent.

Of course it is understandable that larger organisations who have the capacity and significant experience to make multiple applications to a range of funders will do so but is it not incumbent on the department to set appropriate parameters around this particular funding that values the contribution made to community life by many small, locally focussed and voluntary lead groups.

This current, and previous administrations, have rightly been proud of the range of community activity that happens across the city generated by local and designed for communities. You heard some of that articulated by deputations to your last committee and the fear from some that we were creating deserts of non provision.

We welcome the inclusion of the small grants programme within the overall revenue grants review reconvening of the Third Sector Payments Short Life Working Group. We would urge consideration of some future limits for the small grants programme that would provide both stronger guidance and recognition for whom the small grants schemed was aimed at.

Examples might include excluding those organisations whose income levels from the previous financial year are over a certain amount. A number of trusts, including those managed by EVOC, have set that at £200k to encourage small grant applications and awards. If that criteria had been applied to these awards 7 out of the 11 recommendations would have fallen foul.

We, like you, want to see vibrant communities who are supported, encouraged and enabled to deliver local services and where a small grant can make a considerable difference to their ability to do that.

Ian Boardman

LAYC

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