

## **EXTERNAL GRANT FUNDING REVIEW WORKING PARTY**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2024 at 5.30 pm in the Online Only.**

**Present:** Councillor Tricia Austin (Chair); Councillors Davis, Fellows and Pope

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Manners.

### **2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

### **3. EXTERNAL GRANT FUNDING REVIEW WORKING PARTY WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Austin, Chair of the working party, introduced the subject for discussion and said that she had expected the review would focus on what the Council could do to increase external funding coming into Thanet, particularly in the form of small grants to support local voluntary organisations. The perception amongst Councillors was that there could be missed opportunities for these organisations to access external funding for their activities. The review would not be focusing on business or on large scale funding.

Members of the working party made comments as follows:

- In carrying out its review assignment the working party would need to engage a number of voluntary organisations in the district and infrastructure bodies that could include Kent Coast Volunteering, Funding for All and Stronger Kent Communities;
- It was also necessary to compare the ways other local councils work to support voluntary organisations to identify best practice;
- The working party should also engage parish and town councils to find out how TDC could best work with parishes to support small voluntary organisations;
- The working party would also need to gather evidence from TDC officers and find out about their role in grant funding sourcing and information sharing;
- One Councillor said that finding out about the customer experience was important, as this would inform the Council if there was a need to review and reform the protocol for working with community groups
- Funding applications processes were a barrier for a number of small community organisations;
- It was also important to find out about the organisations' aims and objectives - but it was worth noting that community organisations are constantly evolving;
- Having a portal for community groups could potentially be a helpful way to engage groups and help them become more connected, but this could have cost implications;
- Another Councillor commented that core funding was an issue for voluntary groups that should be pursued in this review;
- There were individuals within the community who possessed skills required for assisting organisations through the fund applications process, so the Council could potentially tap into such human resource;
- In trying to reach out to voluntary organisations, the working party could send out a survey questionnaire in case some of the organisations were unable to attend the working party meetings to give evidence;

- The working party would like to access the list of voluntary organisations held by the Regeneration Team in order to identify which ones to engage in discussion, though they might wish to speak with organisations not on the list too;
- Spaces Connect in Margate might be a good organisation to engage. Councillor Pope was going to provide contact details for this organisation;
- Social value should be included in these discussions;
- The working party might also want to consider non-financial support like volunteer days or help with business management skills.

In response, Louise Askew made the following points:

- The working party might benefit from talking to Penny Button and her team on community development;
- The Regeneration team had done some survey and mapping and concluded that money was clearly a key problem for these organisations - however, TDC was unable to back fill the core funding;
- A survey questionnaire to check on the organisations there were in Thanet turned got 270 responses;
- An officer group was processing community organisations applications for grant funding was surprised by the poor quality of applications;
- There was a level of language on application documentation that was too difficult to understand;
- It was important to find ways for community organisations to take risks and undertake activities that they would not normally do;
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund: This programme was still midway in its implementation and this was the biggest voluntary sector fund the TDC has had to manage;
- TDC would use the same approach for running Thanet Lotto projects and it was hoped to launch this in June 2024;
- The Council now has a list of about 1200 community voluntary organisations we are working with;
- The challenge in the database held was that it had to be managed in a GDPR compliant way;
- There was a conference held in November 2023 through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme, and over a hundred local organisations attended;
- Currently there were four or five infrastructure organisations being commissioned to deliver programmes in Thanet;
- KCC has excellent web pages for finding grant funding which TDC could link to;
- TDC has never had a funding officer to support third sector organisations. Clive Bowen's role was to support with grant funding finance management for community groups;
- Funders like the National Lottery Heritage Fund normally liked evidence that organisations are talking to each other locally;
- Natasha Brown and Nicola Wood have been working to bring community organisations together, to work together. Achieving that would be one of the biggest achievements to come out of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund;
- This exercise was labour intensive, as it required officers to be on the ground to network.

The working party agreed that the next meeting be arranged as an online session for a 5.30 pm start for Councillors to meet the following TDC officers:

Penny Button  
 Clive Bowen  
 Nicola Wood  
 Natasha Brown  
 Louise Askew.

Meeting concluded: 6.25 pm