

## **AGENDA 9b, Enc vii) Enhancing Grant Allocation: Analysis of Feedback and Recommendations for Improvement**

### **Executive Summary**

Letters containing feedback were received by the Council from two grant applicants. These were initially reviewed by Chairs and Vice-Chairs, Leader and Deputy Leader and are now being shared with all members for consideration and agreed action. This report provides a comprehensive summary of the feedback received and outlines proposed responses and actions for the Council's deliberation.

Key points of feedback from applicants include concerns about significant funding reductions, perceived lack of transparency in decision-making, changes in the grant-giving structure, and the resource-intensive nature of the application process. The report details these issues and proposes specific actions to address each concern.

Proposed responses focus on enhancing the grant review process, improving transparency, clarifying funding priorities, and strengthening relationships with community organisations. Specific recommendations include implementing a more thorough application review session with Councillors, re-evaluating the grant-giving structure, and developing clearer guidelines for future applications.

The report also suggests key areas for the Council to address in response letters, such as reviewing the decision-making process, explaining shifts in grant-giving strategy, and considering the long-term impact of funding changes on community services.

Draft response letters have been prepared based on these proposals for the Council's review and approval. These letters aim to address the concerns raised by applicants while outlining the Council's commitment to improving the grant allocation process.

The Council is now asked to consider this report, discuss the proposed actions, and agree on the appropriate responses to be sent to the grant applicants who have written.

### **Introduction**

This report presents a detailed analysis of feedback received from two grant applicants regarding the recent allocation process. It is structured to address key concerns raised by applicants and proposes specific actions for the Council's consideration. Each section outlines a primary issue, provides context, and suggests a course of action to address the concern.

The following points are examined in detail:

1. Significant reduction in funding
2. Lack of transparency in decision-making
3. Changes in grant-giving structure
4. Application process
5. Impact on services
6. Collaboration and community impact
7. Future relationship with the Council

Each section concludes with proposed actions designed to improve our grant allocation process and enhance our relationship with the organisations. The Council is asked to review these proposals and consider their implementation as we move forward.

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Following this analysis, key areas for the Council to address are presented and draft response letters for approval. These elements together form a comprehensive approach to responding to applicant feedback and enhancing our grant allocation procedures for the future.

### **Analysis of feedback received**

#### **1. Significant reduction in funding**

Both organisations received significantly less than requested (YMCA: £2,000 vs £10,000 requested; Full Circle: £2,000 vs £11,800 requested).

Both express concern about the impact of this reduction on their ability to deliver planned projects.

Both have responded on how they would use the reduced level of funding, and this has been paid over.

#### **2. Lack of transparency in decision-making**

Both organisations question the rationale behind funding decisions.

YMCA raise concerns about potential conflicts of interest in the decision-making process.

Full Circle suggests that Councillors may not have fully assessed their project's worthiness.

### **Proposed Action**

*Evaluate the Grant Aid process and enhance how applications are reviewed. A beneficial addition would be to have a dedicated session where Councillors can review applications in depth, with an officer present to provide context and answer any questions. This approach would:*

- *Ensure all Councillors have a comprehensive understanding of each application.*
- *Allow for immediate clarification on any aspects of the applications, or to seek answers from applicants if needed.*
- *Provide an opportunity to discuss the potential impact of each project in detail.*

*Implementing this step will strengthen the transparency of our process. It will demonstrate our commitment to thorough, fair evaluation of all applications.*

*Moving forward, this approach could significantly improve the quality of decision-making and help the Council better articulate the rationale behind funding allocations.*

*This represents a positive response to the feedback we have received.*

#### **3. Changes in grant-giving structure**

YMCA note a shift from larger grants to smaller grants, questioning the reasoning behind this change.

Full Circle suggest implementing funding caps or clearer criteria for future applications.

### **Proposed Action**

*Respond to feedback appreciating that the rationale to fund more with less could be viewed as contrary to previous decisions, creating uncertainty and a perceived shift.*

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*A thorough analysis of how we approach grant giving in the future, and taking on board the comments and request for full disclosure of priorities and intentions should be borne in mind. The suggestion of a funding cap is a good one.*

*The application process set a tone with reference to grants over £3k and grants over £5k, and then most got less than this. The Council should be much clearer about the level of grant that will be awarded, and what the Council's priorities are.*

### **4. Application process**

Full Circle raise concerns about the resource-intensive nature of preparing video presentations.

Both organisations imply a need for clearer guidelines and expectations in the application process.

#### **Proposed Action**

*As above these are valid points and can be addressed with some changes to the grant aid application process.*

*The response should be clear that feedback is welcome, and points will be taken into consideration. Any changes will be communicated in advance of grant funding being launched in the next financial year.*

### **5. Impact on services:**

YMCA warns of potential service reductions due to budget deficits, and lost match funding.

Full Circle cannot proceed with their planned project due to insufficient funds.

#### **Proposed Action**

*YMCA are financially secure until April 2025 but have stated that their application to the Council was for match funding. This was not understood at the time and has revealed that we need to be more aware of this and it should be expressly requested on applications in the future.*

*There are opportunities for funding youth initiatives outside of annual grants, this should be communicated to YMCA.*

*Full Circle accepted funds towards an alternative use as were unable to progress the project put forward.*

### **6. Collaboration and community impact**

Both organisations emphasise their commitment to the community and willingness to collaborate.

YMCA addresses perceived negative narratives about their organisation and collaboration efforts.

#### **Proposed Action**

*The response must offer reassurance and commitment to working together for the benefit of the community.*

### **7. Future relationship with the Council:**

Both express a desire to maintain a positive relationship with the Council despite their concerns.

They seek clarity on the Council's priorities and funding approach for future applications.

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### ***Proposed Action***

*Reaffirming that the Council will look at the grant funding process and feedback on changes will provide corrective solutions. The Council is encouraged to remain open and receptive to feedback.*

### **KEY AREAS FOR THE COUNCIL TO ADDRESS:**

- √ Review and clarify the grant decision-making process.
- √ Explain the shift in grant-giving strategy (from larger to smaller grants) and its intended impact.
- √ Consider developing clearer guidelines for grant applications, including potential funding caps or specific criteria.
- √ Address the resource requirements for application processes, question whether presentations are necessary.
- √ Clarify expectations for reporting on smaller grant amounts.
- √ Consider the long-term impact of reduced funding on community services and explore ways to mitigate this.
- √ Engage in open dialogue with these organisations to address perceived negative narratives and foster better collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

This report has presented a comprehensive analysis of the feedback received from two grant applicants, highlighting key areas of concern, and proposing actionable solutions. The issues raised provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of our current grant allocation process.

By addressing these concerns, we have an opportunity to significantly enhance our grant-giving procedures, improve transparency, and strengthen our relationships with local organisations. The proposed actions, if implemented, will lead to a more robust, fair, and effective grant allocation process that better serves our community's needs.

### ***Key recommendations include:***

- Enhancing the application review process with more in-depth Councillor involvement.
- Improving transparency in decision-making.
- Reevaluating our grant-giving structure and funding priorities.
- Streamlining the application process to reduce resource burden on applicants.
- Clarifying reporting expectations for different grant amounts.
- Engaging in open dialogue with community organisations to address concerns and foster collaboration.

Moving forward it is crucial that we remain responsive to feedback and continue to refine our processes. By doing so, we can ensure that our grant funding achieves maximum impact and supports the vital work of organisations serving our community.

The Council is now asked to consider these recommendations, approve the proposed responses to applicants, and commit to implementing the suggested improvements to our grant allocation process. This proactive approach will demonstrate our dedication to transparent governance and our commitment to supporting the valuable work of our community partners.