

Delegated Cabinet Member Decision Report

Decision Maker and Portfolio area:	Councillor Shoab Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Employment and Enterprise
Date of Decision:	4 th April 2023
Subject:	Priority Programme Fund Community Grants
Report Author:	Rachel Dyson, Thriving Communities Lead
Ward(s) Affected:	All

Reason for the decision: To allocate grant funding from the Priority Programme Fund (PPF) to community grants, renewing existing grants for one year (23/24).

Summary: The purpose of this report is to seek approval to allocate funding from the Priority Programme Fund for the renewal of grants to Werneth & Freehold Community Development Project, Greenacres Community Centre and Oldham Credit Union for one year until 31st March 2024, at a total cost of £100,000.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s): Option 1 – Decommissioning: This is not regarded as a viable option. For the organisations funded this would represent the loss of their core funding and may result in a significant reduction in the services they are able to offer, or possibly result in closure of the centres or services.

Option 2 – Renew grant agreements for one year (23/24): This would sustain funding to organisations at the current level, providing some core funding supporting them to continue to provide services to residents.

Recommendation(s):

Option 2 – Renew grant agreements for one year (23/24): This would sustain funding to organisations at the current level, providing some core funding supporting them to continue to provide services to residents.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

The 2023/24 revenue budget for the Priority Programme Fund (PPF) is £610,940. As per the March 2022 report, Action Together have been awarded a grant of £270,500 per annum to 2024/25 which leaves a remaining balance to commit of £340,440.

The report recommends renewing the grant agreements for 2023/24 to the following:

Greenacres CA £32,000

Werneth & Freehold CDP £32,000

Oldham Credit Union £36,000

The grants renewals totalling £100,000 can be met from the PPF budget. This leaves a balance of £240,440 to be allocated in 2023/24.

(Nicola Harrop – Finance Manager)

*What are the **procurement** implications?*

There are no procurement implications as this relates to the approval of grants.

(Emily Molden, Senior Category Manager)

*What are the **legal** implications?*

Legal Services supports the recommendation to renew the grant agreements for one year (23/24) which is in accordance with the Council CPR's and Public Procurement Regulations. The funding allows the organisations to continue to provide at the same level some core services to the residents of Oldham.

(Sukie Kaur – Solicitor)

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*

None

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)

No vulnerable group will be disproportionality affected from the proposals contained within this report. However, an EIA would be undertaken in the event that grant funding is not agreed or is reduced or withdrawn.

1 Background

1.1 The Council has, for a number of years, funded a range of voluntary, community and faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector organisations through its Priority Programme Fund (PPF). The fund has had three main strands, alongside supporting a small number of community events:

- Voluntary Sector Infrastructure
- Community Centres and Organisations
- Legal and Advice Services

The focus of this report is grants to Community Centres & Organisations. Legal and Advice Services is subject to a separate report. A grant for Voluntary Sector Infrastructure is in place until 2025.

1.2 **Oldham Credit Union** exists to promote greater financial equality in Oldham Borough by providing accessible, secure savings and an ethical source of credit at fair and reasonable rates of interest. It particularly benefits people who otherwise would be financially excluded and therefore have difficulty accessing mainstream financial services and might otherwise become dependent upon loan sharks charging extortionate rates of interest.

1.3 **Werneth and Freehold Community Development Project and Greenacres Community Centre** provide opportunities and venues for interaction and engagement within communities and for communities to engage with other stakeholders. They provide a means for residents to engage in a range of positive and creative activities, which enhance their quality of life and provide access to opportunities to further life chances. Building strong communities and community engagement are central components of the work of the organisation. Participation by local residents in such activities supports the principle of building cohesive communities by encouraging individuals to engage and interact with others through shared common interests. Furthermore, it provides significant opportunities for local people to develop their skills and contribute to their community by partaking in a range of volunteering opportunities. Both organisations utilise the core funding to attract inward investment to deliver services (e.g., early years provision).

2 Current Position

2.2 The Council has provided core grant funding to several smaller voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, through the Priority Programme Fund, for many years. The allocations have been reviewed at regular intervals and there are now only a small number of organisations who receive funding as a result of budget reductions, changing Council priorities and the need to seek greater efficiencies and value for money.

2.3 In 22/23 grants were awarded as follows:

Organisation	Funding Allocation 21/22
Greenacres Community Association	£32,000
Werneth & Freehold CDP	£32,000
Oldham Credit Union	£36,000
Total	£100,000

3 Proposals & Conclusions

Community Centres & Organisations

3.1 It is proposed that one-year grants are awarded to the community centres and organisations for 23/24 at the same level as the previous year at a total cost of **£100,000**. It is worth noting that the award of a grant at a static level in relation to previous years represents a real terms reduction in available funding, taking into account inflation of costs.

3.2 Proposed allocations are as follows:

Organisation	Proposed Funding Allocation (22/23)
Greenacres Community Association	£32,000
Werneth & Freehold CDP	£32,000
Oldham Credit Union	£36,000
Total	£100,000

3.3 The total of grants awarded from the Priority Programme Fund results in a short fall of £19,560, which has previously been met by contributions from the CCG and subsequently by Covid Outbreak Management Funds (COMF). For 23-24 it was agreed by Cabinet that the shortfall will be met by funds allocated to the Cost of Living response given the significant contribution of all awardees to supporting residents facing financial challenges.

VCFSE Sector Commissioning Review

3.4 The Priority Programme Fund budget represents only one element of the Council's funding to the VCFSE sector, which has historically been set aside for core revenue funding to key local organisations. VCFSE organisations are also funded from across the Council via grants from other departmental budgets, through external grant programmes, via commissioned contract awards and through Members' local budgets. Given the ongoing shortfall within the PPF budget it is proposed that the use of this budget should be considered within the totality of that investment, and recognising that impacts extend not only to the Council's relationship with the sector as a whole, but also to the range of outcomes within wider strategies to which these key organisations contribute.

3.5 At a Greater Manchester level there have been significant policy developments and commitments made by all GM authorities including Oldham in relation to the VCFSE. Notably in September 2021 all GM Authorities signed a refreshed [Accord](#) with the VCFSE sector which builds on the previous 2017 Accord with GMCA and 2017 MoU with the Health & Social Care Partnership. The Accord sets out eight commitments to ways of working with the sector and shared goals which recognise the role of the sector in delivering the Greater Manchester Strategy and the GM Integrated Care strategy as well as the key role they have played within the pandemic response. These commitments include fully implementing the recommendations of the previously published [GM VCFSE Commissioning Framework](#), of which a central element is the relationship of the public sector as commissioners and grant givers to the VCFSE.

3.6 It is now more than 10 years since the Council published its Compact with the VCFSE and although many of the principles underpinning that remain, there have been significant developments in the policy and commissioning landscape since then which should inform our approach. Likewise, there are additional obligations introduced through the new Subsidy Control legislation around the justification and publication of grants awarded which require robust decision making and recording in relation to the funding of the VCFSE.

3.2 In light of all of the above a full review is underway of the Council's commissioned activity and services to the voluntary sector, whether that be contracted or through the provision of grants. This review should give consideration to the role of the PPF funded activity within it, and to the following:

- Purpose and objectives of funding
- Alignment of funding priorities to refreshed Council Plan & Oldham Plan
- Current delivery & outcomes
- Funding terms – use of grants / contracts, commissioning approach
- Proportionate Monitoring
- Equalities Impact Assessment
- Compliance with subsidy control
- Appropriate future funding term – contribution to resilience of the sector

3.3 This exercise would seek to make recommendations to ensure Oldham's alignment to the GM VCFSE Commissioning Framework, as well as refreshing the Compact with the VCFSE Sector. It would also make a significant contribution to other key pieces of work in development across the system, in particular the development of a whole system Prevention Framework and the consideration of the role of VCFSE in place-based integration, the implementation of the Social Value Portal, the development of a single investment fund for the VCFSE and the Cooperative Approach to Use of Community Assets policy.

In consultation with



Sayyed Osman, Deputy Chief Executive

Date: 6th April 2023

Cllr Shoab Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Employment & Enterprise



Date: Thursday 6th April 2023