

Tackling Inequalities through Grant Aid Consultation Summary Report

What we did:

Two online consultations have taken place on Citizen's Space (and by letter to every funded lunch club as they do not all have internet access) and were open from August 16th 2019 and 17th September 2019. Paper responses continued to be accepted until the end of September.

The first consultation was an open public consultation regarding the principles on the future of Grant Aid. The consultation sought to find out to what extent people thought that i) the council should continue to have a Grant Aid budget, ii) whether this should be ring fenced for the local voluntary and community sector, iii) whether the Council should continue to make grant commitments for more than one year and iv) whether the budget should continue

The public consultation was promoted via the Web Blogs and Social Media platforms and overall 155 people completed the consultation which was a healthy number of responses.

The second consultation was a closed consultation to existing grant recipients only. This consultation ran concurrently with the wider public consultation and because of this it sought to explore what the impact would be if there was no longer a Grant Aid budget, how the service to clients would change and what the groups could do to mitigate the impact of any cut to the Grant Aid budget. 38 groups responded to the impact consultation.

Findings of the Public Consultation:

There was overwhelming support regarding all aspects of continuing a Grant Aid budget as a means to continue our investment into the local voluntary and community sector. Results are summarised below.

Q1. Should the council continue to have a Grant Aid budget as a means to invest in the voluntary and community sector?

Yes: 153

No: 1

Not Answered: 1

All but 2 respondents agreed that we should continue to have Grant Aid to invest in our voluntary and community sector with many indicating that Grant Aid is good for our city and the benefits far outweigh the costs of the grants given. Reasons for this were numerous but could broadly be broken down into the following;

- The voluntary sector deliver vital services to the most vulnerable people in Sheffield
 - “Voluntary Sector Organisations make a huge and essential contribution to supporting the most vulnerable people in Sheffield”
- Grant Aid goes a long to tackle inequality within the city
 - “Poverty in Sheffield would only increase without a Grant Aid budget. Services are already underfunded thanks to national Government’s austerity agenda. This will only worsen with the uncertainty of Brexit”
 - “The voluntary sector addresses issues like poverty, inequality and homelessness”
- Grant recipients deliver on council priorities and a number of council departments directly benefit from this work.
 - “The work the voluntary and community sector in the city is immense. It helps subsidise many of the activities that the local authority struggles to provide.
 - “The sector supplements and indeed sometimes substitutes the work that the local authority would have to do and saves the authority money”
- Grant Aid fits in with the charitable history of Sheffield and the fabric of our local community
 - “Sheffield City Council have a long history of supporting the sector and should be proud of this fact, and continue the commitment to helping the sector support the community which we are all part of”
 - “It’s good for the local economy and the overall fabric of Sheffield”
- Grant Aid helps organisations to be more sustainable, leverage additional income into the city and make a difference to individuals who need it most
 - “The Grant Aid budget is an essential means for us to draw down much larger sums of money from other grant making trusts to benefit the people of Sheffield”
- The local voluntary and community sector is already facing significant cuts from other funding streams and has faced a 58% cut to the Grant Aid budget in the last decade.
 - “Due to cuts to the budget and austerity cuts many groups have already folded.”
 - “Funding is harder to come by but demand has risen. There is an inverse correlation between demand and the availability of funding”

Q2. Should this budget continue to be ring-fenced specifically for Sheffield’s local voluntary and community sector?

Yes: 148

No: 5

Not Answered: 2

Again the vast majority of respondents believed that the Grant Aid budget should be ring-fenced for Sheffield’s local voluntary sector, ensuring that local people benefit from local organisations. It is clear from the responses that people believe

- Local services develop a detailed knowledge of the needs of local communities

- “They know the local community best and have the intelligence and relationships built up over a long period of times.”
- “Local organisations are a key part of the community infrastructure in the city.”
- **Sheffield residents must benefit from Grant Aid**
 - “By ring-fencing the fund for local groups you are guaranteeing that my council tax will be benefitting those in Sheffield rather than going to national organisations which may be focused elsewhere”
- **It is important to invest in local people**
 - “Not only does Grant Aid support Sheffield people, it employs Sheffield people”
 - “Local organisations working for local people have a unique role and it is appropriate for the local council to support this”
- **Working locally develops strong partnerships and encourages groups to work together to achieve bigger aims**
 - “Organisations have built up their knowledge and specialisms to help people locally.”
 - “Local groups work together to improve things for local people”
- **National organisations can bring benefits but must have a Sheffield base and must work with existing local organisations**
 - “By ring-fencing the fund for local groups you are guaranteeing that my council tax will be benefitting those in Sheffield rather than going to national organisations which may be focused elsewhere”
 - Larger national organisations can deliver excellent outcomes but need to have a local knowledge base and work with existing community groups in the area”

Q3. Should the council continue to provide grant commitments for more than one year?

Yes: 151

No: 2

Not Answered: 2

Again the vast majority of responses indicated that the Council should provide grant commitments for more than one year a number of people questioned the fact that if we can award a 25 year contract to Amey then surely it should be possible to commit to three year agreements with local charities. Generally people felt that multi-year agreements;

- **Demonstrate Sheffield City Council are genuinely committed to the voluntary and community sector**
 - “In order to show genuine commitment to the sector the local authority should offer multi-year grant agreements.”
 - “The three-year strategy has felt like a true partnership between the voluntary sector and the council. Any less than this would feel like a massive step backwards”
- **Provide much needed sustainability and stability to organisations**
 - “3 year grants reduce uncertainty for groups”

- “It gives voluntary organisations a secure income so they can plan their activities with confidence”
- Support groups to be able to plan for the long term which improves practice and improves outcomes for service users
 - “You can’t plan properly if you don’t know whether you’ve got money in the future. Multi-year agreements help with stability and forward planning which improves the service.”
 - “Planning a service is extremely difficult without stability in funding. You’ve hardly started and then it’s time to prepare to pack up or start bidding for the next grant to carry on.”
- Multi-year agreements have a positive impact on staff and volunteers and lead to better recruitment and retention
 - “The longer organisations can plan for the better. Otherwise it wastes huge resources recruiting and training new staff only to see them leave because the funding for their post is not guaranteed.”
 - “Short-term grants don’t secure the best staff and people leave before the end of a funding period because they need more secure work”
- One year grant cycles are inefficient for both the council and for the organisations
 - “In order to show genuine commitment to the sector the local authority should offer multi-year grant agreements.”
 - “3 year grants also reduce the work for the council and the staff & volunteers of the voluntary and community groups”

Q4. Should the council continue to use the Grant Aid budget specifically to fund city-wide activity?

Yes: 139

No: 11

Not Answered: 4

Although a higher number of people disagreed with this than previous questions there was still a very high level of support for Grant Aid being set aside to fund city-wide activity. Many people felt that other funding pots existed on a local level (for example Ward Pots and Local CIL) and that there were few funding options for city-wide groups. Other comments included

- City-wide groups can be more effective, efficient and strategic
 - “A city-wide approach will generally have a wider benefit and a more strategic focus.”
 - “The resources have already been cut and city wide services enable organisations to be more cost effective while providing services to more communities.”
- Local knowledge is the key to successful working for city-wide groups
 - The services needed to meet local problems benefit from people with a local interest and local knowledge. But we are one city and it makes sense to look at the whole picture to see where the needs are greatest or more acute.”

- There needs to be a balance between city-wide funding and local funding, the current structure achieves this balance well
 - “The current model enables both neighbourhood projects and city-wide projects to be supported. Not every issue can be fixed by working locally.”
 - “A thriving city that provides excellent services particularly for the most vulnerable communities needs a combination of local services and city wide services.”
- A city-wide approach often benefits particular communities of interest
 - “Some things are best done at scale across the city, so there is a joined up, coordinated and coherent approach. Otherwise people living in different areas could receive services of varying quality”.
 - Some services should be delivered city-wide such as advice and asylum seekers, other services might be better suited locally such as certain young people’s services.”
- It is important to consider how city-wide funding links with more local funding such as Ward Pots, CIL and PKW.
 - “There are lots of neighbourhood level funding sources available across Sheffield but not many funding sources targeted at citywide organisations who can provide a more consistent service across Sheffield”
 - “You should think about how different funding streams such as CIL and Ward Pots link in with city-wide funding”.

Q5. Do you have any ideas for how Grant Aid could better tackle inequalities across the city?

A large number of responses were received to this question including a range of different answers such as

- Requires strategic response
- Requires greater investment
- Requires longer term investment
- Requires a balance of supporting key organisations who tackle inequality on a city-wide basis and ensuring other groups can access support / apply for grants
- A number of suggestions were made suggesting that all Sheffield City Council grants and contracts asked providers to show how they would tackle inequalities prior to awards being made

All of these responses will feed into the wider grant aid review that is due to take place between December 2019 and August 2020.

Findings of the Impact Consultation:

42 groups responded to the impact consultation, all of the groups in receipt of Core Service Grants, Infrastructure Grants, Tackling Inequality Grants and the Lunch Club Development Grant completed the consultation and 29 funded lunch clubs (approximately 60% of all lunch clubs) did so.

Groups funded through Grant Aid support some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Sheffield including asylum seekers, homeless and people with disabilities. Many of the groups who are funded through Grant Aid directly reduce inequalities through their work and it is clear that any reduction in Grant Aid funding would have a significant negative impact on the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Sheffield. Groups reported that a reduction to the Grant Aid funding would result in;

- Significantly reduced services which would mean a large number of vulnerable and marginalised Sheffield citizens would no longer be able to access the support that they rely on.
- Significant reduction in staff hours and including a large number of redundancies (approx. 100 across all organisations)
- Reduction in volunteer hours despite an increasing dependency on volunteers (well over 100 across all organisations)
- Significant financial insecurity that could lead to the closure of one or more organisations
- Because of issues highlighted there would undoubtedly be a negative knock on effect upon the work of a number of council departments.

The information provided by organisations will be used as part of the wider Grant Aid review that will be undertaken between December 2019 and August 2020.

Lunch Clubs were asked how they service they offered would be different without the lunch club grant. Of the 29 who responded, 9 clubs said they would be forced to close, 18 clubs said they would have to make some changes to survive and only 2 clubs said they could continue without any changes. The most common changes that would need to be made are charging members more (15), not offer transport for members (10), not offer as many activities (8), run less frequently (6), have fewer members (5). It is therefore clear that any reduction to the lunch club fund would have a significant negative impact on older people in Sheffield.

Summary of conclusions:

It is clear that Grant Aid has wide support from the people of Sheffield and that people believe that Grant Aid should ring-fenced for Sheffield's local voluntary and community sector delivering city-wide activity. However there are a number of opinions about how we might shape this funding.

Therefore the consultation appears to support the decision to offer a one year extension to the majority of grants whilst also launching a new open application Tackling Inequalities' Grant Fund pending a wider review of Grant Aid and how Sheffield City Council works with the wider voluntary and community sector. All of the information provided within the consultation will be used to form this wider review.