

**Report to Aldridge & Beacon Area Panel  
1<sup>st</sup> October, 2013  
Role of the Strategic Funding Office**

**1. Context**

- 1.1 Walsall has been less successful than many other local authority areas, including Black Country neighbours, in securing larger strategic funding streams with the potential for significant impact on achieving core priorities. Most major funders report Walsall underachieving against application volume and award forecasts. Quality of applications received is noted as generally lower than expected, with major funders attributing this to levels of capacity and skills amongst Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations. Walsall does consistently well in securing 'community grants' of less than £10,000 but does not access the larger funding streams in line with expectations from funders.
- 1.2 Whilst the issue is present across the sub-region, Walsall has one of the lowest success rates of the four authorities. 2010 - 2013 Lottery award data shows in Walsall:
- Only 15% of all awards are over £10,000, compared to 27% in the Black Country (39% in West Midlands)
  - Only 4% are over £100,000, compared to 9% in the Black Country (7% in West Midlands)
  - 75% of funding is awarded from Big Lottery Fund
- 1.3 The Strategic Resource Officer (SRO) post was developed as an output of the Council report regarding devolution through Area Partnerships (approved 22 May 2013).

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To note the content of the report.

**3. Role of the Strategic Resource Officer**

- 3.1 The central task of the SRO role is to develop and deliver a strategy for increasing levels of external funding into the Borough. The strategy is focused on large scale

funding, where projects are bidding for £100,000 or more. It will only apply to funding opportunities below this value where it is agreed there is potential for significant impact on achieving the priorities of the 'Walsall Plan'. Walsall's acceptable levels of success with smaller funding streams will continue to be supported through the work of Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA).

- 3.2 The strategy has been considered by Corporate Management Team (CMT) and will be presented to a Cabinet CMT meeting shortly for consideration. Key tasks within the strategy include:
  
- 3.3 Set up responsive Policy and Funding Project Initiation Group (meeting on an ad hoc basis): Administered through the support of the Strategic Resources Officer post, as large funding opportunities arise and as required a Project Initiation Group, with a dynamic membership based on the opportunity faced, will meet on an ad hoc basis (dictated by the emergence of opportunities). The role of the Project Initiation Group (chaired by the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services) would be to consider the opportunity presented and as required, construct a task and finish group that is skilled and able to respond to the bidding process, in line with the Council's grant procedure. The task and finish group would then report internally to the Corporate Management Team and to the Partnership, Tasking and Co-ordination Group/Borough Management Board. This approach within the strategy is to ensure each opportunity is appropriately considered, there is corporate understanding, that sound project management is in place from the start and that each opportunity is maximised, sitting alongside other Council/partner activity. Aims to:
  - Maximise opportunities to attract funding into the borough and influence development of external funding programmes.
  - Provide overview of policy developments with the support of the Strategic Resource Officer post and consider impact on communities, individual agencies and partnership activity.
  - Manage resources applied to funding bids based on size and complexity.
  - Provide accountability for funding applications whilst remaining flexible in approach.
  
- 3.4 Action to explore the suitability of approach in Walsall. Consider approach for appraising large bids and taking strategic decisions on which to support with resources and/or formal endorsement. If suitable, an appraisal system may:
  - Identify appropriate resources and support for funding bids across service areas.
  - Develop a 'pipeline' of project ideas and partnerships from which to influence funders.
  - Identify organisations with ability to deliver externally funded projects, and strategically target capacity building resource.
  
- 3.5 Create database of applications, detailing organisation type, funding stream, amounts, success, feedback etc. Application outcomes captured to evidence

successes and those requiring further consideration. Conduct lessons learnt exercise on all bids Council is lead or substantive partner. Aims to:

- Generate best practice approaches on funding bids.
- Inform a strategy of targeted development work and develop a network of organisations to be engaged in existing networks
- Identify intelligence and expertise for future bids

3.6 In partnership with Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) and Walsall Housing Group (whg) signpost/deliver training to the VCS on elements of funding. Make referrals to capacity building organisations. Develop suite of online support materials. Host regular funding fairs to promote opportunities.

3.7 Redevelop Walsall Partnership funding webpage and utilise social media to promote funding opportunities with aims to promote funding and capacity building opportunities to VCS and service areas, and further strengthen Area Partnership and other existing networks. The redeveloped Funding pages of the Area Partnership website are now live and can be accessed by the following link <http://www.walsallpartnership.org.uk/funding/>

#### **4. Work in Aldridge & Beacon**

4.1 I have met with a range of groups in Aldridge and Beacon, through referrals and direct contact, and also via attendance at John Morris' networking meetings. I am working with a number of groups in the area to identify funds for projects.

4.2 In terms of large strategic funds, groups in the Area have been contacted in relation to the recent Ageing Better bid to Big Lottery Fund, helping to identify the need for an intervention to tackle social isolation amongst older people. A 'lessons learnt' process is being undertaken to identify where this unsuccessful bid could have been made stronger and there are plans to develop a strategic network to identify and bid for other available funds to meet this need. Area 2 groups will be crucial in supporting the bid.

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