

HEAD OF CULTURAL AND PROJECT SERVICES

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Dear Colleague

Notification of a review of Ashford Borough Council funding and support to voluntary and community organisations

We want your views

I am writing to you and your organisation with important information about a review of Ashford Borough Council funding and support to voluntary and community organisations which we are currently undertaking, in line with Audit Commission guidance on best practice.

The review has three main objectives:

- To ensure that the Council's funding and support to local voluntary and community organisations results in the delivery of quality public and community services of demonstrable benefit to local people, in line with our strategic aims and corporate priorities.
- To simplify and clarify our current funding processes and application procedures for all involved.
- To produce a policy to guide our funding and support of voluntary and community organisations in the future.

The review has now produced a [draft funding and support policy](#) which details some new proposals for the way the Council funds voluntary and community organisations, with the recommendation that these proposals become effective from 1 April 2010. **If you currently receive Ashford Borough Council funding (including Discretionary Business Rate Relief) please refer to page 2 for how these proposals may affect you.**

While the total amount of funding support to the sector is a matter for the Council to consider when agreeing its budget plans, this review seeks to introduce new criteria including a 'shopping' scheme for revenue grants and modest allocations for emergency grants and to support organisational change (for 'infrastructure' groups). The review has also concluded there could be a place in our new framework for a formal process of loans to organisations, although these may have to be modest due to the constraints on the Council. The policy also explains how we want to clarify and simplify the funding process for all applicants by using a single point of contact within the Council known as the 'single grants gateway' and by introducing a simple Expression of Interest as the first stage of *any* funding application to us.

This review is being led by the Cultural Services unit, guided by a task group of Councillors and a *voluntary sector representative* who is a trustee of Ashford Community Network*. The task group believes these new proposals will build on the good practice of Ashford Borough Council's Community Grants Fund and may offer greater funding opportunities for local groups.

Now we want to hear your views.

The task group would therefore like to invite voluntary and community organisations and parish councils to give your views on the new draft policy and funding programme. We are particularly interested in the pros or cons for your organisation, especially if you currently receive Ashford Borough Council funding in some form. Although parish councils are not generally classified as voluntary organisations, they do have a very important role in the delivery of local projects and services and management of facilities particularly in our rural areas, and we are therefore proposing that they are eligible to apply through the funding programme (as they have been to the Community Grants Fund to date).

I have enclosed the draft policy and funding programme documents with this letter and would be grateful if you would consider the detail closely and feedback your comments in writing, either by email or letter, to Kim Harlow or Simon Bannister at the above address by 30 January 2009. If you do not have access to email, I have enclosed a freepost envelope for your use.

Organisations currently in receipt of Ashford Borough Council funding

Please note that, subject to the final outcome of this review, your organisation may be required to go through a different process and/or meet new criteria in order to receive grant funding in the future. We are therefore notifying you, with up to 18 months' advanced warning, that YOUR GRANT COULD POSSIBLY BE AT RISK for the financial year 2010 – 2011 and you may wish to investigate alternative sources of funding. Please note that a grant from us in this current year does not guarantee future funding except where an organisation has a signed, time-specific agreement or contract with us.

NB this review does not include concurrent grants to parish councils.

Ashford Borough Council is a long-standing partner and advocate of the voluntary and community sector. We work with many of the 850 plus voluntary and community organisations in the borough who provide a wide range of community services and now run many of our leisure activities and facilities. The sector as a whole is a significant employer and brings considerable income into the local economy from a range of public and private sources. We consider this review to be a necessary step towards ensuring that we are targeting the Council's finite resources in the best way possible to support voluntary and community organisations in helping us to meet the greatest needs of our communities and residents.

We very much look forward to receiving your feedback and using it to ensure that the final version of our Policy for Funding & Support to Voluntary & Community Organisations achieves the review's three original objectives and can be recommended to the Council's Executive Committee for adoption in November 2009.

Yours sincerely



Mark Carty
Head of Cultural & Project Services

**Ashford Community Network is a charitable network of over 100 local voluntary and community organisations supported by Ashford Borough Council and Department for Communities and Local Government. For further information please contact Simon Bannister on 01233 330474.*