
2022/2023 Grants Strategy

Author/s: Peter Hardisty

Date: January 2022

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1.0 Introduction

HPLC Response to the COVID-19 Crisis (with Particular Regard to the Grants Programme)

During the early weeks of 2020, it became clear that COVID-19 was spreading quickly across the world, and by March it was clear this virus was going to impact life in the UK in an unprecedented manner. In light of the public health crisis, HPLC enacted a policy to move almost all staff (including the Grants Officer) to confined home-working conditions; all external meetings and appointments were cancelled, which included any visits relating to grants and subsequent trustees' meetings, until such time as the virus containment measures can be lifted. The decision was driven by the highly vulnerable nature of HPLC's almshouse residents, who are predominantly older and at high risk of developing complications, and it was deemed vital that the staff of HPLC do everything possible to minimise the risk of exposure for them. It was also vital that services supporting the almshouse residents were maintained safely and effectively. To this end, HPLC took the further decision to redeploy the Grants Officer to more critical front-line services, although, that officer still monitored the progress of those organisations still delivering services for the active grants rounds. However, all other grants activity, both individual and organisational, that would normally be undertaken, was suspended. This entailed:-

- a) The Organisational Grant Application process for the April 2020 round was cancelled. The applications received were held over for a funding opportunity that was eventually delivered as an April 2021 grant round, the only one of the year.
- b) As of 27th April 2020 (the previous year), the Individual Grant Application process was restarted (after a six week suspension) in a limited form, so intended to minimise financial risk to HPLC whilst still serving the residents of The Ancient Parish, and removing any health risks to the Grants Officer and grant recipients. As of 16th November 2021 HPLC instated limited 'doorstep' visits with grant applicants, allowing the Grants Officer some access (with appropriate PPE/distancing measures in place) to those applicants, allowing some measure of further assessment of the applicants' needs.

All of these changes has redefined what HPLC's grant making can be done, in the medium-long term. As before, HPLC grants are available to individuals in need and organisations that assist people in need. When looking at 'need', it is important to look at both material needs (food, warmth, housing, adequate income and employment) as well as psychological needs (mental health, quality relationships, sense of security and self-esteem). The charity cannot possibly hope to provide funding to everybody who asks for our assistance. In order to ensure a fair, equitable and transparent allocation of funding; and in order to target our resources on people who most need our support the charity completes a grant strategy annually. The grant strategy outlines the charity's key priorities for the year. Any applications made to the charity are assessed against these priorities and only applications that demonstrate an ability to evidence and address these needs will be funded. This strategy covers applications for grants made between 1st July 2022 and 30th June 2023. Funding is restricted to the Ancient Parish of Harborne.

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This consists of the following parish areas:

- St Boniface Quinton Road West (Birmingham)
- St Faith and St Laurence (Harborne)
- St John (Harborne)
- St Peter (Harborne)
- St Albans (Smethwick)
- St Chad (Smethwick)
- St Mary (Smethwick)
- St Matthew (Smethwick)
- St Michael and All Angels (Smethwick)
- St Stephens (Smethwick)
- St Paul (Smethwick)
- Old Church (Smethwick)

The grants programme will continue to be delivered through 2022/2023 in the same limited form as in the year 2021/2022, until such time as the virus containment measures can be safely lifted.

2.0 Previous Achievements

Over the last audited period (2020/21) the charity was able to support **2,318** people through the grant programmes for individuals and organisations, conservatively spending only **44.41%** of the original total grants budget. The data shows the audited year's budget was **94.9%** of the previous year's, but a substantial **99.66%** more (almost twice as many) individuals were supported.

Category/Priority	Number of grants	Value	Number of Recipients
16-24yr old NEET Provision, or Risk of Becoming NEET	2	£10,893.72	124
Services for Older People	7	£59,997.18	422
Debt and Money Management	2	£14,185.30	323
Food and Household Goods Distribution	1	£10,923.80	1,235
Core Funding	0	-	-
Individual grants			
Birmingham	36	£10,888.73	109
Smethwick	36	£13,011.73	105
Totals	84	£119,900.46	2,318

3.0 Data and Trends

Summary of previous findings: (2020/2021 -vs.- 2019/2020)

By Organisations Addressing Grant Priorities

Once again, there is little to be gained from making any direct comparison with previous years' performance figure, as for the second year running all performance figures have been heavily skewed by the COVID-19 crisis, and HPLC had a greatly reduced budget in place. An opportunity to

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fund one organisation providing 'Food and Household Goods Distribution' support has resulted in an unusual increase in the numbers of individuals receiving HPLC support, with the previous year's total of 984 (supported by organisational funding) surpassed by the audited year's total of 2,104. The rapid need to adapt organisational services, responding to the crisis, has had the benefit of allowing the majority of the delivery organisation HPLC frequently work with to continue to operate however, many have had to scale back their services and/or downsize their staffing teams. As with last year, a lot of the organisational support necessarily took a 'light touch' form, and so some of the lasting benefit to be gained from any intensive support (that HPLC often funds) was again unavoidably lost.

By Individual Grant Support

Once again, there is little to be gained from making any direct comparison with previous years' performance figures, however, what is of note is that even though a smaller budget was made available, more grants were made and more individuals were supported in the year than the year before. This is likely due to a slow but steady pick up in the number of applications made by support organisations calling on HPLC's individual grant programme, balanced against the 'spending cap' (put in place to minimise financial risk to the charity), resulting in a reduced spend-per-grant compared with pre-COVID spending, heavily skewed by the COVID-19 crisis.

Strategy, 2022/2023

Before making any adjustment to last year's grant priorities, a lot of research relating to trends in deprivation in the parishes we cover was considered. In summary, it was found that in the parish areas we cover, there continues to be high levels of deprivation and high unemployment levels, along with low school attainment and a high number of people with no qualifications. In both Birmingham and Sandwell, pensioner poverty has seen an improvement on figures from the early years of the century, but a worsening over the last fifteen years. However, child poverty has seen greater worsening over the past decade, and is still the highest proportion of all groups measured. Child poverty impacts on both physical and mental health of individuals and affects educational achievements. Even more families living in poverty have to turn to foodbanks, this year being the highest numbers of applicants on record, surpassing last year's shocking record several-fold.

The impact of poverty

Living in poverty contributes to those on lower incomes experiencing poorer physical health and being more likely to have mental health issues. Over a quarter of working-age people in the poorest fifth of the population experience depression or anxiety. The pressures of living in poverty cause considerable stress, which is often linked to poorer mental health as well as strained relationships within families. The long-term effects of poverty culminate in people in deprived areas having significantly lower life expectancy than those in better-off places.

In addition to having lower incomes week to week, people in poverty are also much less likely to be able to build up savings to help cover unexpected expenses, invest in improvements to their homes or access opportunities. One in three of those in the poorest fifth have no savings at all. People on low incomes are also more likely to get into problem debt through falling behind with bills and credit

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payments. One in six people in the poorest fifth of the population report that they are in problem debt, most commonly falling behind with Council Tax payments, rent or utility bills. In the early months of 2022 fuel-utility bills saw a massive increase, hitting those in poverty the worst.

People claiming UC must currently wait a minimum of five weeks for their first payment. Aside from one week admin/processing time this is due to the policy that UC is paid monthly, in arrears. Over the past several years, whilst dealing with many UC claimants' grant applications, it has become clear that the five weeks' waiting time for a decision is too long for claimants to wait for money they need to cover essentials and stay out of debt, plus the COVID-19 crisis has often increased the waiting period.

Current findings: National

A national study of homelessness illustrates the trends analysis made above for HPLC's individual grant support programme. *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2019* is the eighth annual report of an independent study, commissioned and funded by leading UK homelessness charity *Crisis*. The organisation has not been able to produce a report for 2020 or 2021 due to resource shortfall issues created by the COVID-19 crisis, however, reviewing previous years' reports shows that change has been gradual, and we may reasonably assume issues identified in the 2019 report remained prevalent in 2021 and beyond. That report came at a time when there had been some of the most significant policy developments in recent times, with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (April 2018), and the Rough Sleeping Strategy (Summer 2018), and its key findings showed:-

- *"71% of local authorities (LAs) participating in this [2019] year's LA Survey reported that homelessness had been recently increasing, and in a quarter of cases to a 'significant' extent. Nationally, 2017/18 saw a small drop in the recorded statutory homelessness caseload, although it still remains 42% above their 2009 low point.*
- *The extraordinary rise since 2010 in the number of households made homeless by the ending of private tenancies seems finally to have peaked. Homelessness temporary accommodation placements, however, have continued to rise, and now stand 71% higher than in 2011, with a disproportionate rise in "Bed & Breakfast" use also ongoing.*
- *Very few local authority respondents believed that existing social housing provision in their area is commensurate with homelessness needs, but many were at least equally concerned about the problematic profile of the local social housing stock portfolio, mismatched to need. There were also widespread anxieties about ongoing changes to housing association tenancy allocation policies impeding local authorities' ability to resolve homelessness.*
- *Private rents seem to be falling in real terms across the country as a whole, but rising in London. Affordability in the sector as a whole also seems to be improving, and repossessions falling. However the growth in the private rented sector (only marginally reversed in the last year) has*

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exposed many more low-income households to higher housing costs, a smaller proportion of which are protected through housing allowances in the benefit system.

- *The safety net once provided by Housing Benefit, whereby post housing incomes were protected from erosion below basic benefit levels, has now effectively ended for the bulk of private tenants in receipt of benefit across the country, with young people under 35 particularly badly affected by reduced Local Housing Allowance rates (LHA) and the working age benefit freeze.*
- *There is considerable concern amongst local authority respondents of the ongoing expected impact of welfare reform on homelessness in their area. The full roll out of UC is the subject of greatest concern with nearly two thirds of local authorities anticipating a “significant” homelessness increase as a result. Aside from anxieties on UC, most LAs anticipated that homelessness would “significantly” increase due to then freeze in LHA rates (53%) and other working age benefits (51%), with almost as many local authorities (47%) reporting likewise for the lowered benefit cap.”*

2019’s Homelessness Monitor report did however provide encouraging evidence that the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) is enabling councils to help more people in housing need. Most local authorities reported that the HRA has enabled a more ‘person-centred’ approach to managing homelessness in their area and two-thirds of authorities saw the Act as having positive impacts for single people. While this is a positive step forward, there remain pressing issues that if unresolved risk reversing the positive steps achieved by the HRA so far. However, there are still rising trends in three of England’s four broad regions, including core cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester, and amongst Central and Eastern European migrants, despite there being a reduced influx of migrants from these areas, as direct result of Brexit.

The on-going COVID-19 crisis is already exacerbating an already difficult problem, with ‘knock-on’ complications with poverty that will last for years to come. The series of national lockdowns, though vital to protecting the greater health of the general public, put pressure on businesses trying to trade. There was an appreciable increase in Individual Grant applications during 2021 from people who has lost their jobs due to their employers failing or downsizing during the crisis, particularly as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme were both withdrawn 30th September 2021. In the defence of the government’s response to the crisis the furlough scheme, though expensive to the Treasury, will have averted many more job losses, and ultimately saved the Exchequer the high costs of crippling mass unemployment. However, there will likely be further rises in unemployment through the inevitability of continued business closures after months of lockdown.

The data published in January 2022 by the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)* is the most recent, and focusses mainly on the on-going (and predicted future) effects of COVID-19 on the nation’s poorer population. They found that before the crisis, 14.5 million people in the UK were caught up in poverty, equating to more than one in five people. Child poverty and in-work poverty had been on the rise for several years and some groups were disproportionately likely to be pulled into poverty.

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Many of those groups already struggling most to stay afloat continue to bear the brunt of the economic and health impacts of COVID-19. These include:

- part-time workers, low-paid workers and sectors where there are much higher rates of in-work poverty, such as accommodation and food services;
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic households;
- lone parents – mostly women, many of whom work in hard-hit sectors – who are more reliant on local jobs, and are more likely to have struggled with childcare during lockdown;
- private renters, who have higher housing costs, and social renters, who tend to have lower incomes, both leading to higher poverty rates. Renters in work are also more likely to be in a sector more affected by COVID-19;
- areas of the UK where there were already higher levels of unemployment, poverty and deprivation.

[They stated they still] cannot be sure what happened to overall poverty levels in the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, when the furlough scheme and temporary benefit uplift were both in place. However, it is clear that poverty must increase as a result of the £20 'top-up' government support being removed at the end of September 2021.

The JRF research also showed that nationally, about a third of children were living in families lacking the resources for their minimum needs in 1994/95 before the rate fell to 27% in 2011/12, and they state that child poverty has been rising since 2011/12. Now, 4.1 million children live in poverty in the UK (an increase of 500,000 in the last five years). This is much faster than would be expected based on population growth. The total number of children has risen by 3% while the number of children in poverty has risen by 15%.

Virtually all of this increase in child poverty has occurred across working families. In the last five years, poverty rates have risen for every type of working family; lone-parent or couple families, families with full and part-time workers and families with different numbers of adults in work. This is the first period in the last two decades when this has happened. While the proportion of children living in families where no-one works has fallen steadily, the risk of poverty for these families has increased significantly. In 1996/97, 83% of children in workless families lived in poverty. By 2012/13, the risk of poverty for those children had fallen to 63%. Since 2012/13, the risk has grown again; now, 73% of children in workless families are living in poverty.

The Government announced in March 2021 that there would be two rounds of levelling up funds nationally available, set at £4.8 billion. BCC successfully applied for funding for projects including renovations to *Moseley Road Baths*, *Dudley Road*, and the *Birmingham Wheels* site in Bordesley, however none of the funding is earmarked for welfare spending, and SMBC has decided to focus on developing the business case bids in round two, that may have some benefit on unemployment figures.

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Current findings: Our Area

In light of the on-going COVID-19 crisis we expected to see an increase in applications for Individual Grant support across the Ancient Parish; particularly from people self-referring who would not normally be referred to us who may have spent many years in work but have recently lost their jobs, and through 2021 this has proven to be the case and we expect this trend to continue. We also expected the kind of support requested to be more immediate in nature, such as requests for cash-grants or food-bank support, neither of which we can currently provide and again this has proven to be the case through 2021. Also, both Birmingham and Sandwell councils are facing unprecedented pressures on their spending, and in the absence of central government support, can only turn to freezing of budgets or further budgetary cuts through 2022-23 to save revenue. Neither authority has been able to publish up-to date information, so we must rely on existing data to inform HPLC's strategy.

The national picture of a problem with poverty continues to be reflected at a local level into 2022-23. The most recent Index of Deprivation data published in 2015 by '.gov' shows Birmingham is still ranked 6th out of 326 authorities across the UK, representing an increase (detrimentally so) in ranking from 2010, and Sandwell remains ranked 12th (where 1 is the most deprived), also representing a detrimental increase of one position on last year's ranking. Authorities across the West Midlands looked at 7 indicators of deprivation, to measure this:-

- Income deprivation
- Employment deprivation
- Education, skills and training deprivation
- Health deprivation and disability
- Crime
- Barriers to housing and services
- Living environment deprivation

Unfortunately, the single most deprived Sandwell ward, (which falls within the worst 10% of national scores), remains Soho & Victoria, the residents of which mainly fall within the HPLC geographical catchment. Following that, the Smethwick ward is in the top third of deprived wards in Sandwell.

JRF carried out a four-year study that investigated possible solutions to the problem of poverty in the UK (results published in 2020). They found that 14.5 million people (22%) are living in poverty, after housing costs are deducted (AHC), and looking specifically at children: 4.3 million (31%) are living in poverty, AHC. They report that over the past ten years the cost of living (housing, food and fuel prices) increased three times faster than the average wage. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of working households in poverty in that time, with many low paid workers being in insecure jobs with no training opportunities. They outlined a 5-point plan to solve poverty in the UK:

- Boost incomes and reduce costs

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- Deliver an effective benefit system
- Improve education standards and raise skills
- Strengthen families and communities
- Promote long term economic growth benefiting everyone.

Child poverty – In Birmingham, over 1 in 3 children are still living in poverty, above the national average. Birmingham’s Child Poverty Commission was set up to remove some of the barriers which lead to poverty and inequality. In a report published in June 2016, they stated that tackling child poverty was a key priority as they work towards creating a fairer city, though little progress was made in 2017.

In general, Birmingham’s Vision and Priorities 2017–2020 improvement plan continues to aim to reduce the number of children in care or moved into care, and to see a higher proportion of children in need supported to live within their own family. The first report, covering performance up to 2018, shows that after initial successes, the improvement plan is falling behind targets, for all measures. This is, rather unfortunately, particularly true for children’s services, with performance across multiple KPIs at 25% below planned improvement targets for 2018.

In 2015, 29% of children in Sandwell were living in low income families, an increase on the 2013 figure. Sandwell’s Anti-Poverty Action Plan 2016 identified 7 key aims to address child poverty:

- Help people and families to maximise their income and reduce costs
- Create pathways into local employment
- Create stronger communities as a means of meeting local need
- Local agencies use their powers to address anti-poverty
- Respond to food poverty
- Work together to share information, maximise impact and maximise use of resources
- Develop collaborative information and take up campaigns and use local intelligence to influence policy.

Pensioner Poverty – There are still a substantial number of pensioners who have a low standard of living, especially if they are disabled or in ill health. The general trend, over the past 50 years has shown an improvement in (reduction of) pensioner poverty, however the number remains high, and this improvement has faltered in recent years. Since the last measure, 1 in 6 pensioners (1.9 million) in the UK now live in poverty; an increase of 330,000. This again may be due to many reasons, including people living longer, being isolated and poor uptake of benefits. There has also been a significant rise in pensioner poverty amongst the BAME communities, particularly within the Asian communities.

Fuel Poverty – At the time of writing this strategy the nation is facing a rising fuel cost crisis, driven by pressures from overseas gas suppliers. In some cases, home fuel costs have tripled, severely impacting those already living in poverty. This in turn is driving a rise both in debt problems and individuals/families needing to access food banks.

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Homelessness – The encouraging evidence from the most recently available Homelessness Monitor report that the HRA is enabling councils to help more people in housing need. This is offset by further evidence that there is still rising homelessness in some area across the country. One of the areas identified is Birmingham, and that this adverse trend continues to affect Central and Eastern European migrants.

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

Since its creation, the WMCA continues to move forward the infrastructure projects into 2022, namely: the on-going extension of the tram system through the centre of Birmingham as far as Five Ways and the planned reopening of the Hazelwell rail-line to passenger/commuter traffic from the city centre out to the south of the city. It may be of note that both schemes have encountered delays.

The congestion charge on vehicular traffic travelling into/out of the city centre were implemented in June 2021. These infrastructure projects are tied to the impending Commonwealth Games, to be hosted by Birmingham in July-August 2022. The HS2 project has had its northern section extensions cancelled, but this will not impact the West Midlands phases, but as these are still planned for 2029-33, there will be little benefit apparent for some time yet.

The WMCA has, to date, not greatly moved any significant employment or regeneration/investment programmes, and so far has had little effect on alleviating poverty in the region, which is currently driven by national factors. The planning rationale may be to ensure that effective infrastructure will support new economic growth, as and when that's implemented.

'Brexit'

The UK left the EU on 31st January 2020, with a basic trade agreement in place, assuaging fears of a 'hard-Brexit' and of serious and immediate damage to the UK economy. The nature of this agreement however, had the UK at the fullest possible exclusion from EU trading regions, and thus free trade is no longer possible. Also, although there is an agreement in place, the logistics of trade are still not clear after two years, and the ability to do business with the EU continues to be greatly impeded. The greater part of the community of economists still predict this severing of ties will slow the growth of the UK economy (already suffering due to the COVID-19 crisis), with a very real possibility of pushing the UK economy into recession.

HPLC contingency planning for this case has the charity well-placed and ready to weather an emerging poorer economic condition. The cost of the goods and services HPLC provides are already rising, which is likely to reduce the numbers and/or extent of grants available, and the damage to the UK economy will likely to continue to have a detrimental effect on the poorest members of our society. This same economic damage would likely result in even further cutbacks to any government

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funded statutory support. The actions suggested in the *JRF's* briefing (published 13th January 2021) for Government to implement were largely ignored.

Changes to welfare benefit system

The following changes to the benefit welfare system have impacted those already struggling individuals/families:

- The Benefit cap introduced in April 2016 is still in place, and still currently stands at a maximum of £384.62/week for all eligible benefits, which now represents a significant drop in income. Most working-age benefits and tax credits have been frozen for five years already, however, the on-going COVID-19 crisis continues to make forecasting the government's strategy difficult and many families are still struggling to make ends meet and often have to cut back, even on essentials.
- Universal Credit (UC) is paid monthly in arrears and includes Housing costs (rent, but not Council Tax). If the household has two adults, married or living as a couple, there is one monthly payment for both of them. Under UC, individuals are responsible for passing payments on to their landlords for their rent. Those claimants with children are expected to prepare for work when their youngest child turns two, and to look for work when their youngest child turns three, with support from Jobcentre Plus. Once the £20 'top-up', now withdrawn, is deducted from the standard rates, a significant reduction in benefit income is clearly apparent. The monthly UC Living Element amounts are, currently:-

Single and under 25	£257.33
Single and 25 or over	£324.84
For a couple, both under 25	£403.93 (for both)
For a couple and either are 25 or over	£509.91 (for both)

Most impactful, is still the length of time many claimants have to wait for a decision to be made, often without any up-front crisis payments. The roll-out period has long passed and the delivery of this benefit should be efficiently actionable by now, but clearly isn't. These on-going delays have resulted in a marked increase in the demand for crisis support, particularly with users of food banks, attendance at community cafés and people needing debt support.

- There continues to be a lot of problems reported with the process of awarding Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is still subject to long waiting times for assessments and assessment centres not still being accessible for those with limited mobility. Also, claimants report not being treated with dignity by the assessors, that claimants' testimonies and applications still being 'misrepresented' by the assessors, and assessors continue to be, outwardly apparently, unqualified to make sound medical judgements regarding the claimants and people suffering financial hardship as a result of the delays.

The *JRF* also noted there are also some elements of the benefits system that increase the effects of poverty, including:

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- The two-child limit in income-related benefits.
- The benefit cap and the five-week wait for the first UC payment (both mentioned above).
- Unaffordable debt deductions from benefits.
- Local housing allowance rates (frozen since April 2020) again breaking the link between housing costs and benefits.

There have been piecemeal (but relatively large) amounts of local welfare support funding for councils, but the suspicion is that this has not reached many hundreds of thousands of struggling families left behind in receipt of legacy benefits or UC, particularly as there is little evidence of this spending being made in Birmingham or Sandwell/Smethwick.

The only significant current change to the welfare benefit system for the year 2022/23, is the £20 emergency increase to the standard UC payment has been withdrawn (as mentioned above), and responding to low inflation levels during the pandemic lockdowns (as economic activity massively slowed), there is likely to be a spending freeze or even cuts to welfare spending in the Spring Budget, due in March of 2021. However, the inflation rate has (at time of the writing of this strategy) reached a recent high of 5.4% not seen since the 1990s, however, short of the record highs of the 1980s which were in excess of 20%, and the crippling rate of 27% in 1975.

4.0 Cuts to Council Budgets

At the time of writing, Birmingham City Council (BCC) has again not published any further cabinet activity or decisions regarding poverty in the area, so we must again defer to a previous year's report (2019). BCC has in fact removed its "financial_plan_2019_to_2023" from its website; the implication of this move is uncertain. It is now impossible to know BCC's financial planning for the future.

BCC Data from Last Year's (and Previous) Strategy

BCC previously intended to expand the original £690 million worth of budget cuts (implemented in 2010, and with over 40% cut its workforce) and was poised to add a further £86 million of cuts need to be made by 2023, representing an increase of £125 million on the proposed cuts at the beginning of the decade, and up £14 million on 2018's forecast. BCC had cited a decade of austerity driven cuts, stating that this continues to be the most challenging period in BCC's history.

BCC observed that over the same period, demand for many services (especially adult social care) has grown and inevitably that has meant tougher budget decisions than ever before. BCC has previously been heavily dependent upon Government grants to meet the costs of services, which has made it very vulnerable to cutbacks in those grants. BCC is spending its last year of the Government's offer of a four-year grant settlement (in response to rising costs in adult social care), meaning that there will now be significant uncertainty regarding any future Government support with funding.

At the same time as ongoing reductions in Government grants, BCC also faced pressures to spend more on core services to the vulnerable. These cover a range of costs, including the effects of

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inflation, and meeting increasing demand for adult social care services. It is expected that these pressures will require additional annual funding of £161 million by 2022/23. BCC had also undertaken an assessment of the deliverability of its current savings plans, and states its ongoing commitment to deliver a sustainable plan for future years, but recognises that the city continues to face a significant financial challenge for 2021/22. BCC's forecasted future Council Tax include:

- An ongoing increase of 1.99% in Council Tax in 2021/22 and in later years, and;
- BCC continued to raise a "Social Care Precept" by increasing Council Tax by a further 2% in 2020/21 to provide extra funding to meet the costs of social care. This will result in a combined increase in Council Tax of 4.99% in 2021/22.

SMBC is still facing continuing reductions in some of the non-adult care government grants forcing it to review services, having a direct impact on its residents. SMBC is also responding to the Government's rising adult social care costs settlement by increasing Council Tax by an additional 2% and by introducing a different version of the Better Care Fund. SMBC has, since 2018/19, implemented a 3.99% increase in Council Tax in 2019-20 with the intention to implement a further increase of 1% in 2021-22 and into 2022-23, flattening and spreading (but not reversing) the 4.99% blanket increase previously planned for 2017/18.

SMBC continued to cut £16.7 million in 2021-22, and the updated tax policy won't raise any more revenue than predicted. In addition to the £50 million already cut since 2015, SMBC also made the expected 1,000 job losses for 2021-22 with a further 250 planned for 2022-23. Overall, SMBC have budgeted another deficit for the year of £9m, and will need to make cuts to other services aside from the commitment to adult care secured through the Government settlement.

SMBC faces severe cuts once the COVID-19 restrictions are fully lifted, outlined in a report to Sandwell Council's emergency committee predicting the borough will continue to suffer from the pandemic's financial impact for the foreseeable future. The report stated the council "will need to review which services it continues to deliver with the reduced financial resources available, with an immediate focus placed on the continued delivery of statutory services."

The financial cost of COVID-19 means SMBC needs to spend an extra £14m, while suffering lost income of £9m. The report further states "Reduced income from council tax collections, increased costs of implementing the council tax reduction scheme, business rate arrears, commercial rents, housing rent arrears, etc. and increased demand for council services as a result of the economic downturn will impact the current year and future years' budgets." SMBC also warn children services are expected to see a rise in demand as wider job losses in the economy push up the number of children being referred to social workers.

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5.0 Grant Priorities

In light of this data and contextual information, it seems reasonable for the charity to keep the same grant priorities:

- 1) 16-24 year old NEET provision or provision for those of school age at risk of becoming NEET.
- 2) Services for older people.
- 3) Debt and money management.
- 4) Food and Household goods distribution.
- 5) The charity will continue to deliver the individual grant programme to those in need.

In addition, the following priorities will be considered if application levels for the main priorities are low:

- Core Funding for organisations who work with disadvantaged groups who have been impacted by local and national cuts in funding may be considered if application levels for the other priorities are low.
- People with mental ill health.

6.0 Budget

HPLC forecasts that the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis will have lessened enough through this financial year that it may be possible, with minimal risk, to return the grants' spending to previous levels. The charity's total budget for the 2022/2023 financial year however, is not yet determined as of the writing of this strategy. Once that has been decided, it will be published on the HPLC website. Once it is decided, it will likely consist of:

- The greater part of the budget to be set aside for Grants to Organisations,
- The remainder will be for Grants to Individuals (individual applicants may apply once per year).

If any of the budget for the 2021/2022 financial year is unspent/uncommitted by 30th June 2022, the Trustees are to review the reinvestment of that surplus into the grants budget for the 2022/2023.

If the remaining organisational budget for the final grants round of the year is less than the total value of all the applications made for that round, the remaining budget is shared equitably around the successful applicant organisations, with their output/outcome targets adjusted equally equitably. Where an organisation has successfully applied for £3,000 or less, it is a reasonable inference that they would find it difficult to scale down their delivery activities, should their award be equitably reduced in line with the other successful organisations. In such cases, these organisations will receive (budget allowing) their full award of 'up-to/including-£3,000', but their targets will remain in line with their original application.

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For the year 2022/2023, given the reported surge in demand for support for individuals and families facing debt problems and/or need to access food banks (as describe previously in this strategy), then any organisation successfully awarded grant funding **solely** addressing either of the grant priorities: “3) Debt and money management” or “4) Food and Household goods distribution” (or a combination of both) will not have their award equitably reduced if there is insufficient grants budget remaining to fully fund all successful applicant organisations. These organisations will receive (budget allowing) their full award to address these two prominent grant priorities, but as with smaller successful applicant organisations, their targets will remain in line with their original application. This exemption to an equitable reduction will be closely reviewed by the trustees for the Grant Strategy for 2023/2024.

7.0 Key Dates

The Charitable Activities Committee continues to advocate two grant rounds per year, going forward. Given the on-going high demand on HPLC for organisational grant support, it is appropriate that this pattern is maintained, to continue to effectively manage the budget across the year. Therefore, grant applications will likely be taken in two rounds across the year as follows:

1st July – new financial year

- 1st deadline: Friday 1st July 2022. Approved applicants will be notified in September.
- 2nd deadline of Monday 6th February 2023. Approved applicants will be notified in April.

Should there be any remaining funding past February, there may be a final round re-instated for the final quarter. The Grant Strategy is reviewed annually and presented at the February board meeting.

8.0 Application Process

Organisational Applications

Organisations wishing to submit an Organisation Grant Application should contact Peter Hardisty, Grants Officer (0121 426 1600, 07773 304631, or peter.hardisty@hplc.org.uk) for an initial pre-screening conversation and to request an application form.

All applicants must submit their most recent audited accounts, or management accounts if the audited accounts are more than twelve months old. Newly formed organisations without any accounts to show must provide a comprehensive breakdown of the spend for the project. All applications must be submitted in full by the dates outlined above.

Applications will go through a two-stage assessments process.

- Stage 1: Applications will be compliance checked, including legal compliance with statutory bodies. Non-compliant applications will be rejected.
- Stage 2: Once the virus containment measures are lifted, the charity’s Grants Officer will visit

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applicants to gather information for a qualitative report for the Board of Trustees, delivered biannually for the Board's final approval.

(Until it is safe to do so, the charity's Grants Officer will conduct these interviews by telephone or on-line video conference platform).

The kind of grant funding HPLC can give is very specific with regards to the goals of the organisations we fund and the area they cover, aligning to the priorities listed above. HPLC seeks to support established (or newly established) organisations to relieve need within the Ancient Parish of Harborne, in order to protect known and/or valuable services at a time when they are threatened by a reduction in funding from other sources.

Applicant organisations may apply for funding within a grant round once per year (defined as no less than twelve months since the award date of any previous grant, such that the organisation may continue uninterrupted delivery of an ongoing project, should they be successfully awarded such funding). The charity will examine any further applications for a third year and beyond for indications of any growing dependency on HPLC funding, on the part of the applicant organisation.

Individual Applications

In line with the processes updated in the emergency strategy published in July 2020 (*grant strategy Apr-2020 - Covid19*), the Grants Officer will continue to adhere to HPLC COVID-19 containment strategy until the virus containment measures are lifted. Individuals wishing to receive grant support must be assessed by an officer of an outside support agency where possible (social worker, health visitor, welfare rights officer, etc.). This support officer's assessment will continue to be an absolute requirement during the COVID-19 crisis, as the Grants Officer is still not in a position to visit potential grant recipients in their homes to make follow-on assessments, until such time the virus containment measures are lifted. HPLC is still not in a position to take self-referral applications, as a home visit would normally be an opportunity for the Grants Officer to make a more full assessment of need. Such referral organisations/officers must adhere to their own safeguarding procedures to protect their officers and service users from COVID-19 infection.

Since 2021 HPLC's Grants Officer can make limited 'doorstep' visits with grant applicants, allowing the officer some access (with appropriate PPE/distancing measures in place) to those applicants, allowing some measure of further assessment of the applicants' needs. Also, this allows an opportunity for the original referral officer to accompany on the visit, and add yet further insight for refining the application.

The referral officer must be fully aware of the eligibility criteria of potential grant recipients, and the scope of support HPLC can offer, and they must make this assessment themselves, with their client, before submitting an Individual Grant Application. Individuals would normally only self-refer if they are receiving no support from any agency and at such time as the virus containment measures are lifted. HPLC follows the guidelines set down in the document: *'Income threshold for individual grant*

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applicants' (agreed by the Charitable Activities Committee, at their meeting of 9th November 2017) when benchmarking the measure/definition of poverty. Namely:

The Charity Commission's guidance 'The Prevention or Relief of Poverty for the Public Benefit' suggests that: *"The meaning of 'poverty' has to be considered in the context of an organisation's aims, whom the aims are intended to benefit, and where the organisation carries out its aims..."*

For a charity carrying out its aims in England and Wales, 'people in poverty' might typically mean households living on less than 60% of median income... This includes those people who, despite working, may still fall into this category and people may qualify for assistance ...whether or not they are eligible for state benefits."

Furthermore, the Charitable Activities Committee revised (at their meeting of 1st August 2019) the upper limit/threshold for savings for any individual grant applicant to have, below which they could be considered eligible for support. The committee decided to set these figures as:-

- £3,000 per single adult (18+ and resident in the household referred) and/or;
- £6,000 for someone disabled with complex needs.

The referring officer must submit the application to Peter Hardisty, HPLC Grants Officer (0121 426 1600 or peter.hardisty@hplc.org.uk) by secure means, in line with GDPR legislation established in 2018. Applications for an individual may not be made more than once per year (defined as twelve months since the award date of any previous grant), and only for a lifetime maximum of three instances of grant support.

Applications will go through a two stage assessments process.

- Stage 1: Applications will be compliance checked. Non-compliant applications will be rejected, and the referral officer encouraged to reassess the client's needs and/or correct the form.
- Stage 2: Once the virus containment measures are lifted, the charity's Grants Officer will visit applicants, accompanied by the referral officer, to gather information for a qualitative report to the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees (the Chair).
(Until it is safe to do so, the charity's Grants Officer will conduct these interviews on the applicant's doorstep, and will closely liaise with the referral officer).

Applications for individual grant support have no deadlines; there is a rolling process of application, assessment and award. The Chair of the charity's Board of Trustees will review the reports weekly, with the CEO, and approve or decline any grant request. Any case that the Chair and Grants Officer believe exceeds any devolved powers either the Chair or any individual officials of the charity have been granted to act upon (such as, an unusually large single award), is shared with the Charitable Activities Committee to assess and decide. Thus, HPLC can demonstrate a fair, transparent and

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robust level of assessment for any such case.

HPLC normally aims to guarantee a delivery turn-around time of 15 working days from receipt of the application to the awarding of successful grants, however, during the COVID-19 crisis period and the implementation of a 'social distance' delivery mechanism with added stages and routes of communication, this target may be harder to achieve. The charity's Grants Officer will record and monitor all applications and their outcomes, and report this to the Charitable Activities Committee. The Charitable Activities Committee, with the Grants Officer, will report this to the Board of Trustees, quarterly.

Any conflicts of interest regarding any grant application are to be declared, and another appropriate officer selected to carry out the necessary duties.

9.0 Further Information

If you require any further information please contact Peter Hardisty (peter.hardisty@hplc.org.uk, 07773 304631) or Steven Simpson (steven.simpson@hplc.org.uk) or call the Charity's head office on 0121 426 1600.

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