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## April 2020 Grants Strategy Amendment: Covid-19 Response

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Author/s: Peter Hardisty

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Version: 2.0

Pages: 7, plus 1 appendix

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### 1.0 Introduction

HPLC grants are normally 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). As stated previously, 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 overarching grant strategy for 2019-20 initially outlined the charity's key priorities for the year, and how these would be met. However, during the early weeks of 2020, it became clear that a previously unknown and deadly virus categorised as 'Covid-19' (originating in Asia) was spreading quickly across the world. By March 2020 it was clear this virus was going to impact life in the UK in a massive and far-reaching manner, the like of which had not been seen for over a century.

### 2.0 HPLC Response to the Covid-19 Crisis (with Particular Regard to the Grants Programme)

In light of the imminent public health crisis, HPLC enacted a policy to move almost all staff (including the Grants Officer) to confined home-working conditions socially-isolating themselves. This meant all external meetings and appointments were cancelled, which included any visits relating to grants, and subsequent trustees' meetings, which at the time of writing this grant strategy amendment, is 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 entails:-

- a) The Organisational Grant Application process for the April 2020 round is cancelled. If possible, the applications received will be held over and HPLC may be able to reinstate the previously cancelled July 2020 round, but at the time of writing whilst the crisis is still current, this is not certain.
- b) The Individual Grant Application process was suspended for six weeks, from 16<sup>th</sup> March to 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Any applications received in the week prior to the implementation of the virus containment measures are held over until the reinstatement of the individual grants programme, in the form outlined below.

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- b.i.) As of 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, Individual Grant Application process may be restarted, 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, whilst the virus containment measures are still in place.

As before, any applications made to the charity are still assessed against the priorities agreed in HPLC's current strategy: *'2019/2020 Grants Strategy'*, and only applications that demonstrate an ability to evidence and address these needs will be funded. Also, all other findings, evidence-led assumptions, and conclusions identified in HPLC's current strategy: *'2019/2020 Grants Strategy'* are carried forward and are further built upon in *'2020/2021 Grants Strategy'* (*'2020/2021 Grants Strategy'* is available on our website, and either document can be requested by contacting the Grants Officer directly). It is very likely the Covid-19 crisis will continue past July 2020, and so a similar amendment may be needed for next year's grant strategy.

This strategy amendment covers applications for individual grants made up to 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 that were put on hold in readiness for the implementation of this amendment, and any new applications made from 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 until such time as the virus containment measures are lifted. As before, funding is restricted to The Ancient Parish of Harborne. 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)

### 3.0 Assumptions Made: Impact on Poverty that the Covid-19 Crisis May Have

One of the key responses made by the government during the crisis has been a pledge to cover (up to 80% of, or £2,500 of, whichever is lower) the salaries of any employed person who has had to be furloughed, up until at least the end of June. This furloughing has been necessary as the government is restricting what social contact is permissible, and many employers have been instructed by the government to cease trading (in the interest of public health) until the crisis has passed, and their staff cannot work remotely (e.g., most of the UK's service industries). It is the government's hope that this measure will reduce the number of people who would otherwise be made redundant as businesses are 'moth-balled', or worse, cease trading permanently.

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HPLC assumes however, that despite these best efforts, there will be a significant increase in the number of unemployed people resident within the Ancient Parish in the coming weeks and months. Such people would not normally be in contact with the usual statutory services that are the most common referral routes for HPLC individual grant applicants. Usual 'deadweight' indicators would have (depending on sector, and the impact of the crisis on the economy's recovery) anything from 7% to 15% of these people finding work again within six weeks of losing their job (and social-isolating restrictions being lifted) without any need for support, however, many of these people may be unemployed for six-to-twelve months, or longer. HPLC assumes that anyone in such a position will rapidly exhaust any savings they might have, and may remain on Universal Credit for some time. The lack of savings and dependency on benefits will mean such individuals and families will very much fit the criteria for those HPLC wishes to support.

HPLC also assumes, based on historic individual grant making data, that although referrals are currently zero (as many referral agencies are operating a reduced service, or even not at all), the likelihood is that the level of need has not reduced, but it is simply a reduction in individuals' and families' access to HPLC support that is apparent. Historically, HPLC responds to, on average, between eight and twelve applications through late March to the end of April, supporting 20-25 individuals and spending c.£6,000 in the period. HPLC expects this level of need to be still true for this current period, and more going forward. It is likely that when faced with an inability to access HPLC support, some people will turn to other solutions, the worst of which will be to put themselves into (perhaps further) debt to solve their problem, but there is no data available to quantify this. HPLC further expects however, that when referral agencies begin to operate at a more normal level, there may be a surge of 'backlogged' cases through the weeks/months following the lifting/easing of self-isolation restrictions.

### **4.0 Contacting Referral Agencies, and Accessing Potential Grant Recipients**

Key to restarting HPLC grant making will, naturally, be a resumption of the referral process as previously established, or as close as possible to such. As of 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, the Grants Officer has already spoken directly to some referral officers regarding a resumption of HPLC support for their clients in need. The Grants Officer already has a basic e-mail directory of contacts for referral agencies/officers, having previously easily relied of the referral officer to initiate contact. The Grants Officer will now:-

- Use this directory in its current form to blanket e-mail referral organisations to make contact and re-establish the referral process.
- Update this directory to add, where possible, direct telephone contact information for individual officers.
- Use the telephone numbers to directly contact officers to establish if they are still at work and in a position to assess their clients' needs, and make referrals to HPLC for support.

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The Grants Officer will ensure the conversations with referral officers will include some absolute key and vital points, regarding the necessary adjustments that all parties will need to operate under, whilst the virus containment measures are still in place, namely:-

- The updated application process outlined in Section 5.0. of this grant strategy amendment is clearly understood by the referral officer (see below).
- The first assumption outlined in Section 3.0. of this grant strategy amendment (regarding newly unemployed residents of the Ancient Parish) is considered by the referral officer, who is to put some work into identifying such people through their own in-referring routes. If they cannot do this, or have no such means to do so at this time, the Grants Officer will contact those Jobcentre Plus offices within/near the Ancient Parish to encourage such contact to referral organisations.
- The second assumption outlined in Section 3.0. of this grant strategy amendment (regarding any backlog of residents in need within the Ancient Parish) is considered by the referral officer, who is to put some work into identifying such people through their own in-referring routes, and to speed up the referral process to HPLC grant making support.

The Grants Officer will regularly communicate the effectiveness of this process to the CEO of HPLC, and the CEO in turn will communicate this to the Chair of The Board of Trustees (the Chair), as and when is necessary. These processes are open to regular refinement and/or improvement.

### 5.0 Amended Individual Grant Application Process

#### Immediate Assessment of Need

Individuals wishing to receive grant support must still be assessed by an officer of an outside support organisation. This assessment is now an absolute requirement, as the Grants Officer is 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.

Such referral organisations/officers must adhere to their own safeguarding procedures to protect their officers and service users from Covid-19 infection.

Individuals cannot self-refer, until such time as the virus containment measures can be lifted; the Grants Officer will not be able to make an accurate assessment of such an applicants' needs, nor is there any other support professional to make such an assessment.

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. For the purposes of the amendment, HPLC continues to follow the guidelines set down in the document: *'Income threshold for individual grant applicants'* (agreed by the Charitable Activities Committee, at their meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017)

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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 1<sup>st</sup> 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;
- £6,000 for someone disabled with complex needs.

### Making an Application

Applications would normally 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: The charity's Grants Officer will visit applicants, accompanied by the referral officer, to gather information for a qualitative report to the Chair.*

With previous applications, it was possible for the Grants Officer to occasionally accept application forms that were GDPR compliant, but were slightly lacking in a fullness of supporting information. It was a simple exercise to add to this information at the home visit, (with the referral officer and potential grant recipient present), to the level of detail required to write a grant application report.

The Grants Officer will draw up a checklist (see Appendix 1.0) outlining the differences to the normal application process for referral officers to follow, to ensure that no such dereliction occurs.

Applications will now go through a more straightforward assessments process.

- Referral officers will be required to use the checklist to ensure their application is as complete as possible.  
Applications will be anonymised to ensure GDPR robustness, as applications will need to be created and handled remotely, whilst social-isolating restrictions are in place.  
Applications will be compliance checked as normal, plus, robustness of supporting information will be assessed and non-compliant and/or non-robust applications will be rejected and the referral officer will need to correct and resubmit the form.

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Referral officers will be required to scan their applications and covering checklist, and then e-mail them securely to the Grants Officer. The referral officer will also securely post the original to HPLC, where it will be held (under lock and key) until such time as the virus containment measures are lifted and the paperwork can be filed, as normal. As the forms are anonymised, the referral officer will be the primary agent responsible for connecting the successful grant recipient with the supplier/s.

As before, the Grants Officer will write a report for the Chair, however, these reports will be saved in a PDF format making it easier for the Chair to receive them electronically. The Chair will grant authorisation to deliver the support by e-mail to either/both the Grants Officer and/or the CEO. As before, the Chair will review these reports weekly. Once the normal grants programme delivery is resumed, these reports may be printed and signed by the Chair en-masse, as is usually required.

Applications for an individual may still 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.

As before, applications for individual grant support have no deadlines; there is still a rolling process of application, assessment and award. The Chair will review the reports weekly, with the CEO, and approve or disapprove any grant request. Any case that the Chair and Grants Officer believe exceeds any devolved powers either the Chair or any officials of the charity have been granted to act upon will be shared electronically with the Charitable Activities Committee to assess and decide. HPLC can continue to demonstrate a fair, transparent and robust level of assessment for any such case.

HPLC normally aims to guarantee a turn-around time of 15 working days from receipt of the application to the awarding of successful grants, however, during this crisis period and the implementation of an untried 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 electronically, or verbally over the phone, to the Charitable Activities Committee as and when required. The Chair of the Charitable Activities Committee will report this electronically, or verbally over the phone to the Board of Trustees, as and when required, until such time as the virus containment measures can be lifted.

As always, any conflicts of interest are to be declared, and another appropriate officer selected to carry out the necessary duties.

### 6.0 Contacting and Accessing Suppliers of Goods and Services

#### Whitegoods and Household Furniture

The usual approved suppliers of whitegoods and household furniture, (*MacPherson's Direct* and

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*Levines*) are both trading in a limited capacity, with extra Covid-19 safeguarding measures in place (e.g. using appropriate PPE, recipient isolation during delivery or 'doorstep-delivery' where possible, etc.), as of the time of writing this grant strategy amendment. They are ready to receive orders through the usual method, i.e. by an e-mail order pro-forma raised by the Grants Officer.

### Other Items

*Argos* states that all its standalone stores are currently closed. The *Argos* website is open as usual and still offering home delivery whilst its shops are shut. *Argos* stores in *Sainsbury's* supermarkets are also still open, but only to collect orders that have been paid for online. HPLC will be able to order items this way for home delivery directly to grant recipients, and to collect orders only if it is absolutely essential at a *Sainsbury's* outlet. The *Argos* website will be suitable for any ad-hoc purchases, not akin to the more usual items HPLC provides.

## 7.0 Budget

The charity's total budget for the 2019/2020 financial year was £270,000, consisting of:

- £215,000 Grants to Organisations
- £55,000 Grant to Individuals (individual applicants may apply once per year).

£1,504.64 unspent/uncommitted funding was carried forward from the 2018/2019 financial year and was added to the organisational budget. As of 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, those budgets show:-

- £91,623.75 of the organisational grant budget has been spent/committed, with £124,880.89 remaining, and;
- £31,951.77 of the individual grant budget has been spent/committed, with £23,048.23 remaining.

To minimise the financial risk to HPLC, the decision has been taken to set an indicative limit of:

£350, per Individual Grant application.

This limit will remain in place until such time as normal grants programme delivery can be resumed, but is also open to review and/or revision by the Board of Trustees at any point.

The organisational budget is frozen, with the Board of Trustees to follow how the Covid-19 crisis unfolds and eventually passes, and then will decide how best to commit the remaining money.

## 8.0 Conclusion

Once the Covid-19 crisis has passed, the Board of Trustees will assess any on-going risk to HPLC (be it financial or health, in nature) and review and/or rescind this grant strategy amendment accordingly.

**HPLC, Covid-19 Response: Continuation of Grant Support**

**INDIVIDUAL GRANT APPLICATION - CHECKLIST:**

*For the Referral Officer to complete*

<b>Section</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	<b>Page(s)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Harborne Parish Lands Charity's Privacy Statement	<b>E-signed by Referral Officer</b>	<i>p.2-5</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referral agency details: <i>This section MUST also have a DIRECT CONTACT NUMBER for the Referral Officer.</i>	Completed	<i>p.6</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicant details: <i>To <u>include gender</u>. This information <u>MUST</u> be ANONYMISED.</i>	Completed	<i>p.6</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How long has the Applicant lived at this address?			<input type="checkbox"/>
Household composition: <i>This information <u>MUST</u> also be ANONYMISED.</i>	Completed	<i>p.6</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicant Background	Completed	<i>p.7</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Household income and expenditure: <i>This section must be completed in full: if anyone else in the household of working age has any income (wages and/or benefits), this <u>must</u> also be detailed – if they don't, this <u>must</u> be stated.</i>	Completed	<i>p.7-8</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grant required (specifying items/services needed)	Completed	<i>p.8</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supporting Information	Completed, <b>in full</b>	<i>p.9</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home visit details	<i>Do Not Complete - no visits will be scheduled during isolation</i>	<i>p.9</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Equal Opportunities Monitoring	Completed, if possible	<i>p.10</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Statement of Consent	<b>3x boxes ticked, if possible</b>	<i>p.11</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information Sharing	<b>E-signed by Referral Officer</b>	<i>p.11</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Declaration	<b>E-signed by Referral Officer</b>	<i>p.12</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Further details (**circle/underline, below, as appropriate**) – is the property:-

**Council property?    Private Rental Property?    Housing Association Property?    Mortgaged?    Owned outright?**

- Please use this checklist to ensure the application is as complete as possible.
- Non-compliant and/or non-robust applications will be rejected and the Referral Officer must correct and resubmit the form.
- Scan the application and this covering checklist, and then e-mail them securely to the Grants Officer. Also, please post the original to HPLC, where it will be held securely, pending the lifting of 'Covid-19' containment measures.

As the form is anonymised, you the Referral Officer will be the primary agent responsible for connecting the grant recipient (if successful) with the supplier/s.