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Dear partners

The engagement of voluntary and community sector organisations in the co-production of the new Grants and Community Commissioning programmes has exceeded expectations. Over 100 organisations have actively participated in open sessions, one to one surgeries and other forums. The sector has embraced the opportunity to co-produce these programmes with us and I want to thank the many organisations that have given up time to participate over the past few months.

The feedback I have had both from VCS organisations and from Council officers is that there could be real benefits to the final outcome of the programme from giving more time to continue and further develop these valuable conversations before we decide the final shape of the programme and the services it will deliver. I have listened carefully to that feedback and am now minded to extend the timetable for the development of the Grants and Community Commissioning Programmes so that the new services will commence from 1 October 2019.

I believe that this additional time provides the opportunity to improve the quality of commissioned services through:

- Allowing more detailed conversations on specific service areas, giving organisations and networks such as the Children and Youth Forum and TH Community Advice Network the opportunity to undertake focused co-design work with commissioning managers in their particular service areas;
- Extending our outreach to have more discussions with organisations which have not engaged up to now, and
- The potential to extend co-production to directly involve service users.

The additional time would give the VCS:

- More opportunities for training and support to ensure they have the best chance of being able to take advantage of the commissioning opportunities, and
- More time to manage the transition from grants to commissioning, developing partnerships and consortia where appropriate, to deliver new services more effectively.

We will also have more time to consider the range of procurement routes, ranging from the full formal and open tendering of larger contracts to the more light touch Request for Quote process we have for lower value contracts.

A consequence of the decision to give more time to co-produce the Community Commissioning programme is that it is necessary to extend the current Mainstream Grants programme to 30 September 2019. I am keen to ensure that this will not generate uncertainty among currently funded organisations about their funding in the immediate future and arrangements are being made to let individual organisations know as soon as possible whether their MSG grant will be extended to that date. The majority of MSG funded organisations are performing well so I anticipate there may be only a tiny number facing a change in their funding to 30th September 2019.

The co-production of Grants and Community Commissioning is a new way of working for the Council and for VCS organisations. I therefore hope you agree with me that it is right to take stock and, whilst maintaining my focus on the quality and effectiveness of our services for our community, it is sometimes necessary to allow more time for that to happen. The process so far and the involvement of VCS organisations far exceeds any previous engagement with the VCS on funding and now is the right time to take the opportunity to build on the work we have been doing together to produce a Community Commissioning programme which we can all be proud of.

~~Yours sincerely,~~



Mayor John Biggs
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets