

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Executive – 16 December 2020

Review of Voluntary and Community Sector Grants

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Cllr Booth

Report Author: Scott Weetch, Community Resilience Manager

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

To report on progress since February 2020 regarding the Annual Review for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Grants and make future spending proposal.

2. Recommendations

2.1 To maintain current levels of funding for the final year of the current agreement to end in March 2022.

2.2 A cross party Members Working Group is established to work with officers to ensure that clear funding criteria are in place for future work with the Voluntary and Community Sector beyond March 2022.

3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

3.1 There is a risk of misuse of awarded funds by a third party organisation or intended initiatives proposed not being successful or hitting issues during delivery. This is mitigated by existing monitoring arrangements.

4. Background and Full details of the Report

4.1 On 19th February 2020, the Localities Manager brought forward a report to Full Council outlining the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Grants Annual Review for 2019/20. This is a comprehensive report and no attempt is made to replicate it here.

4.2 A copy of that report is available here: (page 221 onwards)
<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/g2283/Public%20reports%20pack%2019th-Feb-2020%2018.15%20SWT%20Full%20Council.pdf?T=10>

4.3 Full Council resolved “*that officers, in consultation with Councillors, carried out a review of current areas of funding and set new funding objectives in line with the Councils corporate objectives and current needs within the community and reported to the Scrutiny Committee, Executive and Full Council in September/October 2020;*”

4.4 Initial work towards the review outlined above took the form of a workshop of officers who set a number of criteria that they felt VCS funding should meet. These included but were not limited to:

- Money and debt advice
- Housing advice and tenancy sustainment
- Mental health support and advocacy
- Social enterprise, skills and training support in deprived areas
- General information, advice and guidance
- Support for rural areas
- Support for families
- Advice for Community buildings and village halls
- Community transport

- 4.5 From March onwards the country has seen the effects of the global pandemic known as COVID-19. This has had a profound effect on the voluntary and community sector in two ways. Firstly, this sector has been at the forefront of efforts to look after the wider community in often unexpected ways. There are countless examples of communities and individuals stepping forward to provide help and support. Secondly, this sector has been unable to raise funds for themselves in their normal fashion and are therefore vulnerable themselves to the effects of the coronavirus, albeit economically.
- 4.6 The priorities set out above came from a workshop to act as a guide for decision making regarding 20/21 funding of the VCS. In light of the interruption and disruption caused by COVID, the aim of this review is to demonstrate if the Council is meeting these priorities and in which locations and to identify any gaps by priority or geographic area.
- 4.7 The original report recommended aligning funding with Corporate Objectives and current needs within the community. Corporate Objectives and the current needs within the community as espoused by the Voluntary and Community Sector are aligned – in particular, this work supports tackling economic, social and health inequalities within the groups and communities that need extra support. It is felt that employment and skills are generally picked up elsewhere and so are not fully reflected here.
- 4.8 This commentary forms part of the review of Voluntary and Community Sector Grants taken to Full Council in February 2020. Other issues recommended in the review referred to the Governance of the schemes, in particular clarity of outputs, outcomes and performance measures submitted by partner organisations. Further that the grant proposal document includes information captured on sustainability of projects, match funding and added value. This has been picked up as a business as usual improvement. Grants forms are continually reviewed and improved and work is in progress to try to align the application process to ensure that applicants have a clear and obvious process which signposts them to the right funding for their project. Additionally, each scheme is subject to grants monitoring, usually on a quarterly basis. These meetings often identify and implement incremental improvement to process and reporting mechanisms.
- 4.9 All expenditure is outlined in the linked report above.
- 4.10 A review of projects has taken place and where questions have been raised, these have been addressed with funding partners and in some cases additional measures have been put in place to better understand and quantify projects. For example, a project was being monitored in terms of hours received and number of referrals made. In order to provide additional assurance, additional qualitative measures have been put

in place to give a better understanding of the work undertaken and the value achieved for the customer and the Council.

4.11 A desktop review was undertaken to understand the allocation and proportion of spend against the priorities outlined above. This is summarised in the table below:

Priority	Name of Project Supporting	Amount(s)	Total	Proportion of overall spend	Area covered
Money and Debt Advice	Citizen's Advice Taunton	Portion of £120,610 @45% (£54,275)	£108,515	25%	Taunton and district
	Money Matters Advisors for Taunton East, Taunton North and Wellington	£42,000			One Team areas
	West Somerset Advice Bureau	Portion of £30,600 @40% (£12,240)			West Somerset
Housing Advice and Tenancy sustainment	Citizen's Advice Taunton	Portion of £120,610 @45% (£54,275)	£66,515	15.50%	District wide coverage
	West Somerset Advice Bureau	Portion of £30,600 @40% (£12,240)			
Support for young families in rural areas	CLOWNS	£1,000	£1,000	0.23%	West Somerset
Self-advocacy and engagement with disability groups	Compass Disability Services	£2,700	£2,700	0.63%	District wide coverage
Mental health support and advocacy	Bridging the Gap (MIND)	£41,000	£41,000	9.50%	District wide coverage
Domestic Abuse				0%	Nil
General information, advice and guidance	Citizen's Advice Taunton	Portion of £120,610 @10% (£12,061)	£19,489	4.50%	Taunton and district
	Wiveliscombe Area Partnership - Community Centre	Portion of £29,710 @25% (£7,428)			Wiveliscombe and 10 Parishes area
Pre-natal and peri-natal support for families in rural areas	Homestart (WS)	£1,000	£1,000	0.23%	West Somerset
Supporting Community organisations/community hubs in deprived areas	North Taunton Partnership	£14,500	£32,000	7.50%	North and East Taunton
	Taunton East Development Trust	£14,500 + £3,000			
Support for Village Agents	Village Agents	£20,000	£20,000	4.66%	District wide coverage
Advice for Community Buildings and Village Halls	Community Council for Somerset	£5,400	£5,400	1.25%	District wide coverage
Social enterprise, skills and training support in deprived areas	Inspire 2 Achieve (Yarlington)	£46,000	£46,000	10.70%	One Team areas
Supporting Community organisations with seed funding for projects	VCS small grants fund - grants of up to £1,000 to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in SWT area	£20,000	£20,000	4.66%	District wide coverage
Employment skills and job training for those farthest from the job market	West Somerset Advice bureau	Portion of £30,600 @20% (£6,120)	£6,120	1.40%	West Somerset
Community Transport in rural areas	Wiveliscombe Area Partnership - Wivey Link	Portion of £29,710 @75% (£22,283)	£22,283	5.20%	Wiveliscombe and 10 Parishes area
Arts projects and skills development in deprived areas	Fuse performance	£6,000	£6,000	1.40%	East Taunton
Administration	Covers West Somerset lottery, small grants and partnership fund	£8,000	£8,000	1.86%	Not applicable
Others not covered above	Creating volunteering opportunities - Spark	£23,500	£23,500	5.50%	District wide coverage
		Total	£429,520		

- 4.11 Money and debt advice (25%) plus housing advice and tenancy sustainment (15%) account for 40% of overall spend. Mental health support (10%) and employment, skills and training support (10%) account for a further 20%.
- 4.12 It can be clearly seen from the above that there is a wide range of support given across the sector and that this help covers the district to some degree. This shows that there is a strong alignment of Council and community priorities that are met through the provision of funding and that these are targeted to those that will benefit most.
- 4.13 It is apparent from the above that the prevention of domestic abuse is a priority that is not funded through this route. However, the Council does fund domestic abuse prevention through a partnership arrangement with Somerset County Council. In addition, the Safer Somerset Partnership, of which the Council is an active partner, does fund initiatives and there are agreed ways of working in this arena. The Domestic Abuse Bill when enacted provides an opportunity to review provision and service.
- 4.14 The recommendations of Full Council from February of this year have been met through this review. That is, that funding be reviewed and new priorities set. However, this is a different review to that anticipated due to the changes brought about within the sector caused by COVID. As a result, this review has determined that grants should not be reallocated nor priorities changed unless there is clear supporting evidence that priorities and outcomes are not being met. As part of the review, value for money and contract compliance have been assessed but are not directly addressed as there are no significant concerns on any of the projects which are the beneficiaries of funding.
- 4.15 Changes to the current levels of funding for many of the organisations that rely upon this support could have long lasting detrimental effects for the groups and the communities that they support. This is underlined in the various multi-agency meetings that the Council is part of.
- 4.16 During November partners in receipt of VCS Grant Funds submit proposals for funding for the following financial year. That information is not collated at the time of writing. It is unknown therefore if there are to be gaps in provision.
- 4.17 It is unknown at this stage what the medium and long term effects of COVID are likely to be. Maintaining current levels of funding will allow some analysis of impact.
- 4.18 Lessons learned and impact analysis from the current crisis will allow the Council to better place resources according to identified need. This will not be known in time to inform 2021/22.
- 4.19 An end date of March 2022 aligns with proposed timetables for a new unitary authority and allows an unfettered and objective view to be taken by any shadow authority.
- 4.20 In addition to the grants reviewed here, the Council oversees a significant number of other grants, all of which are referenced in the previous report to Full Council linked at the top of this report.
- 4.21 The Council has additionally funded £250,000 of one off support to the Voluntary and Community Sector through the Community Chest grants scheme.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Homes and Communities - Engage with the voluntary sector in their mission to help support our communities.

6. Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 Existing funding arrangements and agreements are in place until March 2022 unless varied by either party.

- 6.2 Tables outlining grants are presented below:
Voluntary and Community Sector Grants 2019/20

Project	Total Awarded	General Fund	HRA
Citizen's Advice Taunton	£83,610	£75,432	£8,178
CLOWNS (WS)	£1,000	£1,000	
Community Council for Somerset	£5,400	£5,400	
Compass Disability Services	£2,700	£2,700	
Spark (TD)	£22,500	£22,500	
Spark (WS)	£1,000	£1,000	
Fuse	£6,000	£1,200	£4,800
Homestart (WS)	£1,000	£1,000	
North Taunton Partnership	£14,500	£2,000	£12,500
Taunton East Development Trust	£14,500	£2,000	£12,500
West Somerset Advice Bureau	£30,600	£30,600	
Wiveliscombe Area Partnership	£29,710	£28,710	£1,000
Village Agents	£20,000	£20,000	
VCS Small Grants Fund (SCF)	£20,000	£20,000	
Citizen's Advice Taunton (one off)	£45,000	£45,000	
Totals	£297,520	£258,542	£38,978

Administration and Monitoring Costs

Project	Total Awarded	General Fund	HRA
SCF administration of SLAs	£1,560	£1,560	-
SCF administration of small grants	£2,000	£2,000	-
Somerset West lottery admin fees*	£2,400	£2,400	-
Licensing fees Gambling Commission	£350	£350	-
Totals	£6,310	£6,310	-

*Does not impact on Council budgets as taken from Lottery ticket sales

HRA Commissioned Projects

Project	Total Awarded	General Fund	HRA
Taunton CAB – Debt Advice for Tenants	£42,000	-	£42,000
Taunton East Development Trust	£3,000	-	£3,000
MIND – mental health advocacy	£41,000	-	£41,000
Inspire to Achieve – Employment/skills support	£46,000	-	£46,000
Totals	£132,000		£132,000

7. Legal Implications (if any)

- 7.1 There are no legal implications if current funding is maintained. If funding levels are changed or removed, there are notice periods to be served on existing agreements.
- 7.2 Existing funding agreements with individual parties are monitored and reported on a regular basis to ensure agreed standards are met.

8. Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)

- 8.1 No anticipated impacts

9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)

- 9.1 None

10. Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)

- 10.1 A full EIA is not required because the recommendation is to maintain existing levels of service provision.
- 10.2 The support provided to the VCS by this funding helps to promote equality and diversity and increases social cohesion through the maintenance of social capital – i.e. it helps the community to grow together by connecting and improving existing links.

11. Social Value Implications (if any)

- 11.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act came into force on 31 January 2013. It requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits.
- 11.2 Clearly, the continued funding of the VCS Grants scheme will ensure that greater social value is gained through the nature, breadth and scope of the work that they are undertaking and the communities and individuals that they support.

12. Partnership Implications (if any)

- 12.1 None

13. Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)

- 13.1 The VCS Grants scheme has far reaching consequences for health and wellbeing. This includes individual and families' ability to sustain tenancies; support for mental health; debt and benefit advice; employment and careers advice. The inability of an individual or family to secure and maintain work or a home with have impacts on their immediate health and wellbeing as well as the potential for a knock on into other areas of care and support such as GP surgeries, housing and homelessness if not addressed.

14. Asset Management Implications (if any)

- 14.1 None

15. Data Protection Implications (if any)

15.1 None

16. Consultation Implications (if any)

16.1 If the Council does not agree with the recommendations outlined, there will need to be a period of consultation and engagement with the beneficiaries of grants in line with contractual agreements, which states that a minimum of 3 months' notice of a termination of contract shall be given.

17. Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)

17.1 Scrutiny met on the 2nd December 2020. In addition to accepting the two recommendations at the top of this paper, they made a further recommendation. This is recorded below

17.2 “As part of the review of the Voluntary and Community Sector Grants, the increased workload for the two Citizens Advice Bureaus that cover the SWT area must be recognised accordingly with a grant increase in line with their objectives to meet increased demands due to Covid, and that this support is equalized across population areas that they cover, but not to the detriment of other organisations being funded by SWT.”

17.3 This recommendation is discussed in Appendix A

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – Yes**
- **Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – Yes**

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

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