

<b>Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities</b>	<b>Ref No: SSC10 18/19</b>
<b>February 2019</b>	<b>Key Decision: Yes</b>
<b>Grant Funding of Voluntary &amp; Community Sector Infrastructure Services</b>	<b>Part I</b>
<b>Report by Director of Communities</b>	<b>Electoral Division(s): All</b>

## **Summary**

As part of the County Council's commitment to building stronger and more resilient communities it recognises the vital role played by the voluntary and community sector in developing a healthy and dynamic civic society across West Sussex.

To evidence this commitment a set of clear Partnership Principles to reset the relationship between the Authority and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) were agreed in 2018.

To sustain and strengthen the role played by the VCS within the many communities of West Sussex the County Council has worked with the providers of local voluntary and community sector infrastructure services, the District and Borough councils and representatives from Health to develop a fit for purpose model to ensure adequate support and advice is available to support and enable the continued growth of dynamic and effective voluntary organisations across the county.

Infrastructure support to the VCS plays an essential role in nurturing and expanding the range and diversity of the VCS within the community promoting volunteering opportunities and creating an environment for groups to thrive and flourish.

Within West Sussex the delivery of robust infrastructure support to the VCS is recognised as a responsibility shared between the county council and the district and borough authorities and this report builds on a legacy of effective joint work over many years.

Working together the different independent providers of voluntary sector infrastructure support in the county have formed an Alliance to provide a consistent, effective and robust framework for providing this important function throughout West Sussex.

This Alliance model marks a significant commitment made by the voluntary sector itself to work collectively to share resources and to develop and strengthen the breadth, depth and sustainability of voluntary and community activity across the county which underpins the resilience and capacity of local communities.

This report provides information as to the development of the Alliance model and the benefits, actual and anticipated, it provides. It recommends the award of three year grant funding to enable and stabilise the effective delivery of locally based infrastructure support to the VCS across West Sussex.

## **West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context**

The level and range of voluntary organisations and groups operating across the county is an important bell weather indicator by which to assess the health of its communities.

An active and dynamic VCS plays a fundamental role in providing services, promoting volunteering opportunities and creating additional support to complement that provided by the statutory sector for people across the county. Importantly, it offers a route by which communities and individuals fulfil their potential and build their resilience and capacity.

As such the VCS includes organisations focused on all aspects of the West Sussex Plan, enabling the best start in life, developing strong and sustainable places and helping people remain independent in later life. Voluntary groups support children and families, older people, those with disabilities or other disadvantages or special needs creating important additional capacity and expertise to support and enable residents and communities.

The approach proposed in this report signposts an important foundation to support and develop a vibrant VCS better enabling the statutory and voluntary sectors to work creatively and collaboratively to focus on joint priorities while remaining flexible to respond to local need.

## **Financial Impact**

To support the creation of the Alliance and to safeguard additional benefits at a county level the existing budget allocation will be awarded as a grant of £206,070 per annum for 3 years.

## **Recommendations**

The Cabinet Member is asked to approve:

- 1) The VCSI Alliance proposal to provide VCSI in West Sussex in support of the objectives of the 2017-22 West Sussex Plan;
- 2) The award of a grant of £206,070 per annum to the VCSI Alliance for a period of three years from April 2019;
- 3) The continuation of a funding partnership with District & Borough Councils to support VCSI provision in West Sussex via a formal 'Declaration of Intent' Partnership Agreement document.

## **Background and Context**

- 1.1 VCS infrastructure providers work to deliver support and assistance to the diverse voluntary organisations operating across the county. Their primary functions are as follows:
  - championing the voluntary sector by connecting, representing and supporting voluntary organisations.
  - providing independent advice and support to small to medium sized voluntary and community organisations including active support to create new groups.
  - developing the variety, range and level of activity of the voluntary and community sector across the county whilst maintaining local distinctiveness and support.
  - promoting and supporting greater access to volunteering opportunities across the many communities of West Sussex.
  - ensuring the voice of the voluntary and community sector in West Sussex is heard through effective representation.
- 1.2 From 2015 the County Council has devolved the budget that supports VCS infrastructure services to District and Borough councils to enhance the local commissioning of these services. District and Borough councils have then subsequently commissioned services locally, leading to four standalone provider organisations providing support at a local level.
- 1.3 Recognising the important role played by a vibrant and active voluntary and community sector in enabling the building of stronger communities, the County Council has led a joint operational, officer Task & Finish Group (TFG) over the last 12 months with the seven Districts and Boroughs and Health representatives to review current and future Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure (VCSI) funding from April 2019 onwards.
- 1.4 While the historic arrangements have been largely effective, involving the current providers of infrastructure support working directly with over 1556 groups and the recruitment of an additional 775 volunteers in 16/17, the TFG identified some significant issues.
- 1.5 These included an inconsistent approach across the county, the need for a more streamlined offer for volunteering to reduce duplication and confusion for residents, a range of concerns about the future financial sustainability of the separate organisations and a limited countywide voluntary sector 'voice' to represent the VCS.
- 1.6 In line with the Government's Civil Society Strategy the County Council and partners have worked collaboratively to develop a new model for VCS infrastructure which is co-produced with the VCS and has as a central objective the promotion and support of the long term sustainability of the VCS in West Sussex.
- 1.7 As such the existing VCSi providers operating within the county have come together to develop a new way of working to support the future needs of the

voluntary sector, creating a West Sussex 'VCSI Alliance' as a standalone entity. It is made up of the four existing independent providers working collaboratively to share resources and capacity to enable greater efficiency and improved outcomes.

## **2. Proposal**

- 2.1 The Alliance model has been developed independently by the VCSi providers and is designed to safeguard the distinctiveness of local voluntary sector infrastructure support in the seven District and Boroughs by maintaining local knowledge and relevant networks at the same time as creating an environment for greater collaboration underpinned by combining resources to reduce inefficiency and allow for more sustainable countywide outcomes.
- 2.2 To demonstrate effective support for the proposal, joint-funding partnership options to support the approach have been agreed and statutory partners have agreed to align their available funding to collectively fund the VCSI support network in West Sussex through the auspices of the Alliance.
- 2.3 To underpin this the statutory sector funding partners have agreed broad principles for VCSI provision via a 'Declaration of Intent' to work collectively.

These are:

- That the funding partners can continue to jointly fund VCSI in West Sussex and that this will result in better outcomes over the next 3 years
  - That recognises the investment in VCSI to date from all the funding partners and seeks to build upon the outcomes of that investment
  - The size of West Sussex as a county and the diversity of VCS activity across its communities
  - The need for 2 tier local government engagement and support with the VCS that reflects the needs of the funding partnership
  - The increased need for engagement between the VCS and statutory sector to co-produce creative solutions to key societal challenges
  - The need for different local service delivery models across the county including the benefits of existing delivery models to reflect local differences
  - The role and specific needs of health services in the partnership, for example engagement (voice) and place-based solutions.
- 2.4 As such the County Council will fund the 'countywide' element of the VCSI support and the District and Borough authorities will fund and commission the 'local' elements of service delivery based on the specific circumstances in each local area.
  - 2.5 To demonstrate commitment and support for the model developed by the VCSi providers the County Council will grant-fund the Alliance for a period of 3 years from April 2019 and this funding will support the delivery of the following outcomes over and above the core functions detailed at 1.1:

- Additional social capital generated through the expanded use of volunteering
  - A county wide voice for the VCS, to support the active engagement of the sector on a range of representative bodies
  - Brokerage opportunities for the VCS to work with statutory services to co-produce solutions to key issues
  - Access to wider networks and partnerships to benefit wider priorities
  - A more co-ordinated, even service across the county
  - A single website gateway for residents to improve access
  - Shared and coordinated performance reporting
  - Opportunities for internal operating efficiencies
  - Countywide training opportunities and delivery
  - Sharing roles and responsibilities across the partnership to reduce multiple duplication
  - The opportunity for collective funding bids increasing external funding
  - An improved alignment with County Council priorities.
- 2.6 In addition, Coastal CCG will award some new funding for a fixed period to March 2020 to support specific work on the development of Local Community Networks (LCNs).
- 2.7 Discussions with health commissioners have illustrated the potential for potential future health funding of VSCi and these conversations are being progressed. The model allows for any future additional funding from other statutory partners to be accommodated within the proposed partnership funding arrangements.
- 2.8 Agreement has been reached with all partners to combine performance monitoring requirements for the Alliance to reduce inefficiencies through duplication from the different statutory partners and to maximise the use of resources to meet community outcomes.

### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1 During 2018 WSCC led a operational, officer Task & Finish Group (TFG) including representatives from all the District and Borough authorities alongside Health working together to review current and future Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure (VCSI) funding from April 2019 onwards.
- 3.2 A number of meetings and workshops were held to allow the development of the optimal approach to securing VCS support across the county. The Alliance model alongside a clear Declaration of Intent agreed by all partners to work collaboratively developed from these sessions.

- 3.3 The Alliance have also consulted in depth with the Trustee Boards of their respective organisations; Voluntary Action Arun Chichester , Community Works (Brighton and Hove), Crawley CVS and Mid Sussex Voluntary Action.

#### **4. Financial (revenue and capital) and Resource Implications**

- 4.1 The proposed grant would be awarded with specified conditions attached, for a period of three years. The funding for the grant has been provided for as part of the 2019/20 budget.

	Year 1 2019/20	Year 2 2020/21	Year 3 2021/22
	£	£	£
Approved Revenue budget	206,070	206,070	206,070
Cost of Proposal	206,070	206,070	206,070
Difference	--	--	--

- 4.2 As outlined earlier, in addition to the proposed County Council support as shown above, funding of £65,000 has been provisionally approved from the Coastal CCG to support VCSI engagement with Local Community Networks (LCNs), over and above that facilitated by the County Council grant. The CCG funding is subject to agreeing outcomes around the LCNs, and its profiling is expected to be £15,000 for the remainder of 2018/19 and £50,000 for 2019/20. Once those outcomes have been agreed, the acceptance of this funding (and the recognition of the related additional investment) will be determined through existing Officer delegations, given that it will be budget neutral. Any opportunity for gaining future additional funding and its financial implications will be considered in due course, to inform budget considerations for 2020/21 onwards.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 Legal Services will review and finalise the terms of the proposed partnership agreement.

#### **6. Risk Assessment Implications and Mitigations**

- 6.1 There are a number of risks associated with this decision that have been identified and taken into consideration, as follows:

- 6.2 Whilst the existing service will be maintained it is expected that the 'VCSI Alliance' service model will result in an enhanced service provision for the same budget. This is considered to be a likely outcome but as the 'VCSI Alliance' is a new partnership the performance evidence is currently limited and thus improved performance remains to be proven. The grant award to support and develop the service model, including the generation of performance evidence to inform future funding and commissioning, is in acknowledgement of this risk.

- 6.3 The current service will be maintained by a new partnership of existing providers. The grant award maintains the current status-quo. However, there is some risk that other potential providers of VCSI services may challenge the decision to maintain the existing arrangements, the grant award and the lack of opportunity to compete for a contract to deliver this service. This issue was discussed at Procurement Board and on balance the value of supporting the partnership proposal via a grant was seen as the best option, the risk of challenge from other providers assessed as minimal.
- 6.4 Under the new arrangements the County Council's funding for Horsham District will be passed directly to the 'VCSI Alliance' to support the VCSI support network, rather than directly to HDC to support their in-house service. To manage this change, and associated risks, the 'VCSI Alliance' will seek to build positive links with the voluntary & community sector in Horsham District and the Horsham District Council in-house service in order to ensure that VCS representation and support is maintained and developed.

## **7. Other Options Considered (and reasons for not proposing)**

- 7.1 The importance of maintaining a dynamic and vibrant VCS across West Sussex to build stronger communities and the need for effective infrastructure support to the VCS in a challenging financial context require creative, streamlined and flexible solutions. Continuing to support four separate providers would not allow for the most efficient and effective use of constrained and reducing resources in the context of rising demand and expectation.

## **8. Equality and Human Rights Assessment**

- 8.1 There is no adverse impact on people with protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010. The service is universal in nature and does not provide services directly to the general public.

## **9. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment**

- 9.1 The VCS can play a powerful role in providing value for money and inherent social value benefits. VCS organisations achieve social value goals as part of their day to day business, by reinvesting any surplus into the pursuit of their unique purpose. To this end, the countywide VCSI service can support the VCS to deliver wider social benefits beyond the scope of its own objectives.
- 9.2 There will be a strong emphasis on utilising the service to understand the VCS voice and the social benefit they create in communities and how this can be instrumental in supporting the West Sussex Plan. The VCS organisations supported by the service often have social and environmental outcomes at their core. The service employs locally based staff to support the economy and works towards building sustainability and resilience amongst VCS organisations that support disadvantaged West Sussex residents.
- 9.3 Volunteering is a vital aspect of the service aims; providing infrastructure and training opportunities to strengthen and enhance volunteering in West Sussex, recruiting from a cross-section of the community to reflect the diversity of West Sussex.

- 9.4 The role of the VCSI service will help to integrate health services within their local communities, strategically and locally. This service will take the lead role to engage and actively involve the VCS in place based work when co-designing health services and shaping specific projects in the following areas:
- Prevention
  - Frailty and Ageing
  - Supporting the VCS to engage residents in other health interventions and wellbeing initiatives in the community.
- 9.5 The service will investigate, promote and share external funding opportunities in pursuit of its social value aims when supporting the VCS. It will also investigate, support and advise on funding opportunities for the VCS thereby leveraging further funding to support local initiatives that create added social value benefits.
- 9.6 A fundamental outcome for the service is to assist in smarter commissioning by collation of community intelligence and utilising their expertise and awareness of gaps in service provision. This intelligence can further enhance social value across West Sussex and inform future commissioning decisions that achieve the strategic aims of the West Sussex Plan.

## **10. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment**

10.1 None

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### **Background papers**

None