

**Draft Extract from minutes of People and Health Overview Committee
– 22 September 2020**

Financial provision to the voluntary and community sector

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive, which explained the results of the consultation regarding Dorset Council's proposals for allocating funding to the voluntary and community sector.

The recently appointed Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services explained that the report had been developed over a long period and was looking to change from grant provision to commissioning activity. If the recommendations were agreed, this would give the organisations currently working with the Council the confidence to continue with this. They had provided a good response through the Covid-19 pandemic and it was important to go forward without grant reductions as they were saving the Council money. The final recommendation suggested that smaller organisations could bid for outcome-based funding.

The Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships explained that when Dorset Council had been established it had inherited many different funding arrangements. The Cabinet had agreed to a full public consultation on the future provision of grants to Dorset's voluntary community sector and this had run for 8 weeks. Overall, the response to the consultation was positive but since the consultation closed the Covid-19 pandemic had had a major effect on all areas of the voluntary and community sector. This had led to some financial instability within the sector and micro groups moving to support local communities. The policy would enable communities to build and develop new relationships and support prevention at scale. The Committee were asked to support the recommendations and recommend them to Cabinet for decision.

Members asked a series of questions about: the EU procurement exercise; whether small groups currently receiving funding would have an extension of this to 30 September 2021; clarification of Recommendation 3; what outcomes were being sought under recommendation 5 and were they achievable; whether there would be support and advice available for micro groups set up as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; whether arts and museums had been included; whether there would be any funding left for the bigger organisations once the smaller organisations had received their funding; whether Dorset Community Action, Dorchester Volunteer Centre and the Race Equality Council could abuse their power; and whether the discretionary outcome-based funding was allocated by Dorset Council;

In response it was explained that:

- six months would be long enough to give notice of changes to current arrangements and undertake a procurement process under EU regulations;
- funding for small groups would be extended to 30 September 2021;
- currently Dorset Community Action, Dorchester Volunteer Centre and the Race Equality Council provided the social voluntary sector infrastructure which would be continued for a further six months;
- those affected by recommendation 5 had been given notice of the change. If the recommendations were agreed, then these organisations would receive information about next steps;

- the criteria for the outcome-based fund had been consulted upon and details were included in the consultation report. Final details of the criteria would be signed off by the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services but all teams administering specialist grants had been involved to ensure criteria were appropriate for the level of funding;
- Dorset Council officers would be able to provide expertise and Dorset Community Action could provide information and guidance to organisations to help them write bids or carry out an organisational health check so that they were in the best place to access funding. The Arts Development Company could provide support for arts and cultural organisations;
- arts and culture had been added to the Dorset Plan and an extension was being asked for the first three recommendations to 30 September 2021 to allow the EU procurement process to be undertaken.
- It was not in the public interest to delay Recommendations 4 and 5 because there was an inequality in the ways these organisations were funded by the previous Sovereign Councils. If the recommendations were agreed by Cabinet, this would enable micro organisations to bid for funding from 1 April 2021. The other recommendations had extended current arrangements to 30 September 2021 so that there were no gaps whilst the procurement exercise was undertaken;
- the assets review currently being undertaken would be reported to Cabinet on 22 November 2020.;
- all organisations would bid for funding at the same time. This process was in development and there were potentially three different levels of funding - under £1,000, £1,000 to £10,000 and over £10,000 and there would be a different process for each. Details would be put in place once Cabinet approval had been given;
- the three organisations would be providing infrastructure and support to the rest of the sector and would not deliver services. They would be expected to work in partnership with other organisations and this would be included in the terms of the new contract. There was no guarantee that they would be successful if they bid for the new contract;
- the allocations system for the discretionary outcome-based funding was being developed and was expected to be carried out by Dorset Councillors, officers and a representative from the sector.

The concern was expressed that Dorset Community Action, Dorchester Volunteer Centre and the Race Equality Council should not have full control under Recommendations 2 and 3.

The Chairman referred to the Committee's responsibility for policy making and suggested that voluntary sector engagement be included into all Dorset Council policies.

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health reminded members that the Council should be working in partnership with communities to grow and shape policies and be looking for opportunities to build community resilience. The Executive Director of People - Children supported this approach.

It was also suggested that social prescribing should be embedded into commissioning criteria.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services added that Council policies seemed to be in silos currently. As the integrated care system moved forward, and the Council worked with health colleagues, towns and parish councils, it would become increasingly difficult to write everything into every paper. It was important for a holistic way of working with people to be adopted in order to try to help residents. It was about social prescribing but also about getting partners to be part of it. She and the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health had taken this on board.

The Chairman referred to work undertaken on this by the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, and Locality Health Groups and suggested that a policy be developed on how the Council should work with health partners. The Executive Director of People - Children added that senior leadership team meetings across organisations were being held to look at directing funding to help people at an early stage. In Weymouth and Portland engagement with the community was underway to find out what the communities needed. Although his process had started, there was more to do. In terms of the relationship with health partners, the Executive Director of People - Adults explained that they were working across the integrated care system to build communities and ensure the right care and support was available in the right place. The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care added that the difficulty of getting organisations to forego sovereignty had started to change since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Organisations were now more willing to share and attribute credit to the integrated care system as a whole and not to individual agencies. She fully supported this change.

The Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships summarised that there was a need to ensure that a whole systems approach was taken when looking at future policy development with the inclusion of partners and the social voluntary sector.

The Chairman thanked officers for the work undertaken.

It was proposed by Cllr P Batstone and seconded by Cllr D Turner and unanimously agreed :-

RECOMMENDED

That the Cabinet agree to:-

1. The continued provision of the 'information, advice and guidance' service for residents at the current financial rate for a 5-year term to offer stability. Extension of the current grant for a further 6 months 1st April – 30th September 2021 to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken. The new contract to begin on 1st October 2021
2. The continued provision of an arts and culture support service at the current financial rate for a 5-year term. Extension of the current grant for a further 6 months 1st April – 30th September 2021 to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken. The new contract to begin on 1st October 2021
3. The continued provision of support services to the social voluntary community sector at the current financial rate for a 5-year term. This will be tendered as one contract for bidding organisations to work in partnership to deliver the support for the rest of the social voluntary community sector. Extension of the current grant recipients for a further 6 months 1st April – 30th September 2021 to enable a procurement exercise to be undertaken. The new contract to begin on 1st October 2021

4. The continued commissioned support of the museums and community centres in which Dorset Council have a reversionary interest at the current financial rate for a period of 1 year from 1st April 2021 to be considered within the wider council buildings and assets review.
5. A discretionary outcome-based fund to be introduced to replace all historical grant programmes offered by Dorset Council. Criteria to be modified in accordance to the comments made in the consultation and agreed with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder.
6. That voluntary sector engagement be included into all Dorset Council policies.

DRAFT