

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

20 September 2021

Dorset Council support for post Covid VCS Recovery

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr J Haynes, Customer and Community Services

Executive Director: A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

Report Author: Laura Cornette

Title: Business Partner – Communities and Partnerships

Tel: 01305 224306

Email: laura.cornette@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

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Recommendation:

Members of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee consider the financial support to the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) during Covid -19 and into recovery and note the relation to the organisational reset and planned VCS recovery.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure that People and Health Scrutiny Committee is aware of the impact of COVID-19 on Dorset's vulnerable communities and responds accordingly.

1. Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the council's financial response to supporting the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) during the pandemic and into recovery, following the report received by Cabinet in June 2020. This report also offers an update on the core annual infrastructure support we have commissioned following Cabinet approval on 6 October 2020.

2. Financial Implications

Dorset Council supports the VCS through a core annual financial package of £1.8 million. Additional financial resources have supported the sector from external agencies. There are no additional financial implications as a result of this report.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

Well-being and Health implications will be addressed in meeting the Dorset Council Plan priorities in the individual grant fund applications.

4. Climate implications

There are no climate implications as a result of this report.

5. Other Implications

Other implications regarding sustainability, voluntary organisations, public health, safeguarding and physical activity will be addressed in meeting the Dorset Council Plan priorities in the individual grant fund applications.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: low

Residual Risk: low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

Incorporated under the EqIA for the Dorset Together programme.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Specification for the Provision of Infrastructure Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) across the Dorset Council Local Authority Area.

9. Background Papers

- [Covid- 19 Response](#) Cabinet 5 May 2020
- [Update on Dorset Council's response to Covid-19 – Updated Report](#). Cabinet 30 June 2020
- [Covid-19: How well has Dorset Council responded to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups during 'lockdown'?](#) Cabinet 30 June 2020
- [Financial Provision to the voluntary and community sector](#) 6 October 2020

- [People and Health Scrutiny – Community Response](#) 28 January 2021
- [Cabinet - Covid – 19 Response](#) 22 June 2021

1. Background

- 1.1 Over the last 18 months the relationship between the voluntary and public sector has developed at considerable speed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The voluntary and community sector (VCS) is embedded in the community and has showcased their passion, strength and creativity. There has been extraordinary and unprecedented support from the sector, working in partnership with statutory bodies, to support vulnerable residents and recruit volunteers, foster grassroots community networks and adapt to deliver innovative and responsive online services and this has followed into the recovery phase of the pandemic. Coordination of this work continues through the 'Dorset Together' programme, a cross-council network of officers, with political leadership provided by Cllrs Andrew Parry, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help; Cllr Laura Miller, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social care and Health and Cllr Jill Haynes, Portfolio Holder for Customer and Community Services.
- 1.2 This report follows the Committee's request to receive a report on the distribution of grants at the committee of 28 January 2021 where members received a report on the community response to the pandemic.
- 1.3 To date, since March 2020 Dorset Council has directly distributed a massive **£1,185,405** in grant funding to support Dorset's VCS during the pandemic and to promote recovery from a variety of funds from Dorset Council's core budget as well as on behalf of government departments such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The government Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) funding has been used directly to support post-Covid recovery. The detail of these are covered in sections 3-5. A table summarising the financial detail is in section 6.
- 1.4 These grants have enabled the VCS to support Dorset's vulnerable residents and Voluntary and Community Service Organisations (VCSOs) with; emergency and community food support; befriending; shopping and pharmacy supplies; change in financial circumstances and many other services.
- 1.5 In addition to the Covid financial support, Dorset Council has a core budget to support the VCS infrastructure. This continued support was agreed at Cabinet on 6 October 2020. The main aim of the infrastructure VCS services is to enable community groups and voluntary organisations to develop, build greater reliance, self-sustaining capacity and capabilities to deliver activities

and services that benefit the users of their services and communities. They are also commissioned to provide strategic representation, liaison and partnership working across sectors, playing an important role in helping the Council deliver [the Council Plan](#). This has played a vital role during the pandemic and is key to the wider sector's recovery.

2. Commissioned VCS Infrastructure Support

2.1 Following Cabinet authorisation to procure on 6 October 2020, Dorset Council undertook market engagement exercises with internal and external stakeholders and then went out to tender in June 2021 for the 3 contracts. Specification detail can be found in appendix 1.

2.2 The contract for the Provision of Information, Advice and Guidance for a 3+2-year term has successfully been awarded to Citizen's Advice in Dorset. A partnership between the 3 Citizen's Advice offices operating in the Dorset Council area. This new contract will commence on 1 October 2021.

2.3 Following market engagement, the contract for VCS Infrastructure Support was split into 2 separate lots – Lot 1 will provide organisational support and training and Lot 2 will focus on Volunteer Support infrastructure.

2.4 Lot 2 has successfully been awarded to Volunteer Centre Dorset for a 3+2-year term and will work in direct partnership with the successful tenderer/s of Lot 1 – Organisation Support. This new contract will commence on 1 October 2021

2.5 Lot 1 to support organisation infrastructure was not awarded through this tender process as it did not receive a bid that satisfactorily met the new specification requirements.

2.6 Officers are now working at pace on an alternative offer to go out to market that may be more attractive to the VCS market whilst still meeting proposed specification.

2.7 A verbal update will be offered to People and Health Scrutiny Committee on 20 September.

2.8 Although there is potential risk having a brief gap in the provision for support to the VCS, officers feel the new improved offer will be more focused on the micro and small organisations who have been financially excluded from being able to attain this assistance from the current provider in the past. Additionally, Dorset Community Action are receiving additional funding to offer free support to community groups as part of Covid Recovery which continues until 31 March 2022.

3. Community & Culture Project Fund (CCPF)

3.1 CCPF is the small grants programme that replaced the Social Inclusion Fund, Leisure Development Fund and the Community Impact fund. The Grant programme cuts across several themes including: Communities, Play, Sport, and Culture (Arts and Museums). It is focussed upon providing a small one-off grant for up to one year for the delivery of projects or specific activities that meet Dorset Council's fund objectives and for 2021-22 has a focus on projects that support community sector projects restart and recovery.

3.2 Round 1 awarded a total of 25 grants equating to £72,284 across the themes of culture and community for Covid recovery.

3.3 Round 2 will open in November 2021 and will aim to award £132,516

4. Targeted Youth grants

4.1 In March 2021, following an independent EAP, Cabinet agreed that organisations that took over running predecessor council youth and community centres were least likely to access Crowdfunder, that the current approach to funding for positive activities for young people has changed and the £100k set aside for Crowdfunder is repurposed and prioritised for these through a simple grant allocation process.

4.2 In March 2021, Round 1 awarded a total of £81,382 to 13 Youth Clubs, the fund had targeted the former Dorset County Council Youth clubs to apply for this funding.

4.3 Round 2 opened on 30 July 2021 and will close on 10 September 2021, to support community-based youth centres and clubs to deliver a range of positive activities for young people and to help with COVID19 recovery plans, funding 80 to 100% of total project costs. This round of funding is open to all applications that meet the criteria, offering grants from £500 to £5,000.

4.3 The Grant Panel is made up of 2 specialist Dorset Council Officers (one acts as the panel Chair), 2 councillors (one of which is the portfolio holder for Children, Education, Skills and Early Help) and 2 young people, and we will be confirming our award decisions on 1 October 2021.

5. Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)

5.1 The COMF was awarded to Dorset Council from central government to support recovery and mitigate against long term effects of the pandemic in all areas of Dorset including Adults and Children's services, Place, Economy and Tourism, Public Health (in the DC area). The process Dorset Council adopted was for officers to bid for funding and the Senior Leadership Team would assess, award and oversee implementation.

5.2 Dorset Council has supported VCS recovery with 14 specifically targeted grants to aid VCS restart and recovery to the value of £465,500.

5.3 In addition to this, it has created 2 specific competitive micro grants programmes (up to the value of £2000) to support small grass roots community organisations and village halls and community buildings to restart and reopen.

5.4 Round 1 has awarded 34 community restart micro grants to the value of £50,000 and 30 village halls to the value of £40,000. A further £50,000 has been awarded on 26 August for further distribution.

6. Total financial support to the VCS during Covid.

6.1 The table below shows the total grants and amounts issued to support the VCS since March 2020 and also indicates other allocated funds to support the sector by the end of the financial year. This table does not include the commissioned core awards detailed in section 2.

Grant name	Awards made	Total value of awards (£)
Culture and Community Project Fund R1 – Community	10	29,800
Culture and Community Project Fund R1 – Culture	15	42,484
DEFRA (emergency food support)	74	341,739
MCHLG Fund (emergency community response)	27	370,000
Targeted Youth Fund Round 1	13	81,382
Contain Outbreak Management Fund – targeted & competitive	11	320,000
TOTAL to date	150	1,185,405
<i>Contain Outbreak Management Fund – targeted & competitive (awarded 26 July 2021)</i>	3	145,500
<i>Targeted Youth Fund Round 2 (awarded Oct 2021)</i>	TBC	100,000
<i>Culture and Community Project Fund R2 – Community (Awarded Jan 2022)</i>	TBC	65,000
<i>Culture and Community Project Fund R2 – Culture (Awarded Jan 2022)</i>	TBC	67,500
TOTAL by 31 March 2021	153 +TBC	1,563,405

7. Next Steps

7.1 Dorset Together has provided leadership and coordination to multiple

initiatives throughout lockdown and has been a strong and effective partnership between statutory agencies and the community and voluntary sector, with true co-production and sharing of resources and ideas. The group continues to focus on recovery of the community and voluntary sector.

7.2 The provision of targeted financial support through effective commissioning and grant making is an important element of this work recognising the value that the sector brings and providing the infrastructure support necessary for the sector to flourish.

7.3 Lessons learned throughout the pandemic have shown that success is also dependent on a shared sense of purpose and a genuine sharing of power and resources between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector. This approach will continue to be taken by the Dorset Together Programme and underpin the emerging 'Enabling Communities' Strategy.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Appendix 1 – Specification for the Provision of Infrastructure Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) across the Dorset Council Local Authority Area

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Provider shall be required to work in partnership with the Council and with commissioners to build and strengthen the capacity of Dorset's Voluntary and Community Sector, who play an important role in helping the Council deliver [the Council Plan](#). The Provider will facilitate a good working relationship between the Commissioners and the voluntary and community organisations, building capacity in line with the Commissioners' priorities.
- 1.2 The Provider shall have, and maintain, a good understanding of the Dorset landscape and communities (further information on Dorset and its local communities is available on [Dorset Insight](#)), [the Council Plan](#), and be able to navigate, build and facilitate relationships across different partners at local level and through key strategic partnerships across the Dorset Council area.
- 1.3 The Commissioners recognise the importance of supporting, in particular, small sized voluntary and community organisations that in turn provide support to keep people resilient and able to live independently and prevent reliance on statutory services. The key role of the Provider is to help voluntary organisations who need support, whether they be small or larger VCS, to be sustainable and effective and develop solutions that combine the creation and delivery of voluntary and community led action.
- 1.4 The Provider is required to provide what is sometimes referred to as 'infrastructure support'.

Infrastructure organisations are the backbone of the Voluntary and Community Sector – Resources providing crucial guidance to hundreds of community organisations such as local charities, community groups, village hall committees, social enterprises and parish councils. A good infrastructure body will “*offer the right mixture of support, challenge, leadership, resource, skills and knowledge. It will also help to foster relationships between the local voluntary sector, public bodies and local business. They also promote social action and make sure local communities have a voice*”. Sir Stuart Etherington, chief executive of NCVO (31 Oct 2012)

- 1.5 The partnership will develop over time but will include significant opportunities for discussion to shape and reshape the practical workstreams that need to be delivered as priorities evolve. The Provider shall ensure that the voice of the sector is brought into these discussions and influences the Communities Strategy.
- 1.6 This Service Specification describes 2 lots, the shared principles, values and behaviours that are required to support the VCS. These are shaped from conversations, formal consultation, market engagement and workshops with service leads, stakeholders, VCS groups, and the development of Council priorities.
- 1.7 Providers shall be expected to work in a mutually beneficial way with one another in order to provide a consistent level of service for the Voluntary and Community Sector across the Council's local authority area and provide an integrated service in partnership with each other and the Provider of the Information, Advice and Guidance Services contract.

2. Shared Principles

2.1 The overarching principle is to deliver Voluntary and Community Infrastructure Sector support so that:

- i. Dorset's Voluntary and Community Sector is enabled to grow and develop – supporting residents to enjoy a good quality of life and enabling more people to benefit from a vibrant and greater choice of social, cultural and sporting opportunities.
- ii. Volunteering is regarded as a valuable opportunity for individuals to contribute to their community and is accessible to all, regardless of their skills or time capacity.
- iii. Provider(s) represent the whole VCS and act as their strategic voice and shall be the strategic partner for the Council to help inform its current and future services. The Provider(s) shall ensure the VCS is well informed and understand the priorities of Dorset Council as laid out in the [Council Plan](#), the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy, the Communities Strategy (currently in development) and other key workstreams.

3. Outcomes and Values

Delivering better outcomes is a shared achievement as many are interconnected, overlapping and are the result of people, organisations, processes and cultures interacting together. Communications and open dialogue, relationships and collaborations are the repeated themes highlighted through conversations and consultation.

4. Who is this service for?

The Provider(s) shall capacity build and work with voluntary sector organisations, community and faith groups and others delivering services in the Council's local authority area.

5. Funding

Lot 1 - Organisational Infrastructure Support (Voluntary, Community and Social Sector): The fixed budget for this service is £90,000 per annum for the duration of the contract.

Lot 2: Volunteer Infrastructure Support: The fixed prices budget available for this service is £50,000 per annum for the duration of the contract. The Provider shall support the VCS to think beyond statutory funding, including working with the local authority on partnership bids.

6. Performance Measures and Monitoring Requirements

The Provider, in delivering the service, shall use learning as the driver for performance improvement and capture of outcomes. The Council recognises that working effectively and collaboratively requires the ability to adapt and change in response to the dynamic nature of communities. What works is a continuous process of listening, learning and adapting.

Quarterly monitoring meetings to be held between the Council and the Provider. The Provider shall capture social value, added value and cost savings to statutory services. Review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure how well the Provider is achieving agreed goals and objectives.

The Provider shall produce and share an annual service report. This annual report shall summarise activity, analyse data and trends (including emerging trends), and detail the learning and adaptations that have occurred. The use of case studies will benefit the report.

7. Interdependencies with other services

Due to the diverse range of organisations, people and places covered by this service, it is essential that the Provider(s) encourage all to proactively engage and collaborate in order that the principles and behaviours of the service are met. Building positive relationships with the sector is key as well as engaging with a range of partners. The Provider(s) to facilitate specialist VCS representation where needed.

8. Service requirements

Lot 1: Organisational Infrastructure Support (Voluntary, Community and Social Sector) - organisational support, development and capacity building

The provision of the Council's local authority area wide organisational infrastructure service is required to focus on, but not be limited to, the following broad areas of activity.

The Provider shall:

Raise standards by –

- Providing professional organisational support, delivered through a combination of in-house capacity and brokerage, facilitating access to advice on:
 - Constitutional matters, including advice on organisational set up and close down
 - Support for trustees to transform services
 - HR and legal matters
 - Policy development
 - Organisational finance and accounting
 - Funding opportunities, particularly engagement with new funding models including, but not limited to, social investment
 - ICT and digital development
 - Public sector commissioning, procurement and bid writing

The core advice offer is required to be available to small organisations (defined as turnover of less than £5000) free of charge, and that any charges for advice over and above this core offer to be proportionate to the size of the organisation.

The core offer shall include:

- Safeguarding
- Basic start up Governance advice
- Business plan/ project planning basics - evidencing impact, evaluation and monitoring.
- Fundraising basics
- Developing an environmental policy
- Developing a GDPR policy

The core advice offer to small organisations shall represent a minimum of 25% of the service provision.

In line with the changes in training delivery over the past 12 months, a 'blended' [online/in person] training offer may be considered, subject to prior agreement with the Council.

The Provider shall:

- Provide an effective and up-to-date online web presence for dissemination of self-service information, key points of contact for support, and publication of sector specific advice and analysis
- Work with the Council, volunteer support service and other related Dorset Council area specific online information and advice partners to ensure a clear and coordinated provision of web-based VCS advice

Identify and fill the gaps by –

- Monitoring the services provided by the voluntary social and community sector in the Council's local authority area, so they are able to identify the gaps in services
- Working with new groups to address unmet needs as well as ensuring that existing groups are equipped to shape their services to the changing needs of the community
- Proactively responding to emergent issues facing the sector, in collaboration with public sector partners

Provide a voice by –

- Representation and networking for the local sector
- Working very widely across the sector to coordinate stakeholders for joint working opportunities and to create partnerships and drawing on this broad engagement to build a representative voice of the sector
- Consulting on policy developments and contribute to discussions and decision-making at local level

Facilitate communication and cooperation by –

- Representing the voice of the sector at key forums with public and private sector partners, supporting a two-way communication flow between these partners and the sector. Contributing to ensuring that these forums remain fit for purpose.
- Working collaboratively with the provider awarded Lot 2 – Volunteer Infrastructure Support, to achieve joint outcomes
- Working collaboratively with the provider awarded for the Information, Advice and Guidance contract.
- Encouraging and supporting groups and organisations to work together and share resources to create a more efficient way of working and build stronger local sector
- Providing a forum for networking to share good practice and expertise as well as forming partnerships, ensuring a geographical coverage across the county

- Translating national and local policy/ legislative changes into the local context in a format that is relevant to local VCS organisations

Promote strategic involvement by –

- Working with the providers of the Volunteer Infrastructure Support service and the Information, Advice and Guidance service to make strategic links across the sector, promoting best practice and proactively contributing to an evidence base of sector specific analysis in Dorset Council area, drawing on a range of research and information sources
- Ensuring that the sector is involved and represented in local policymaking and planning