additional papers 1

Executive
Committee

Tue 29 Jul
2014
7.00 pm

Committee Room 2
Town Hall
Redditch

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

making a difference

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Welcome to today's meeting.
Guidance for the Public

Agenda Papers

The **Agenda List** at the front of the Agenda summarises the issues to be discussed and is followed by the Officers' full supporting **Reports**.

Chair

The Chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the meeting. Generally to one side of the Chair is the Democratic Services Officer who gives advice on the proper conduct of the meeting and ensures that the debate and the decisions are properly recorded. On the Chair's other side are the relevant Council Officers. The Councillors ("Members") of the Committee occupy the remaining seats around the table.

Running Order

Items will normally be taken in the order printed but, in particular circumstances, the Chair may agree to vary the order.

Refreshments : tea, coffee and water are normally available at meetings - please serve yourself.

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REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Executive

Committee

Tuesday, 29th July, 2014

7.00 pm

Committee Room 2 Town Hall

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:

Bill Hartnett (Chair)	John Fisher
Greg Chance (Vice-Chair)	Phil Mould
	Mark Shurmer
Juliet Brunner	Yvonne Smith
Brandon Clayton	Debbie Taylor

5.	**Voluntary Sector Task Group - Final Report** (Pages 1 - 48) Councillor Pat Witherspoon	To receive the final report of the Voluntary Sector Task Group. (Report to follow) **All Wards**

Overview & Scrutiny

Voluntary and Community Sector Task Group

2013/14

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Membership of the Task Group
Councillors Pat Witherspoon (Chair) and Andrew Brazier and former Councillor Roger Hill.

Support Officers
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Completed
July 2014

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Email: scrutiny@redditchbc.gov.uk

FOREWORD

This review of the Voluntary and Community Sector has taken almost a year and although the group fulfilled their objectives it was impossible to look at all groups who have received either grants or other support from Redditch Borough Council over the years. We were aware of the sensitivity that any scrutiny may arouse but we all agreed that Redditch Borough Council must have a robust, transparent grants process fair to all recipients.

Needless to say we as a very small Task Group, relied heavily on the two officers who have been stretched to the limit (with other Task Groups running at the same time) compiling our research and supporting us. Both Jessica and Amanda have our gratitude.

Councillor Pat Witherspoon, Chair of the Voluntary and Community Sector Task Group

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 1: THE COUNCIL'S GRANTS PROGRAMME

Recommendation 1
The following should be addressed in relation to the Council's grants programme: a)   **the timescales for the Council's grants process should be reviewed to ensure that decisions are made in sufficient time to enable Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to plan constructively for the year ahead;** b)   **the geographical spread of the client base for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations should be taken into account by the Grants Panel as part of the scoring process when considering applications for grants;** c)   **the template for the Council's application form for Council grants should be reviewed; and** d)   **action points should be recorded at meetings of the Council's Grants Panel.**
Financial Implications: Additional time would be required from Democratic Services Officers to record action points at meetings of the Grants Panel. However, the financial implications are likely to be minimal as attendance at evening meetings is already a consistent part of their jobs and can be covered by existing budgets. **Legal implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

Recommendation 2
The following actions should be taken in respect of the members of the Grants Panel: **a) formal training should be provided to Members of the Grants Panel;**   **b) wherever possible members of the Grants Panel should visit Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that have been awarded larger project grants as part of the monitoring process. These visits should take place before the second instalment of funding is provided to the organisations.**
Financial Implications: There will be a minimal cost associated with Members visiting organisations, however, it is anticipated this will be met from existing budgets.   **Legal implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

Recommendation 3
The implications of the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 should be considered by Officers to ensure that the Council's grants process is amended as and when required. Officers should ensure that any changes that are made to the process in response to these requirements take account of local needs.
Financial Implications: There are no financial implications as a result of this recommendation.   **Legal implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

CHAPTER 2: WORKING DIFFERENTLY TOGETHER

Recommendation 4
The Council should employ an apprentice to support the work of the Grants Officer. Consideration should be given to sharing this apprentice with a Voluntary and Community Sector organisation.
Financial Implications: There are costs associated with an apprentice, however, there is a current budget allocation to support the recruitment of an apprentice. This could be considered should Members agree this recommendation. **Legal implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

Recommendation 5
The *Framework Agreement for the Provision of Debt and Budgeting Advice to be Delivered Within the Locality areas in Redditch* should continue to be supported by the Council for the foreseeable future.
Financial Implications: The framework currently covers a three year period. Funding has been secured for the first year. Additional funding will need to be negotiated to support the framework in the following two years. Whilst the group recognises that this recommendation has financial implications for the Council Members believe that this could potentially be offset by savings that could be made by the Council and partner organisations as a direct result of the provision of financial management and debt advice. (e.g. through a potential reduction in enforcement and court action). **Legal implications:** There are no legal implications.

Agenda Item 5

Recommendation 6
An informal working group of Council Officers should be formed to discuss and share knowledge about current joint working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. These informal meetings would also provide an opportunity for different teams to identify further opportunities to work with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and highlight any duplication of work.   **a) Dedicated space should be introduced on the Council's intranet to allow Officers working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and / or volunteers to share information.**
Financial Implications: There should be limited financial implications to this recommendation. Relevant Officers would need to spend a small amount of time meeting during the year, though the group is not envisaging that these meetings would be onerous or too time consuming. There is the potential that if opportunities to work together are identified as well as any potential risks of duplication then these meetings could help the Council to achieve financial savings in the long-term.   Whilst some time would be required to add information to the Council's intranet the group is not anticipating that this task would be too onerous or costly.   **Legal Implications:** There may be a need for information sharing protocols to be put in place.

CHAPTER 3: VOLUNTEERING

Recommendation 7
The following actions should be taken in relation to the Staff Volunteering Policy: a) **the policy should be refreshed and promoted; and** b) **a taster list of local volunteering opportunities should be advertised on the "Briefcase" section of the Council's intranet for the consideration of staff. In particular, consideration should be given to advertising volunteering opportunities that would help to address the Council's strategic purposes.**
Financial Implications: Officer time would be required to review the Staff Volunteering Policy. However, the policy is already scheduled to be refreshed so this action would not add any extra workload for Officers. There would also be a small amount of time required to upload volunteering opportunities onto the Briefcase. However, the group is only suggesting that a "taster" sample of opportunities should be displayed on the intranet which should help to limit the workload. **Legal Implications:** A disclaimer to protect the Council in respect of staff participating in volunteering activity is required. However, as the policy has been in place since 2011 the group is working on the basis that the Council has gained some practice in addressing this legal requirement.

Recommendation 8
A Staff Award should be created to recognise the voluntary work carried out by members of staff.
Financial Implications: In previous years employees who have won a staff award have received a small payment in recognition of their achievement. If this is set to continue in future a similar payment would need to be offered to any member of staff who wins this award. **Legal Implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

CHAPTER 4: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Recommendation 9
The Council should work with local businesses and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to introduce a "Redditch Hour" on twitter and other social networks.
Financial Implications: There would not be any significant financial implications in relation to this recommendation for the Council. **Legal Implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

Recommendation 10
A Voluntary Sector Event should be held on a regular basis to help promote **a) the work of local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to each other as well as potential customers;** **b) volunteering opportunities to local residents; and** **c) a prize giving awards ceremony should form part of this event.** **This event could potentially be aligned to existing events that are already take place.**
Financial Implications: Financial investment would be required to organise and host this type of event. The level of financial investment required would depend on the scale of the event and regularity of these events. The costs associated with this recommendation would have to be clearly identified. **Legal Implications:** There are no specific legal implications.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Councillor Pat Witherspoon suggested that the Voluntary and Community Sector would be a suitable topic to scrutinise in August 2013. This exercise was considered to be timely because it provided a useful opportunity to assess the impact of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group's recommendations on the Council's grants programme five years after the previous review concluded. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also agreed that in the current climate of financial austerity a review of this subject would enable the Council to assess both the value for money accrued from supporting Voluntary and Community Sector organisations as well as provide an opportunity to assess whether these organisations required additional support.

There were a number of key objectives to this review.

1) To review the Council's grants programme and the work of the Grants Panel.
2) To assess the support provided by other Council departments to Voluntary and Community Sector orgnsiations.
3) To receive an overview of the Council's Concessionary Rents Policy and to assess the implications for local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
4) To consult with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector about the support they receive from the public and private sectors.
5) To assess and clarify whether any additional support could be provided by the Council, if needed, to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
6) To identify actions that could be taken to improve communications regarding the work of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

A variety of approaches to gathering evidence were adopted by the group. This included reviewing relevant documentation such as the Council's Grants Policy and Concessionary Rents Policy as well as statistical data relating to the Council's grants process since 2010/11. Interviews were held with key relevant Officers and the Chair of the Grants Panel as well as with a number of representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector. The group also used a survey to consult with a wider number of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. A questionnaire was similarly developed to enable the group to consult with Council employees about staff volunteering opportunities.

Third Sector Task and Finish Review

At an early stage in the review Members revisited the final report that had been produced by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group in 2008. Members were keen to find out what impact the group's recommendations had had on the Council's grants process as well as to ensure that their exercise did not duplicate work undertake by the previous scrutiny group.

Members found that there had been a number of key achievements arising from the previous exercise:

- A Voluntary Sector Grants Policy had been introduced for the Council at the instigation of the group. No policy had existed prior to that review.
- The Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) funding framework had initially been adopted by the Council. Under this framework the Council had signed up to "Shopping", for an organisation to deliver a service on the Council's behalf funded by a large grant or contract; "Investing", involving the Council providing funding to develop capacity in the sector;and "Giving", in terms of providing funding to Voluntary and Community Sector groups. The Shopping element of this policy had been withdrawn from the Council's funding framework at a later date.
- A Grants Officer had been employed to facilitate the process and had remained in post for a significant amount of time. This ensured that local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations had a continuous point of contact.
- The criteria for grant applications had been consistently linked to local priorities since the completion of the review. This compared favourably to previous years when there had been inconsistent links made between the process and local priorities.
- The application forms used by the Council had been designed to be very similar to the forms used by Worcestershire County Council. Whilst Members felt that these forms were relatively complex the Task Group recognised that the similarities between the two sets of forms would help some groups as they could devote scarce resources to becoming familiar with local application requirements.
- The Council had signed up to the Worcestershire Compact, an agreement between the Statutory and Voluntary Sector relating to how both sectors could work together. By 2013/14 the compact had become less prominent locally though was being reviewed by Worcestershire Voices, a countywide group which aimed to support an independent and influential Voluntary Sector. Members were pleased to learn that a representative of the Council had been involved with the work of this group.

Concessionary Rents Policy

In line with the group's terms of reference Members scrutinised the content of the Concessionary Rents Policy during the review. As part of this process the group noted that a Short, Sharp Scrutiny review of the policy, conducted in 2012, had focused on an initial draft of the policy. This policy had subsequently been significantly redrafted in July 2013.

The group found that the Council's Concessionary Rents Policy applied to the lease of Council owned properties by Voluntary and Community Sector Groups. Under the terms of the policy organisations based in Council properties can apply for Rent Relief Grants. There are three different tiers of reduction available; a 25

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per cent reduction, a further 20 per cent reduction and the final tier where an additional 25 per cent reduction can be made on rent due to the Council. Eligibility for each tier is determined by a specific set of criteria.

The group considered the content of the policy in detail. They concluded that no further revisions of the policy were necessary at this stage. They were particularly pleased to note, however, that the policy had helped to make rent arrangements available to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations much more open and transparent than it had been in previous years.

Membership

Early in the review it became clear that Members would be investigating the subject in more detail than had been anticipated at the start of the exercise. In November 2013 Councillor Baker, who had originally been appointed to the review, became concerned that continued participation in the exercise could create a conflict of interest for him. In particular he advised the group that as the owner of Omega Therapies, an organisation that was eligible to apply for grant funding from the Council, he would have a potential conflict of interest if he became involved in more detailed discussions of the grants process. He therefore resigned from the group and took no further part in any of the subsequent meetings or in agreeing any of the recommendations that are detailed in this report.

The review was originally due to end in April 2014. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to extend the deadline to enable the group to consult with a larger number of representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector than had hitherto engaged with the review. Former Councillor Roger Hill subsequently stood down at the local elections in May 2014, though remained keen to participate in the Task Group exercise until the end of the review due to the expertise that he had gathered on this subject in the preceding months. For this reason Mr Hill was co-opted back onto the review in June 2014.

CHAPTER 1: THE COUNCIL'S GRANTS PROGRAMME

Recommendation 1	The following should be addressed in relation to the Council's grants programme: a) the timescales for the Council's grants process should be reviewed to ensure that decisions are made in sufficient time to enable Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to plan constructively for the year ahead; b) the geographical spread of the client base for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations should be taken into account by the Grants Panel as part of the scoring process when considering applications for grants; c) the template for the Council's application form for Council grants should be reviewed and d) action points should be recorded at meetings of the Council's Grants Panel.
Financial Implications	Additional time would be required from Democratic Services Officers to take Action Points at meetings of the Grants Panel. However, the financial implications are likely to be minimal as attendance at evening meetings is already a consistent part of their jobs and can be covered by existing budgets.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

Council Grants Programme – Basic Overview

Consideration of the Council's grants programme formed a significant part of the review. In 2014/15 two types of grant are due to be provided to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations by the Council. This includes:

1) The main project grants, whereby grants are awarded to organisations to undertake project work. These grants are aligned with specific themes that correspond with with the Council's strategic purposes.
2) Smaller grants worth up to £500, also known as Stronger Communities Grants. There are three rounds of these smaller grants during the year which are provided to support the work of local Voluntary and Community Sector groups within the community.

The total budget for grants to voluntary organisations for 2014 /15 was £241,000.

In Redditch the Grants Panel considers every application for funding that is received by the Council and determines whether the organisation should be awarded funding. The Panel makes recommendations to the Executive Committee which makes a final decision about the grants that will be awarded.

At present applications are assessed by the Grants Panel in relation to specific scoring criteria where points are awarded out of a total of 59. There is usually only enough funding to support a certain number of projects under each theme and grants are awarded to groups that have received the highest scores.   In March 2014 it was agreed that a threshold should be introduced in the scoring system. This was designed to address concerns that under the previous scheme, in cases where there were limited numbers of applicants or a number of poor quality applications had been received, groups that had received low scores had a chance to secure funding. There had been suggestions that this would lead to a risk that Council funding would not necessarily be used in the most appropriate manner to the benefit of the local community. From this year, as a result of the introduction of this threshold, any funding that is not allocated to groups in any given round of grant funding will be returned to the main grants budget.

Groups can submit up to two applications per theme. In cases where more than one application is submitted under each theme an organisation must demonstrate that the funding would be used for different projects. There is no limit to the number of grants that a single group can be awarded in a year. However, if two applications are made from the same applicant for the same project under different themes, only one of the applications will be funded if successful. The process for scoring the applications does allow for the panel to determine viability of the group to successfully deliver a multitude of projects and ensure that they are the appropriate group to deliver the proposed project.

During the course of the review Members considered historic data relating to the provision of grants to Voluntary and Community Sector groups in the period 2011/12 – 2013/14. When scrutinising this data the Task Group identified the following issues:

- There were a number of local Voluntary and Community Sector groups that applied for funding from the Council on a regular basis.
- By 2013/14 53.5 per cent of applicants who had applied for larger project grants were repeat applicants (i.e. they had submitted an application in two or three of the years for which data was available).
- In 2013/14 53 per cent of applicants who were successfully awarded larger project grants were repeat applicants.
- For the Sustainable Communities Grants whilst 52 per cent of applicants were repeat applicants only 32 per cent of the groups that were successfully awarded a grant were repeat applicants.

- Members noted that there were a number of repeat applicants who applied for funding in each year though on some occasions they would apply for a project grant and on other occasions they would apply for a Sustainable Communities Grant. The figures provided above may not therefore reflect the true frequency with which particular groups repeatedly applied for and were awarded funding by the Council.
- In some cases the groups that had successfully applied for funding on multiple occasions were the same groups that the Third Sector Task and Finish Group had found to be in receipt of funding on a regular basis in 2008.
- A number of groups had been awarded a grant despite the fact that they had received a low score in the scoring process due to a limited number of applicants for that theme. Members are aware that the introduction of a threshold in the grants scoring process should help to address this situation.
- Some of the groups had submitted multiple applications in different grant categories and had successfully been awarded more than one grant in some of these years.
- A number of the applicants delivered services outside Redditch Borough and in some cases the group was based in another part of the country. In particular, groups based in Bromsgrove were found to have submitted applications for funding.

Members developed concerns about the extent to which some groups were relying on Council sources of funding to deliver services. They recognised that in order to become sustainable many of these groups needed to be able to secure alternative sources of funding. They also felt that the Council needed to be able to support new groups as and when required to address emerging issues within the local community.

In this context the value of promoting match funding was identified by the group as a constructive method that could be adopted to encourage Voluntary and Community Sector groups to become less reliant on the Council for funding. Members learned during their review that at Wychavon District Council, which also manages a community funding programme, groups were not allowed to apply for funding that would cover up to 100 per cent of the project costs and had to identify alternative sources of match funding from other providers. Furthermore, Wychavon District Council did not permit Voluntary and Community Sector Groups that had successfully secured a grant to reapply for funding in the following three years, obliging those groups to identify further alternative sources of funding in order to remain sustainable.

Towards the end of their review Members were advised that in Redditch match funding is always encouraged in any applications submitted. Groups are also signposted to external funding opportunities. However, match funding is not an explicit requirement in order for a group to secure funding as it is at Wychavon District Council. The group would suggest that whenever possible more action should be taken to promote match funding to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in order to encourage these groups to become more sustainable.

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Members recognise that there are potentially other issues impacting on Voluntary and Community Sector organisations which may influence how they apply for funding and the sources of support that they require within the local community. They concluded that to ascertain the needs of local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations it was important to consult with representatives of the sector.

Consultation with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations:

During the review Members arranged to consult with local representatives of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. The group was keen to consult with a range of small, medium and large Voluntary and Community Sector groups. This included holding interviews with the Director of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN), an infrastructure organisation that supports a network of Voluntary and Community and statutory organisations that provide services in Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove district, and with the Director of the Sandycroft Wellbeing Centre. In both cases Members were keen to consult directly with representatives of these groups as they recognised that they were established members of the local Voluntary and Community Sector with significant links to other local groups.

A survey was also produced and circulated in order to obtain feedback from a wider cross-section of the sector. Unfortunately some problems were experienced with the ICT support for this survey and for this reason the deadline for receipt of completed surveys was extended by a month.

In total nine completed surveys were received from local representatives of the sector. Whilst Members were disappointed with the low number of responses there were a number of key themes that were identified in the feedback, both in these surveys and from the interviews, that they felt should be highlighted in this report:

- Alternative sources of funding could be obtained from a range of funding providers, such as the lottery and other public sector organisations. Many groups were also actively involved in fund raising activities.
- However, in the current financial climate some groups had found that competition for resources had increased.
- A number of groups had been in receipt of Supporting People and Future Lives funding provided by Worcestershire County Council. Members concluded that the removal of this funding would therefore have an impact on the finances of many Voluntary and Community Sector groups.
- Some groups had commented that they relied predominantly on Redditch Borough Council for funding and had thanked the Council for the support that it had provided to date.
- A number of groups that were not in direct receipt of funding had benefitted from Council support in other ways. In particular some of the groups leased Council properties and had applied for concessionary rents.

- Some groups delivered very similar services, though Members concluded that this was not necessarily leading to duplication in service delivery as they often had different target audiences.

The Task Group were concerned to find that some groups, which had been in receipt of Council funding through the grants programme in previous years, had suggested that they did not receive support from any public sector organisations. Instead, these groups, which were in a minority, referred to the community funding provided by the Council as a separate source of funding. Members felt that this potentially demonstrated a need for greater emphasis to be placed on the fact that the Council's grants process was a discretionary service that was supported using general sources of Council funding.

The Task Group did ask Voluntary and Community Sector groups to identify any additional support that would assist the sector. The following suggestions were recorded for Members' consideration:

- More opportunities be provided for Voluntary and Community Sector groups to apply for contracts to deliver services on behalf of the Council and support be provided to groups applying for these contracts. (Members are aware that any support that is provided for this purpose would need to be delivered in line with the Council's procurement rules).
- Additional funding be provided to support on-going services (rather than just for specific projects).
- To concentrate on providing funding to groups that could provide tangible evidence that the services they have provided have resulted in qualitative and quantitative outcomes that have benefited the local community.
- To consult with the local community to find out what projects and services delivered by Voluntary and Community Sector organisations would benefit them. (The group is aware that the current grants programme is linked to the Council's strategic purposes which were developed following consultation with the public. To ensure that Voluntary and Community Sector groups are aware of this situation Members would suggest that this point may need to be emphasised in future rounds of the Council's grants programme).
- Council Officers and elected Members were urged to visit Voluntary and Community Sector groups to observe the services they provide (further information in relation to this point is provided below under Recommendation Two).
- Improved communications from various Council departments when contacted by Voluntary and Community Sector organisations was requested. In particular timely responses and provision of alternative contact details in the absence of lead Officers was considered to be important.
- Opportunities should be provided (or supported) to enable groups to develop new technologies that would help groups to deliver services to younger people who are more likely to be familiar with social media and other forms of online communications.

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- Continuing support with applications for concessionary rent was requested. (The group is aware that this type of support would need to be assessed fairly and in line with the Council's Concessionary Rents Policy).

Potential Changes to the Process

Based on the feedback that the group received from both Officers, other Councillors and representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector Members concluded that there were a number of improvements that could be made to the Council's grants programme.

a) Timescales:

The Task Group exercise coincided with a round of the grants programme dedicated to the larger grants. The Grants Panel's recommendations at the end of this process were reported to the Executive Committee on 11th March 2014. These timescales largely mirrored the dates on which the findings of the Grants Panel had been considered in previous years (for example a decision was taken on this subject by the Executive Committee on 12th March 2013). As part of the standard process the Grants Officer advises both groups that have been awarded funding and those groups that have not been successful of the outcome of the process.

However, during the course of the review representatives of the sector approached some members of the group to express concerns about the timing of the decisions about the grants process. In particular, some representatives of the sector raised concerns that due to the fact that decisions were made late in the financial year it could be difficult for Voluntary and Community Sector groups to plan their work for the following financial year effectively as they were often uncertain until early March as to whether they would be receiving any funding.

The group concluded that in this context there was a clear need for the timescales applied to the Council's grants process to be reviewed. Whilst they accept that this may not now be possible for the grants process this financial year, as dates will have already been set for meetings of the Grants Panel, the group would contend that the timeframes could be reviewed for following years.

b) Geographical Service Remit

As part of the review the group considered the geographical areas in which Voluntary and Community Sector groups delivered services to customers. Members recognised that in many cases the need for services would cross geographical boundaries and that groups might therefore deliver services to meet the needs of customers living outside Redditch Borough. Based on the historic data that had been provided for the consideration of the Task Group

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Members found that funding had been awarded in the past to some groups that delivered services in other parts of the county and / or which operated from bases outside the Borough.

Officers have reported that the scoring matrix does allow Members to a degree to ensure that appropriate groups are awarded funding. They indicated that they would be happy to map the spread of applications and Members would urge Officers to undertake this task as soon as possible to ensure that wherever possible an emphasis is placed on awarding funding to groups that deliver services to residents living in the Borough. Indeed, it is for this reason that the group is suggesting that the geographical remit of a group or the project for which they are applying for funding should be taken into account as part of the Grants Panel's scoring process to ensure that the needs of Redditch residents are prioritised.

c) Application Form Template

As part of the scrutiny exercise Members viewed a blank copy of the Council's current grants application form. A small number of groups consulted by Members suggested that completing these application forms could be time consuming due to their length. In some cases Members were advised that some groups, particularly smaller community groups, were struggling to complete the application forms. The group also compared the Council's application form to forms used by Wychavon District Council and agreed that the version used by Redditch Borough Council was more complicated.

Members are aware that every effort is made by Officers to provide support and advice to groups when completing applications for grants. This has included specific workshop sessions in previous years. However the group felt that in order to encourage smaller groups to apply for funding it would be useful for Officers to review the template for the application forms for both the larger project grants and the Sustainable Communities Grants.

d) Action Points

During the review Members learned that formal minutes were not taken consistently during meetings of the Grants Panel. The group were concerned that from an audit perspective this was not appropriate. Whilst meetings of the Grants Panel are held in private these minutes would help to demonstrate to an auditor that decisions had been taken in line with the Constitution and procedural rules. The group was also concerned about the need to ensure that meetings of the panel are as transparent as possible and enable the Council's Grants Process to comply with the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 (please refer to recommendation 3 below). Furthermore,

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Members were advised that minute taking at Grant Panel meetings was considered to be best practice with, for example, minutes being taken at Wychavon District Council.

Formal minutes are particularly useful to ensure that a record is maintained of all declarations of interest made by both Councillors and Officers in relation to applications that have been received. A record of these declarations and of the fact that Members were absent from the meeting during discussion of any applications in which they have an interest would help to reassure Voluntary and Community Sector groups that decisions have not been influenced by personal interests. It would also protect both Members and Officers against any accusations of impropriety in the decision making process. In the interests of transparency the group feels that these declarations should be reiterated in the report that is presented for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed some concerns about an initial proposal from the group for formal minutes to be taken at meetings of the Grants Panel. Members suggested that formal minutes might not be appropriate due to the nature of the information discussed during Grants Panel meetings. However, Action Points, highlighting key actions arising from the meeting, could be recorded relatively easily and would ensure that the process is transparent and accountable.

Recommendation 2	The following actions should be taken in respect of the members of the Grants Panel: a) formal training should be provided to Members of the Grants Panel; b) wherever possible members of the Grants Panel should visit Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that have been awarded larger project grants as part of the monitoring process. These visits should take place before the second instalment of funding is provided to the organisations.
Financial Implications	There will be a minimal cost associated with Members visiting organisations however it is anticipated this will be met from existing budgets.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

The group also considered the role of members of the Grants Panel during the course of the review and concluded that a number of changes could be made to enhance their position.

Member Training

At an early stage Members discussed the training that was provided to members of the Grants Panel. Indeed, the group was advised that informal "on-the-job" training was provided to members of the panel prior to their first meeting in the grants programme for that year. However, towards the end of the review Members were advised that formal training is provided to Members of the Grants Panel. The group has learned that this training has never formed part of the Council's formal Member Development programme nor has a central record of this training been maintained for Members' records in line with the corporate approach to Member Development training.

Members had some concerns about the conflicting evidence that had been provided on this subject. The Task Group concurred that formal training was necessary due to the significant amount of funding that the panel is awarding to Voluntary and Community Sector groups. Members feel that formal training should help to inspire confidence within the local community that Council sources of funding are being utilised appropriately. If formal training is already taking place Members are suggesting that this should be recorded in line with all other training for elected Councillors as part of the Council's official Member Development programme.

Monitoring Process

There is an established monitoring process for the Council's grants programme. Groups in receipt of project grants are required to complete a monitoring form by a set deadline which must be returned to the Council's Grants Officer. The Grants Officer also visits groups in receipt of funding throughout the length of the project to ensure that work remains on target and any problems can be identified at an early stage. In cases where concerns are identified the second installment of project funding can be withheld and support provided to that group if required to resolve those problems.

The group was advised during the review that members of the Grants Panel were encouraged to visit Voluntary and Community Sector organisations throughout the year in order to gain a clearer understanding of the services they provide. Unfortunately, based on the evidence gathered by the group it appeared that this was not occurring frequently. Indeed, one of the groups that responded to the Task Group's survey, which Members were aware had been in receipt of funding in previous years, suggested that visits should occur indicating that this was not happening consistently:

> "*Council Officers and Councillors should visit the voluntary sector organisations to see first-hand the success of the services provided by them to the community, possibly as part of the bidding process*".

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Members of the Task Group concluded that visits would be particularly useful as part of the monitoring process. This would provide Members with an opportunity to observe how funding that they had allocated had been used and the impact that this is having in the community.

The group recognises that some Members will struggle to visit Voluntary and Community Sector groups during the day due to work commitments. However, it may be possible to arrange for Members to visit some groups outside of working hours, as some Voluntary and Community Sector groups deliver services at irregular hours in order to meet the needs of their customers. Members therefore do not feel that this should be provided as a reason for members of the Grants Panel not to visit groups in receipt of funding.

Recommendation 3	**The implications of the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 should be considered by Officers to ensure that the Council's grants process is amended as and when required. Officers should ensure that any changes that are made to the process in response to these requirements take account of local needs.**
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications as a result of this recommendation.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

The *Local Government Transparency Code 2014* was published in May. The code has been developed in order "*…to meet the Government's desire to place more power into citizens' hands to increase democratic accountability and make it easier for local people to contribute to the local decision making process and help shape public services.*" Underpinning the code is the basic principle that data held by local authorities should be made available to local people unless the information should legitimately remain confidential in line with previous legislation.

The code makes specific reference to local authority grants programmes. Members agreed that the following key points with implications for Council grants programmes should be highlighted in this report:

• Local authorities are required to publish details of individual items of expenditure that exceed £500 including grant payments.
• Grants to Voluntary, Community and social enterprise organisations must be published on an annual basis. However, the code's authors go further and recommend that local authorities consider publishing this information on a

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- monthly basis in cases where payments are made more frequently than on an annual basis.
- It is also recommended in the code that local authorities could do more than the minimum requirement to publish the required information. This could include publishing details "*…disaggregated by voluntary and community sector category (e.g. whether it is registered with Companies House, charity or charitable incorporated organisation, community interest company, industrial and provident society, housing association etc.)*"
- For each grant as a minimum the following details must be provided:
  - The date the grant was awarded.
  - The length of time the grant will be provided to cover.
  - The local authority department that awarded the grant.
  - The recipient of the grant.
  - the recipient's registration number.
  - A summary of the purpose of the expenditure, and
  - The amount of funding provided.
- Specific details must also be provided about "*…any contract, commissioned activity, purchase order, framework agreement and any other legally enforceable agreement with a value that exceeds £5,000*". The Task Group recognises that this could include details relating to any Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that enter into such agreements with the Council.

The Task Group is aware that the Council already publishes a significant amount of information about the groups in receipt of funding through the Council's grants programme. There are specific web pages on the Council's website that are dedicated to the grants process which lists the groups that received funding the previous year. Unfortunately, in early July 2014 Members were concerned to find that due to an IT error information about the list of organisations in receipt of grant funding was no longer accessible from the Council's website. Instead, the following message appeared when attempts were made to access this web page: "This page is no longer available." Whilst this problem had been rectified by the time that the group's report was published Members agreed that this situation should be highlighted as they were aware that if this problem recurs in future the Council could be in breach of the code.

With this in mind the group feels it is important that relevant Officers assess the requirements outlined in this code to ensure that the grants process is conforming with legal requirements. In cases where difficulties arise due to ICT technical problems attempts should be made to direct interested persons to alternative locations where the information could be obtained. For example, a certain amount of information will have been published in the report regarding the grants programme that was presented to the Executive Committee in March 2014 which has been published on the Committee pages of the website. Wherever possible, however, the group would contend that full details required under the code should be published on dedicated web pages.

CHAPTER 2: WORKING DIFFERENTLY TOGETHER

Recommendation 4	**The Council should employ an apprentice to support the work of the Grants Officer. Consideration should be given to sharing this apprentice with a Voluntary and Community Sector organisation.**
Financial Implications	The Council would need to invest in employing an apprentice to support the Grants Officer.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

During the course of the review the Task Group considered the support available to the Voluntary and Community Sector in terms of Officer support. Currently the Grants Officer provides the majority of support to the sector, both in terms of acting as a lead point of contact and in facilitating the Council's grants programme.

The group recognises that there will be occasions when the Grants Officer may be absent from work, for example whilst on annual leave. Members have concluded that due to the significant role that Voluntary and Community Sector organisations have in the local community it is important for another Officer to be available for groups to contact in the Grants Officer's absence. The group feels that an apprentice could fill this role effectively.

In recent years the Council has invested in employing more apprentices in a range of service areas, though no apprentices are currently employed to support the grants process. The group recognises that employment of an apprentice would require additional financial expenditure which could be difficult in a time of austerity. However, when Members discussed the potential for an apprentice to support the grants process with senior Officers at the Council they responded positively to the group's suggestion.

Members were keen to suggest that the potential for this apprentice to be shared with a Voluntary or Community Sector organisation should be explored further. There could be a number of benefits to sharing this apprentice with a Voluntary and Community Sector Organsiation:

• The apprentice would gain broader work experience in both local government and the Voluntary and Community Sector. This would also help the apprentice to explore a potentially greater range of employment options when their apprenticeship has finished.
• The apprentice could develop useful transferable skills working in a different environment that could benefit Council services as well as Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

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- The apprentice could help to maintain positive relationships between the Council and Voluntary and Community Sector and to address any misunderstandings between the two as and when they arise.

Recommendation 5	The *Framework Agreement for the Provision of Debt and Budgeting Advice to be Delivered Within the Locality areas in Redditch* should continue to be supported by the Council for the foreseeable future.
Financial Implications **Legal Implications**	The framework currently covers a three year period. Funding has been secured for the first year. Additional funding will need to be negotiated to support the framework in the following two years. Whilst the group recognises that this recommendation has financial implications for the Council Members believe that this could potentially be offset by savings that could be made by the Council and partner organisations as a direct result of the provision of financial management and debt advice. (e.g. through a potential reduction in enforcement and court action). There are no legal implications.

In this period of financial austerity many local residents are increasingly seeking support to manage their finances. The potential for the Council to support residents who are struggling to manage their finances has been recognised and is reflected in two of the Council's strategic purposes: "help me to be financially independent" and "help me live my life independently". The group is aware that local demand for support with managing finances and for debt advice may further increase following the introduction of Universal Credit.

Members learned during the review that in previous years a number of grants have been provided by public agencies to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to deliver financial management and debt advice. In 2013/14 this included grants provided by the Council as part of the Grants process under the Independent Living theme as well as grants provided to organisations as part of the Area of Highest Needs project in Winyates. There are also a number of Voluntary and Community Sector organsations that specialise in providing this advice to customers in an independent and confidential manner.

However, during the course of the review concerns were brought to the attention of the group regarding the impact of this approach to funding financial management and debt advice. In particular concerns were raised that because funding was allocated on an annual basis, with the decision on funding generally

being taken towards the end of a financial year, groups in receipt of this funding did not always feel assured that they would have the finances available to continue to provide the same level of support in the following financial year. As a consequence Council Officers were finding that sometimes organisations did not feel able to accept referrals in the first few months of the calendar year because they could not guarantee that they would be able to continue to provide support into the following financial year. This was despite the fact that vulnerable residents could find themselves in need of help managing their finances at any time of the year.

The group is aware that a *Framework Agreement for the Provision of Debt and Budgeting Advice to be Delivered within the Three Locality Areas within Redditch* has been produced to try to address these concerns. The aim of this framework is to enable the Council "…*to procure money advice, debt counseling and budgeting training to support teams working in the locality*…" The framework is separate from the Council's Grants Programme.

Members welcome this framework because they believe that it could help to address the needs of some of the most vulnerable people within society. However, they wish it to be noted that the Council should not become complacent over this subject and would urge the Executive Committee and senior Officers to continue to provide the financial support necessary to ensure that this advice remains available to residents for the foreseeable future.

Recommendation 6	**An informal working group of Council Officers should be formed to discuss and share knowledge about current joint working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. These informal meetings would also provide an opportunity for different teams to identify further opportunities to work with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and highlight any duplication of work.** **a) Dedicated space should be introduced on the Council's intranet to allow Officers working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and / or volunteers to share information.**
Financial Implications	There should be limited financial implications to this recommendation. Relevant Officers would need to spend a small amount of time meeting during the year, though the group is not envisaging that these meetings would be onerous or too time consuming. There is the potential that if opportunities to work together are identified as well as any potential risks of duplication

| | then these meetings could help the Council to achieve financial savings in the long-term.

Whilst some time would be required to add information to the Council's intranet the group is not anticipating that this task would be too onerous or costly. |
|---|---|
| **Legal Implications** | There may be a need for information sharing protocols to be put in place. |

During the course of the review it became clear that there were a number of Council Officers and teams who were working with the Voluntary and Community Sector. The group found that the following Council services had worked or were currently working with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector:

- The Grants Officer and the Grants Programme.
- The Community Safety team, worked with representatives of the sector on specific projects. In particular the team focused on working with groups that supported victims and witnesses of crime as well as groups that provide support to offenders, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending.
- The Leisure Services team worked with a consortium of Voluntary Sector groups as part of the Positive Activities programme (youth service provision).
- The Arts and Events team worked with various community groups to deliver the Holocaust Memorial Event and Armed Forces Day. Collaboration had also occurred in the past when organising and delivering Morton Staney Festival.
- The arts team worked closely with the Arts in Redditch Network.
- Various teams were working with the Big Lottery project in Church Hill.
- Housing Options worked with various groups, in particular to provide financial management and debt advice.
- The BRAVO volunteering scheme had been developed by Leisure Services to enhance the skills and employability of participants.
- The Council's Sports Development team worked closely with local community and amateur sports clubs
- There were working links between the Council and a number of community allotment societies.
- The Early Help team (formerly Sure Start) had worked with groups to provide counseling to families with young children.
- Environmental Services teams had worked with community conservation groups consisting of local volunteers.
- Environmental Services operatives had also worked with the Save the Alex Campaign to undertake bulb planting in certain parts of the Borough.
- Environmental Services operatives had worked within the community to promote recycling of furniture and used goods with local Voluntary and Community Sector groups as part of the bulky waste collection service.

- The Area of Highest Needs Project had involved Officers working directly with both Voluntary and Community Sector groups to deliver services that would meet the needs of the community.
- The Policy team had developed strong links with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector through the Redditch Community Forum.
- The Redditch Partnership had developed links with Voluntary and Community Sector groups appointed to the main partnership board as well as those groups which were involved in sub-groups. Representatives of the partnership were also involved with Worcestershire Voices.
- The civic team had developed links with the Voluntary and Community Sector through the attendance of the Mayor at events across the Borough at the invitation of local groups. The Mayor also provided direct financial support to groups by supporting particular nominated charities during his or her mayoral year.

It became clear as the review progressed that often Officers in one department were not aware of the work that staff in another service were doing with volunteers and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. The group agreed that this should be addressed because they felt there was a risk that otherwise duplication could arise whilst opportunities for Council services to work together with the Voluntary and Community Sector would potentially be missed.

The purpose of this recommendation is to encourage Officers to communicate more effectively with each other about the work they have been doing with the Voluntary and Community Sector and to address what the group found to be an existing lack of common knowledge within the Council about the extent to which Council services already interact with the sector. A number of informal working groups have previously been established at the Council focusing on subjects such as equalities. The group feels that relevant Officers should consider Officer capacity when determining how regularly these meetings should take place. However, due to the potential for new opportunities to be identified and duplication to be reduced during these meetings the group believes that use of Officer time at these meetings would be justifiable.

Members are also suggesting that greater use could be made of the Council's intranet by Officers to share information about their work with Voluntary and Community Sector groups. A dedicated section of the intranet could be created to enable Officers to share this information as well as to publicise the dates of forthcoming meetings of the Officers' group. Members recognise that it would take a small amount of time for Officers to upload this information though they are not anticipating that this task would be onerous.

CHAPTER 3 – VOLUNTEERING

The Contribution of Volunteers to Redditch Borough Council

During the course of the review Members learned about the valuable contribution that volunteers make to the delivery of Council services. The group was informed that volunteers assisted the following services (there is the possibility that the Council receives support from other volunteers that have not been brought to the attention of the Task Group):

- Redditch Palace Theatre.
- The Palace Youth Theatre.
- Forge Mill Needle Museum.
- Arts and Events.
- Sports Development (including volunteers registered as BRAVO volunteers).
- 'Friends of Parks' volunteer groups who assist with the management, maintenance and cleansing of the parks.
- Approximately 150 litter pickers, who are provided with a sack and litter picker and help to keep the Borough clean.
- There are also local groups who occasionally volunteer for a specific period of time to undertake litter picking duties in the local community. (For example local church groups).
- Volunteer groups assist with the management of local woodland areas.
- In line with the principles of the place intervention (in Environmental Services) staff are working more closely with local residents who take pride in their local environment and are willing to maintain areas of Council land in their neighbourhoods.

The Leisure Services team, which has particularly benefitted from the support of volunteers, was able to quantify the value of most of these voluntary hours to the Council in the period April – November 2013. (Unfortunately, the value of the contribution made to the parks service could not be confirmed). Officers have advised Members that during this period the monetary value of the voluntary hours across leisure services in this period was £126,362.60. At the time of writing figures were not available for the other services that benefitted from volunteering, however, the group concluded that the final figure for the whole of the financial year would be significantly higher.

In the current financial climate for local government Members feel that the value of volunteering to Council services as well as the local community cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the group concluded that the value of the contribution made by volunteers to the Council should be given proper recognition and promoted within this report.

Recommendation 7	The following actions should be taken in relation to the Staff Volunteering Policy: a) the policy should be refreshed and promoted; and b) a taster list of local volunteering opportunities should be advertised on the "Briefcase" section of the Council's intranet for the consideration of staff. In particular, consideration should be given to advertising volunteering opportunities that would help to address the Council's strategic purposes.
Financial Implications	Officer time would be required to review the Staff Volunteering Policy. However, the policy is already scheduled to be refreshed so this action would not add any extra workload for Officers. There would also be a small amount of time required to upload volunteering opportunities onto the Briefcase. However, the group is only suggesting that a "taster" sample of opportunities should be displayed on the intranet which should help to limit the workload.
Legal Implications	A disclaimer to protect the Council in respect of staff participating in volunteering activity is required. However, as the policy has been in place since 2011 the group is working on the basis that the Council has gained some practice in addressing this legal requirement.

Staff Volunteering Policy

During the investigation Members discovered that there was an opportunity available for staff to volunteer within the local community during working hours. The framework for this volunteering is outlined in the Council's Staff Volunteering Policy. The key requirements of this policy are:

- The Council can grant a maximum of 16 volunteering hours in a 12 month period. (For part-time workers this is granted on a pro-rata basis).
- The time used as volunteering hours must be agreed by the employee's line manager in advance with reasonable notice provided. Line managers are not obliged to approve the request for volunteering hours.
- The volunteering hours can be taken in a single block or over a period of time.

- The volunteering work should not lead to the potential for a conflict of interest to arise for that employee at work.
- Staff are urged to provide feedback once a volunteering experience has been completed for monitoring purposes.

The Council recognises that there are a number of benefits to be obtained from staff undertaking volunteering work. This includes:

- Helping the local community.
- Improving the local reputation of the Council.
- Building important relationships with local Voluntary and Community Sector representatives.
- Enhancing the skills of employees.
- Improving levels of recruitment and retention.
- Providing the Voluntary and Community Sector with access to skills and resources that they might not otherwise be able to afford.
- Volunteers having a chance to meet new people.
- Boosting the confidence of volunteers.
- Providing opportunities for staff to feel they are making a difference.

Unfortunately the group was disappointed to learn that only five employees had volunteered under the scheme since the policy was introduced in June 2011. Members were surprised to learn that this figure was so low particularly as they were advised that the feedback that had been provided by both the staff who had volunteered and their managers had been positive. In particular it had been reported that staff who had undertaken voluntary work had felt inspired and this had helped to boost their morale at work.

Staff Consultation:

To identify the reasons for this low uptake of volunteering opportunities under the policy the group produced a survey which was designed to enable Members to consult with staff about this subject. The survey was promoted on the Council's intranet and in the Oracle newsletter, a copy of which is sent to all staff on a monthly basis.

A total of 25 completed surveys were received. Whilst the group was disappointed in the low response rate Members did identify a number of key issues which they felt should be highlighted:

- 52% of the respondents (13/25) had been aware that the Council had a Staff Volunteering Policy. However, five of these respondents admitted that they were not familiar with the content of the policy and would not know how to arrange to volunteer during work time.
- A number of staff who had not previously been aware of the policy were interested to learn of its existence. In some cases this was reported in the employee's written response. However, some members of staff approached

the Chair of the Task Group and a Democratic Services Officer respectively to request further information about the policy after the survey had been issued.

- A significant number of staff who were not familiar with the policy were undertaking voluntary work in their own time. The types of volunteering that staff were engaged in varied widely from acting as a special constable, to volunteering for youth groups, acting as volunteer litter pickers and volunteering with the Palace Theatre.
- A number of staff who currently volunteer under the policy responded to the group's survey. Some of the roles they used their volunteer hours for were very similar to voluntary work undertaken by staff who were not familiar with the policy. For example, a number of respondents volunteered as school governors but only a small number had applied to volunteer in line with the Council's Staff Volunteering Policy.
- A range of reasons had been provided for not applying to volunteer. This included family and caring commitments, health restrictions and lack of time.
- There had been one respondent who had provided a negative assessment of the policy. In particular this respondent had suggested that more hours should be made available and that there was a risk that managers would only release staff to work on "pet projects". As all the other respondents had been largely positive about the policy (or had not been familiar with the policy) the group agreed that it was difficult to reach any conclusions about how representative this feedback was, though it was conceded that this respondent may have had a negative experience.

The group was concerned to find that some employees appeared to be anxious about volunteering because they were worried about the impact this might have on the service they provided and the impact that their absence might have on their colleagues. In particular Members were concerned about the following feedback that was received:

> "*(I have) too much work to do and there is no-one to cover for me if I am not in. My work just builds up and waits for me to come back in which makes it more stressful for me.*"

> "*Staff are under tremendous pressure to perform the day job and this will only get worse. This can and will restrict people from being able to volunteer and make managers reluctant to free staff up for volunteering as someone else will have to pick up the work.*"

The group agreed that it was unacceptable for any member of staff to feel stressed at work. Members would therefore urge senior managers to ensure that appropriate support is in place to make sure that workloads are manageable across the organisation and that staff continue to be made aware of the support networks that are already available. The group would also suggest that the positive feedback that has already been received from staff and managers who have volunteered in line with the scheme should be promoted in order to demonstrate to both staff and managers the potential benefits.

Refreshing and Promoting the Staff Volunteering Policy

Based on the overall feedback received to their survey the group concluded that there are many more members of staff who would be interested in taking advantage of this opportunity to volunteer in the local community in line with the Council's policy than are presently doing so. The group is therefore proposing that the policy should be refreshed and promoted to staff and managers.

It should be noted that within the policy it is stated that the terms of the scheme would be promoted using the following mechanisms:

• The intranet with appropriate links being provided to external web sites about volunteering.
• Notice Boards.
• Employee Induction.
• PDR's and Development.
• Cascaded through team talks, team briefings and one-to-ones.

The group recognises that some of these methods may have already been used. However, the lack of familiarity with this policy amongst staff would seem to suggest that further action to promote the policy would be useful.

Taster List of Volunteering Opportunities

The group feels that one of the ways to raise the profile of the Staff Volunteering Policy would be to promote specific local volunteering opportunities to staff. These opportunities could be promoted on the 'Briefcase' section of the staff intranet, which currently is used to list all job vacancies. Members recognise that the Council does not maintain a list of volunteering opportunities. For this reason the group would suggest that the Human Resources team, which updates the contents of the 'Briefcase', should liaise with a local Voluntary and Community Sector organisation that maintains a list of local volunteering opportunities that could be promoted to staff.

Members understand that staff can choose what area they wish to volunteer in and would not want to restrict this choice. The group are aware, however, that it would not be feasible to advertise every local volunteering opportunity on the intranet due to the time and resources that would be required to upload this information. For this reason Members are suggesting that a small taster list of volunteering opportunities should be advertised on the intranet. In order to meet the community's needs the group are suggesting that these taster sessions should be selected on the basis of their links to the Council's strategic purposes.

Recommendation 8	**A staff award should be created to recognise the voluntary work carried out by members of staff.**
Financial Implications	In previous years employees who have won a staff award have received a small payment in recognition of their achievement. If this is set to continue in future a similar payment would need to be offered to any member of staff who wins this award.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

The Council's Making a Difference Awards (for staff) are presented on an annual basis. The awards are open to anyone who is employed to provide a service for Redditch Borough Council, whether they are employed by Redditch directly or through shared service arrangements. All nominations - from colleagues, customers and Councillors - are considered by a panel of the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, and political group leaders.

The group feels that the value of volunteering work could also be promoted further if a staff award was to be introduced recognising the achievements of staff who have participated in voluntary work during the year. There are already a number of established award categories, though new categories are added from time to time. For example the Apprentice of the Year category was introduced in 2013/14.

This staff award, if it was to be introduced, would demonstrate the Council's commitment to the Staff Volunteering Policy and employees who volunteer. Members feel that it would also help to demonstrate to both staff and managers that requests to volunteer in line with the policy should be taken seriously. As written nominations would need to be submitted for the recipients of this award there would be a further opportunity to promote volunteering to staff during the awards ceremony as the submissions for category winners are read out during the awards ceremony.

CHAPTER 4 – MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Recommendation 9	The Council should work with local businesses and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to introduce a "Redditch Hour" on twitter and other social networks.
Financial Implications	There would not be any significant financial implications in relation to this recommendation for the Council.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

As part of the review Members considered current opportunities available for Voluntary and Community Sector groups to communicate and network with each other. Members are aware that there are local infrastructure groups such as the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network which can help to facilitate communications between groups and to provide networking opportunities. Furthermore, the Council's Grants Officer does help to signpost groups to other organisations within the community when opportunities arise.

Worcestershire Voices has also been established to work with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations of all sizes, to help those groups network within the county and to enable groups to work effectively in partnership within the Voluntary and Community Sector. Members welcomed the fact that Worcestershire Voices would be using its influence to make sure that the voice of the sector is heard in the county and recognised that the Worcestershire Voices twitter account could become a useful device for networking at the sub-regional level.

However, Members felt that further use could be made of social media, particularly at a local level, to market the work of local groups as well as to provide them with an opportunity to network. The group learned at an early stage that in some parts of the country Twitter and other social media platforms are being utilised at specific times to facilitate networking. For example, a "Worcester Hour" has been created on Twitter which provides Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, public sector organisations and private companies with an opportunity to network during a specific time in the city. Similar networking hours have been developed for smaller towns such as Droitwich Spa. Unfortunately, there is not currently a Redditch Hour on twitter and Members feel that this should be addressed to the benefit of the local community.

Officers consulted about this suggestion have been largely positive in their feedback and have suggested that there are a number of ways in which this

could be developed. Officers are suggesting that a Redditch Hour should be developed in conjunction with other local agencies, including local media representatives which have a larger following than the Council and more influence in the Borough on social media. Alternatively the Council could work with a local infrastructure organisation, such as BARN, or a consortium of local organisations and groups that might be interested in launching and using a Redditch Hour. Whilst the group have no preferences regarding the final arrangements for the co-ordination of a Redditch Hour on social media they believe that every effort should be made to involve representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the process.

The Council could provide invaluable support with the Redditch Hour. This could include promoting the launch of Redditch Hour, such as through the involvement of the Mayor in a civic capacity.   However, Officers have suggested that there could be a potential for conflicts of interest to arise if the Council was to run this Twitter feed and it is unlikely that the Council would have capacity to manage a Redditch Hour.

Recommendation 10	A Voluntary Sector Event should be held on a regular basis to help promote a) the work of local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to each other as well as potential customers; b) volunteering opportunities to local residents; and c) a prize giving awards ceremony should form part of this event. This event could potentially be aligned to existing events that are already take place.
Financial Implications	Financial investment would be required to organise and host this type of event. The level of financial investment required would depend on the scale of the event and regularity of these events. The costs associated with this recommendation would have to be clearly identified.
Legal Implications	There are no specific legal implications.

Members are acutely aware that there are some groups that do not have access to the internet. These groups, which may serve a variety of customers, could still benefit from opportunities to network and the group feels this could best be achieved during a local event dedicated to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. Members agree that this type of event would also provide groups

within the local community with an opportunity to promote their services to potential customers as well as to individuals who might be interested in volunteering to assist their organisation.

The suggestion that it would be useful to convene a Voluntary and Community Sector event was first raised at an early stage in the review. The group received some positive feedback regarding this suggestion, particularly from the Chair of the Grants Panel who commented that a local awards ceremony could also be organised to coincide with this event.

It has been brought to the attention of Members that a number of opportunities are already provided for Voluntary and Community Sector groups to network in the Borough. This includes bimonthly networking meetings organised by BARN and quarterly Community Workers' Group meetings. BARN also already promotes a range of volunteering opportunities in the Borough.

Members feel that attempts could be made to work with these existing groups to develop a high profile event dedicated to the Voluntary and Community Sector. The Council could assist with this process by providing a venue and helping to market the event.

CONCLUSION

The Voluntary and Community Sector Task Group, despite being a small group of Councillors, have completed a lengthy and detailed review.   Their investigations have built on the findings of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group, which they concluded had had a positive impact on the Council's grants programme.

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations of all sizes have a history of providing essential services to some of the most vulnerable residents living in the local community. The value of these services, particularly during a period of financial austerity, should not be underestimated and the Council should continue to do all it can to support the sector for the foreseeable future.

The group's recommendations are designed to make improvements that will benefit local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. Members also hope that their proposals, once implemented, will have a positive impact on the Council's working relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector. The group would therefore urge the Executive Committee to approve their recommendations.

Scrutiny Proposal Form

(This form should be completed by sponsoring Member(s), Officers and / or members of the public when proposing an item for Scrutiny).

Note: The matters detailed below have not yet received any detailed consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserves the right to reject suggestions for scrutiny that fall outside the Borough Council's remit.

Proposer's name and designation	Councillor Pat Witherspoon	Date of referral	13/08/13
Proposed topic title	Voluntary Sector Task Group		
Link to national, regional and local priorities and targets	Redditch Borough Council Strategic Purposes: • help me run a successful business; and • help me be financially independent.		
Background to the issue	Redditch Borough Council, like many public sector organisations, provides support to voluntary sector organisations that deliver services to local residents. This support can take a variety of forms including financial support, material support and advice. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee previously reviewed the Council's third sector funding policy in 2009. The intention of this review would not be to duplicate this work. However, there have been many changes at both the local and national level since this review was completed. There remains room to adapt and improve the support that the Council and relevant partner organisations provide to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. A review would help to ensure that the Council's process remains transparent whilst at the same time meets the changing needs of local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. The Council has appointed a Grants Panel to award grants to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. In order to receive funding organisations must submit an application to the Council		

	demonstrating how the application fits with the Council's funding criteria. The Panel also monitors implementation of projects for which funding has been awarded and can withhold funding instalments in cases where specific funding criteria have not been met. The Grants Panel will start to review applications for grants for the 2014/15 round of funding in September 2013. The work of the Panel is organised in accordance with timeframes for the grants process which are set in advance. Any findings from this review could not be implemented mid-year but instead would need to be applied to the 2015/16 funding round. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is advised to appoint a maximum of five Members to each Task Group in line with best practice. Members of the Council's Grants Panel would be advised not to participate in this exercise due to the potential for a conflict of interest to arise during the review.
Key Objectives Please keep to SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)	1) To review the Council's grants programme and the work of the Grants Panel. This could involve: • Interviewing the Council's Voluntary Sector Grants' Co-ordinator. • Interviewing the relevant Portfolio Holder (for Community Leadership and Partnership). 2) To assess the support provided by other departments at Redditch Borough Council to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. This could involve: • Interviewing the relevant Portfolio Holder (for Community Leadership and Partnership). • Interviewing representatives of the Council's Leisure and Cultural Services Team. • Interviewing representatives of the Council's Environmental Services Team. 3) To receive an overview of the Council's Concessionary Rents process and the implications of this process for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

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This could involve:
- Interviewing the Council's Voluntary Sector Grants' Co-ordinator.

4) To consult with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector about support they receive from the public sector.

This could involve:
- Circulating a survey to all Voluntary Sector organisations based in the Borough.
- Interviewing the Voluntary and Community representative appointed to the Redditch Local Strategic Partnership.
- Consulting with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

5) To investigate and clarify the additional support that Voluntary and Community Sector organisations require from Redditch Borough Council and partner organisations.

This could involve:
- Reviewing survey feedback received from Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
- Interviewing the relevant Portfolio Holder (for Community Leadership and Partnership).
- Consulting with the Voluntary and Community Sector representative appointed to the Redditch Local Strategic Partnership.
- Consulting with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

6) To identify actions that could be taken to improve
   a) internal communications about the support Council departments provide to the Voluntary and Community Sector; and
   b) the Council's approach to communicating with representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

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<td>How long do you think is needed to complete this exercise? (Where possible please estimate the number of weeks, months and</td>
<td>This review should take eight months to complete. If the Task Group was launched in September 2013 it would need to be completed by the 1st April 2014.</td>
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meetings required)	

Please return this form to: Jess Bayley or Amanda Scarce, Democratic Services Officers, Redditch Borough Council, Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH
Email: jess.bayley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk /
a.scarce@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

APPENDIX 2
Witnesses

The Voluntary and Community Sector Task Group would like to thank the following people for providing evidence during the course of the review:

Helen Broughton (Redditch Partnership Manager)
Councillor David Bush (Chair of the Grants Panel)
Ray Cooke (Leisure Services Manager)
Clare Flanagan (Principal Solicitor)
John Godwin (Head of Leisure and Cultural Services)
Joanne Hall (Parks and Green Space Development and Allotments Assistant)
Donna Hancox (Grants Officer)
Sue Hanley (Deputy Chief Executive)
Anne-Marie Harley (Communications Manager)
Councillor Bill Hartnett (Portfolio Holder for Leadership and Partnership – including the Voluntary Sector and Health).
Elise Hopkins (Housing Options Manager)
Bev Houghton (Community Safety Manager)
Michael Hunter (Chairman, Worcestershire Voices)
Lee McKenzie (Sandycroft Well-being Centre)
Paul McLaughlin (Estates Team Manager)
Jayne Pickering (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources)
Guy Revans (Head of Environmental Services)
David Riley (Revenue Services Manager)
Ann Sowton (Bromsgrove and Redditch Network – BARN)
Becky Talbot (Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager)
Susan Tasker (PA to the Chief Executive and Office Services Manager)
Christopher Thomas (Neighbourhood Development Assistant)
Amanda De Warr (Head of Customer Access and Financial Support)
Dave Wheeler (Leisure Services Manager)
Liz Williams (Neighbourhood Development Manager)
Judith Willis (Acting Head of Community Services)
The 25 members of staff who responded to the group's staff volunteering survey.

Members would also like to thank the following Voluntary and Community Sector Groups for submitting evidence during the review:

Inspire Community Training and Development (CIC) Ltd
NewStarts
North Worcestershire Basement Project
Redditch and Bromsgrove CAMRA
Redditch Citizens Advice Bureau
Redditch Talking Newspaper
RYCE
Where Next Association
Worcestershire YMCA

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APPENDIX 3
Timeline of Activities

Date	Task Group Activity
1st October 2013	Scoping discussion and interview with the Grants Officer
15th October	Discussion of approach to the review and identification of expert witnesses.
1st November	Consideration of Third Sector Task and Finish Group's report and outcomes, and reviewing relevant pages on the Council's website and the Concessionary Rents Policy.
22nd November	Interview with the Deputy Chief Executive and Acting Head of Community Services.
25th November	Interview with Councillor Bush, Chair of the Grants Panel.
5th December	Interviews with the Head of Environmental Services, the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services and the Redditch Partnership Manager.
10th December	Consideration of the Council's Staff Volunteering Policy and reviewing the Grants Programme in place at Wychavon District Council.
19th December	Interview with the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support, the Revenue Services Manager, the Estates Team Manager and the Grants Officer.
10th January 2014	Interview with the Neighbourhood Development Manager and visit to The Space and Winyates Hub.
24th January	Interview with the Housing Options Manager.
3rd February	Considering the work of volunteers for the Council, support for allotments and the links between the Mayor and the Voluntary Sector.

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7th March	Interview with Ms Ann Sowton, Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
14th March	Interview with Mr Michael Hunter, Worcestershire Voices.
18th March	Interview with Ms Lee McKenzie, Sandycroft Well-being Centre.
28th March	Consideration of Progress with the review and next steps.
4th April	Reviewing grants statistics and consideration of feedback received in writing from the Leader of the Council.
1st May	Considering feedback from staff regarding the Council's Staff Volunteering Policy.
9th June	Consideration of the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 and agreeing an initial draft of recommendations. The co-option of former Councillor Roger Hill was also confirmed at this meeting.
17th June	Finalisation of the group's recommendations.
8th July	Consideration of feedback from Officers about the draft list of recommendations and finalisation of the group's report.

Total: 20 meetings.

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APPENDIX 4
Declarations of interest

Councillor Brazier: Councillor Brazier declared an other disclosable interest throughout the review as an employee of the British Heart Foundation.

Councillor Witherspoon: At every meeting of the group Councillor Witherspoon declared an other disclosable interest as a member of the Redditch Older Peoples' Forum and Age UK. She also declared that her husband, Councillor J Witherspoon, was a member of the Board for the local branch of the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB).