

additional papers 1



Executive Committee

Tue 14 Jan
2020
6.30 pm

Committee Room Two
Town Hall
Redditch

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Executive

Committee

Tuesday, 14th January, 2020

6.30 pm

Committee Room 2 - Town Hall
Redditch

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:	Matthew Dormer (Chair)	Julian Grubb Bill Hartnett
	David Thain (Vice- Chair)	Mike Rouse Craig Warhurst
	Greg Chance	
	Brandon Clayton	

5. Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector 2020/21 (Pages 1 - 38)

This report will be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee due to take place on Thursday 9th January 2020. Any recommendations arising from this meeting will be reported for Members' consideration in an additional papers pack for this meeting.

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REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**14th January 2019**SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR 2020 / 21**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Mike Rouse, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Councillor David Thain, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis, Head of Community and Housing Services
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report details options to change some of the support which the Council provides to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Both the Concessionary Rents Scheme and the VCS Grants Pot (including the Councillor Community Grants Scheme) have been reviewed and details of options for future delivery of these schemes and financial changes are included in this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is requested to RECOMMEND:

- 1) which option set out in Appendix 1 it recommends for the next 3 years to financially support the VCS and to advise Officers of resulting savings to build in to the medium term financial plan 20/21;

And to RESOLVE:

- 2) that an officer panel to be established to deal with applications for any grant awarding activity to include allocation of Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) funding, the Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant and general VCS Grant funding; and
- 3) that delegated authority be given to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, to agree a new VCS Grants Policy in accordance with the preferred option.

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3. KEY ISSUES**Financial Implications**

- 3.1 A table of six options can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. The opportunities and risks of each are set out along with the financial implications/savings for each option.

Background

- 3.2 The VCS Grants Programme is reviewed each year with a view to setting the budget for the programme and to detail the means of distributing funding to the VCS. For 2019/20 the programme budget was set at £220k. This included £75k for the Financial Advice and Problem Solving contract and £145k for the VCS Grants pot generally.
- 3.3 It was agreed that for 2019-20, a new way of distributing the VCS Grants Pot would be utilised. The Council moved away from requiring VCS groups to apply using an application form and decisions made using a Members Grants Panel. Instead the Council introduced the Councillor Community Grant Scheme (CCGS) where each of the 29 Councillors was allocated £5k to fund VCS groups in their local ward area or borough wide. The Executive Committee resolved to undertake a review of the scheme during the first year of its implementation.
- 3.4 In 2017, the Council decided to change the decision making process for allocating funding for a financial advice and problem solving service from a grant to a contract. Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch were successful in the competitive tender process and were awarded the contract to deliver this service from April 2017 to March 2020. The contract is currently worth £75k per annum.
- 3.5 Further support provided by the Council to the VCS goes in helping to identify which VCS groups receive funding through the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Recycling of Metal Recovered from Cremation Scheme. The national scheme provides that this funding is ring fenced to local bereavement charities. Local Authorities are able to send (with permission of the families) metal parts recovered after cremation for recycling for money which is then gifted back to the Local Authority to be redistributed to the local VCS. It was agreed last year that the Grants Panel should be making any decisions about this funding. The average annual funding is approximately £21k.

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- 3.6 In addition to this support, the Council also provides a Concessionary Rent scheme which enables any VCS group renting a Council owned commercial property to receive a discount on their rent. Most groups that take advantage of this scheme receive 70% discount on their rent. Historically, VCS groups have had to apply for the discount using an application form. This has been considered by the Grants Panel and a recommendation made for whether a discount could be applied and at what level (25%, 45% or 70%).
- 3.7 Currently, there are 9 organisations that receive a discount across 13 council properties. Some of these groups do sub-let to other VCS groups which could also be affected by any changes made to the scheme.
- 3.8 The Council has historically set aside a budget for the Concessionary Rent scheme of £63k per annum. The total cost of the scheme is £117k (this includes the full market rent of all the 13 properties affected). VCS organisations in the scheme all currently pay only 30% of the full market rent (which for all properties totals approximately £35k) with the Council having to budget for the remaining £82k). This therefore means that the Council are over budget by £19k.
- 3.9 In July 2019, the Council was issued by its auditors with a Section 24 notice which set out serious concerns about the Council's ability to balance its budget. As a consequence of this, the Council was required to review all of its budgets to see what significant savings could be made. It was felt necessary that an ongoing review of funding for the Concessionary Rent scheme be brought forward as a priority and alongside the annual review of the VCS Grants Programme. The two schemes provide support to VCS organisations totalling approximately £300k (£283 budgeted), as set out below:

Concessionary Rents	£63k (actual spend £82,000)
Community Councillor Grants Scheme	£145,000
Financial Advice and Problem Solving Contact	£75,000

Legal Implications

- 3.10 The Council needs to continue to ensure that it has a transparent and fair grants scheme, ensuring that we comply with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code
- 3.11 Whilst grant funding and concessions to the VCS are not statutory function, under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to incur expenditure which in its opinion is in the

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interest of and will bring direct benefit to its area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants. The direct benefit accruing must also be commensurate with the expenditure to be incurred.

- 3.12 There is a further power to make grants to voluntary organisations providing recreational facilities under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. Depending on the option within this report that is approved, a new VCS Grants Policy will be required.
- 3.13 Local Authorities must comply with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code and Best Value duties.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.14 Consultation has been undertaken as part of this review with both those VCS organisations that receive a concessionary rent and those organisations that can and have benefitted from the VCS Grants Programme in the past and present. The consultation was undertaken to seek the view, options and ideas of the VCS on how any reduced Council funding could best be allocated equitably and transparently to organisations. A consultation event was held on 26th November for all groups to attend, a meeting was held with VCS organisations receiving a concessionary rent on 10th December and a survey replicating the questions at the event on 26th November was circulated to the VCS through the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN) distribution lists.
- 3.15 The consultation was on the short term provision of support to the VCS, with a view to establishing a longer term process in the future and as detailed in paragraph 3.23 of this report.
- 3.16 Appendix 2 details the responses to the consultation from the event, the survey and the meeting with the concessionary rent holders. Approximately 35 people attended the event representing around 30 organisations. There were only 4 individual responses to the questionnaire. Some of the key points made include:
- some of the VCS stated that the consultation was not a proper consultation - the sector was not being consulted on the amount of funding available to them and the cut being made;
 - VCS groups felt that Councillors did not understand what they do, there was a feeling that the social value and capital provided by VCS organisations was not been taken into consideration in the decision making process;
 - some VCS groups felt that the Council was not taking into account the added value and additional funding the sector brings into the

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town. They quoted the Charity Commission who state that for every £1 Invested in the VCS will bring in a further £10 in social value;

- groups would prefer funding made available by the Council to be for core costs including rent, it was felt that rent is very difficult to find other sources of funding for;
- there was a view put forward by some that maintaining the concessionary rent scheme was the most important support the Council could provide to the VCS;
- the majority of participants felt that the larger amount of any funding should be available for core costs with a smaller amount available for small grants;
- the majority of participants agreed that a cap on how much groups could apply for should be in place and that it should be £5k;
- there was a request by some for flexibility in allocating funding rather than strict set pots of funding to bid into;
- the sector expressed a clear preference for an application process as opposed to the current Community Councillor Grant Scheme;
- there was a request that any application process should be straightforward with a simple form to complete;
- funding should be generally allocated in time for the start of the financial year;
- there was consensus that the Council's Strategic Purposes provided the framework for organisations to bid into;
- some participants felt that funding should be allocated to helping other less established VCS groups to sustain themselves and general sector capacity building;
- it was also suggested that the funding might help to bring the sector together and co-ordinate consortium bids;
- there was a suggestion that funding should be utilised to help the sector demonstrate need for the activities and services they provide; and
- that most participants were supportive of the role of the VCS Grants Coordinator and felt that the role could help to build capacity in the sector.

3.17 Additionally, there was a meeting held on 10th December between officers and representatives of organisations who currently receive a concessionary rent for the Council owned buildings they rented. Key points made by the Group included:

- if the Council removed the concessionary rent scheme some organisations would not be able to pay for their rent and would therefore close;
- the Council were cutting from the VCS twice (both concessionary rent scheme and the main VCS Grants pot);

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- the costs to the Council of dealing with empty units would be far greater than if the Council continued to subsidise the current groups renting them;
 - the Council was at risk of being financially worse off if the VCS withdrew from the units and they were then to remain vacant;
 - the Council needed to be clear about the level of rent that could be charged for these units given that many of them were and still are in poor condition;
 - the Council sets the value at market rate but it was felt the commercial value of the units is likely to be less than that;
 - it was questioned if the market value of units in Matchborough and Winyates could be made when they were potentially going to be knocked down as part of the District Centre redevelopment plans;
 - groups had invested a lot of money in maintaining and improving the units, one organisation quoted £18,000;
 - each unit and VCS organisation should be considered individually taking into consideration all factors about the unit they rent and the services they provide and impact on the community; and
 - the Council could develop a concessionary rents scheme which looks at what units were lettable and put these VCS organisations inhabiting those units onto a meanwhile lease.
- 3.18 Written representation from the concessionary rent holders themselves has also been made which reflects the points made in the meeting with them on 10th December 2019 as set out above.
- 3.19 Property Services Officers would advise that many of these comments at 3.17 relate to the Council's property functions, as part of its overall ownership and management of its commercial property portfolio. Whilst the comments made as to how the Council might fulfil these functions are noted, they cannot determine how the Council will manage its property portfolio. Details of potential void costs are set out in section 4.2 and reference to property related risks are contained within Appendix 1.
- 3.20 If the wider VCS pot was to be maintained in some form, the consultation exercise strongly showed that VCS Groups were less supportive for the Councillor Community Grants Scheme (CCGS) model to be utilised. Groups had experienced difficulties in securing funding through this approach, some saying the fact that it was often difficult to know how long it would take to get their funding once they had approached their Councillor and also that communication could be difficult at times. The one element that the VCS did like about the CCGS scheme was the simplicity of the application form which they would like to keep in any scheme going forward. From an Officer perspective, the CCGS scheme did require a large amount of

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administration and a large percentage of the VCS Grants Co-ordinator's time was taken up by co-ordinating communication about applications between VCS groups and the Councillors and keeping records of what funding had been allocated.

- 3.21 In line with the consultation, Officers are minded to establish any new process and policy for the distribution of funding made available through a wider VCS Grants Pot, one which invites applications for funding from the VCS which align with the Council's Strategic Purposes. This will be very similar to methods used in previous years as part of the VCS Grants Programme and is likely to be the least disruptive way of implementing any VCS Grant Pot programme for the next 3 years.
- 3.22 As a general cut is being applied to the wider VCS Grants pot, it is also recommended that the budget for the Financial and Problem Solving Advice service is also subject to a reduction in funding. The recommendation is to save £25k from this pot and reduce the funding to £50k per annum. Officers have made available to Members the monitoring reports submitted over the lifetime of the contract which sets out the outcomes achieved to this point. It is also recommended in this report that in line with the recommendation of support to be guaranteed to the VCS generally for three years, that funding be given to whichever organisation is successful in delivering the Financial and Problem Solving Advice service in the future for 3 years also.
- 3.23 This report proposes options for a 3 year short term proposal to support the VCS at the end of which it migrates to a longer term sustainable scheme. Such a scheme would be developed in consultation with and engagement with the VCS, private businesses and wider public services. One possibility could be the establishment of a Redditch Community Foundation.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.24 A general Equalities Impact Assessment has been conducted for the proposed changes and cuts to grant funding which sets out any implications for Equality Groups from these proposals. This is attached at Appendix 3. The Assessment will be continuously reviewed once the preferred option has been determined and an action plan developed accordingly.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Risks for each of the options are set out in Appendix 1. In terms of the Concessionary Rent Scheme the current level is not commensurate with the budget which has been set for the scheme.

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- 4.2 A number of the options propose either the removal of the scheme altogether or removal of the scheme over a transition period. These proposals do pose the risk to groups that currently hold a concessionary rent not being able to afford an increase in the rent and folding altogether or moving out of the premises. It is therefore prudent for the Council to examine the risk of these properties becoming void as a result of these proposals. There clearly would be additional costs such as utility charges, void inspections costs, and business rates that the Council would need to find if properties were left empty. The main void costs to the Council if all 13 units were empty per annum are as follows:

Total Full Market Value of the Units - £117,160

Business Rates Payable (after 3 months of the properties being vacant) - £57,523

Utility Standing Charges Payable - £3120

Void Inspections Costs Payable (estimated) - £2925

Total - £180,728 per annum

There may be other costs not included in this calculation such as insurance and maintenance costs.

- 4.3 With the proposed reduction of funding available for the Financial Advice and Problem Solving service there is a risk that any organisation in a position to apply for the funding to deliver the service may not be able to deliver what is required with the funding available. This could result in no applications submitted for this funding or a service being provided which does not have the breadth and scope to meet demand.
- 4.4 By reducing the amount available through the wider VCS Grants pot, the Council will not be able to fund the breadth and diversity of projects it currently funds. However, Members have decided to retain the VCS Grants Co-ordinator post as a means of helping to build capacity in the sector and to support more inexperienced groups in finding and applying for other sources of funding.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Options Table

Appendix 2 – Write up of consultation with VCS groups on 26th Nov, questionnaire results and consultation with Concessionary Rents Holders on 10th Dec.

Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment

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6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Local Government Transparency Code 2014
- Voluntary Sector Task Group Report 2014
- Reference Executive Committee report 2010
- Policy for Leases of Council Land & Property at a Concessionary Rent – Executive Report – 18th December 2012
- Concessionary Rents – pre-decision scrutiny, short, sharp review – final report to Executive Committee from O&S Committee - 18th December 2012
- Review of Policy for Leases of Council Land & Property at a Concessionary Rent – 9th July 2013
- Concessionary Rents Consultation Report - VCS Concessionary Rents Holders – 4th December 2019
- Financial Advice and Problem Solving Contract Quarterly Monitoring Reports submitted by Bromsgrove and District Citizens Advice 2017 – 2019.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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Appendix 1 – Options Table

OPTIONS	DETAILS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
<p>Option 1 - Cease all funding to the VCS, i.e. Concessionary Rents Scheme and VCS Grants Pot which includes a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No funding to be provided to the VCS through the concessionary rents scheme or through the VCS Grants programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VCS Grants Co-ordinator would focus on helping to build capacity in the sector and support groups in applying for alternative funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VCS organisations folding owing to the withdrawal of funding from the Council. Potential risks around rising demand for Council services especially with the loss of the Financial Advice and Problem Solving contract. Effect of VCS organisations folding that support vulnerable people in Redditch's communities and the negative impacts of this. Any units which become vacant as a result of organisations closing will incur additional void costs to the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will save £283k per annum. If VCS organisations do choose to vacate there would be a short-term loss of income until alternative tenants or actions occurred. If all units were to become void it would cost the Council £180k per year but it is unlikely that all units would remain unoccupied for a year.
<p>Option 2 – End the Concessionary Rents Scheme, reduce the VCS Grants Pot to £175k of which £50k is allocated to a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All VCS groups to have their concessionary rent terminated in 2020. Make available a £125k wider grants pot for all VCS organisations to bid into for their core costs. Maximum bids up to £5k. Groups receiving concessionary rents will have to bid into this VCS Grants pot to cover their rent. Make available £50k for a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If some of the concessionary rents holders are unable to retain their units, the Council would seek to let some of the units at the market value. If units became vacant there could be opportunities to look at utilising the assets in a different way e.g. developing the sites for other uses, selling any potential land etc. The VCS Grants Co-ordinator would focus on helping to build capacity in the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations receiving concessionary rents may not be successful in bidding for funds from the VCS grant pot for their rent. This would mean their rent would increase in 2020 to full market rent. It is likely that the organisations would be reluctant to commit to longer term leases as they would not have a guaranteed income to ensure they could afford the rent in the long term. If this occurred, there is a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If VCS organisations do choose to vacate there would be a short-term loss of income until alternative tenants or actions occurred. If all units were to become void it would cost the Council £180k per year but it is unlikely that all units would remain unoccupied for a year. The Council saves £108k from the VCS grants budget including the £63k from concessionary rents scheme.

OPTIONS	DETAILS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
			<p>chance that a number of VCS organisations receiving concessionary rent would have to move or cease to exist altogether.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This would impact negatively on the communities receiving support through these organisations. Costs would still exist to the Council if these buildings were left void – void costs and business rates costs would need to be considered. 	
<p>Option 3 – Maintain the concessionary rents scheme but withdraw the wider VCS Grants scheme completely, with the exception of the Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All VCS organisations continue to receive the 70% concessionary rent. Current and future arrears would need to be addressed through the scheme. Those groups deemed to be in properties which could be let to commercial tenants be placed on a meanwhile type lease and under notice that if a commercial tenant was interested in their property they would be asked to relocate. No wider VCS Grants scheme will exist. Make available £50k for a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VCS organisations receiving concessionary rents will be able to sustain their business and continue to deliver their activities as before. The Council does not have to find new tenants to replace the VCS groups or find associated costs with having these units as void. The groups affected would be able to sign a longer term lease knowing they have the guarantee of continued income for the rent. The VCS Grants Co-ordinator total focus could be on helping to build capacity in the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be no general funding available for any other VCS organisations. This may affect the ability of the sector to deliver the diversity and range of services sustained at the moment. With regards to the potential changeover in tenancies within the concessionary rents scheme, there would be a delay if occupier was unwilling to leave and recovery action was required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will save £170k, however an ongoing pressure will still need to be made in the concessionary rents budget for the lost income from the concessionary rents scheme of £19k approximately (on top the existing budget of £63k). The identified saving may potentially decrease if the ongoing pressure increases owing to any new organisations joining the concessionary rents scheme in the future.

OPTIONS	DETAILS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
<p>Option 4 - Close the Concessionary Rents scheme to new applications but maintain the scheme for existing organisations only with a reduction of support for the wider VCS Grants Pot, including a the Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant</p> <p>Note: As and when existing VCS organisations vacant premises they are re-let on a commercial basis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each of the groups receiving a concessionary rent continues to pay their 30% of their current rent which totals £35k approx. of income to the Council. • Allocate £125k for the wider VCS Grants pot which would be used to supplement the £82,314 that remains outstanding (the other 70%). • This would leave £42686 in the pot for other VCS grants. • These organisations would not be able to bid into the wider VCS grants pot at all. • This could continue year on year if Members were minded to keep the concessionary rent scheme in place. • No new organisations can join the scheme • Any arrears would need to be addressed through the life of the scheme. • Those groups deemed to be in properties which could be let to commercial tenants be placed on a meanwhile type lease and under notice that if a commercial tenant was interested in their property they would be asked to relocate. • Make available £50k for a Financial Advice and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The groups affected would be able to sign a longer term lease knowing they have the guarantee of continued income for the rent. • The Council does not have to find new tenants to replace the VCS groups or find associated costs with having these units as void. • The VCS Grants Co-ordinator would focus on helping to build capacity in the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall support from the Council to the VCS will shrink as there is a £45k reduction to the general VCS Grants pot. • This option benefits the existing VCS organisations with a concessionary rent rather than the wider sector as limited funding is left to distribute to other groups who do not have a concessionary rent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will save £45k from the wider VCS Grants budget. • There will no longer be the need to allocate any budget for the Concessionary Rents scheme so a saving of £63k will be made. This will make a total saving of £108k.

OPTIONS	DETAILS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
<p>Option 5 - End the Concessionary Rents Scheme but provide a stepped down transition over a 3 year period paid for out of reduced VCS grants pot of £175k of which £50k will be allocated to a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant.</p>	<p>Problem Solving grant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option 4 as above would operate for year 1 but then for the following year the received concession percentage would be stepped down. In year 2, groups would be expected to pay 50% of their rent with a 50% concessionary rate which would be approximately £59k to pay. This £59k would be deducted from the pot which would leave £66k for other VCS Grant giving. In year 3 the rate the VCS groups would be expected to pay would rise to 80% with only a 20% concessionary rent. This £23,600 would be deducted from the pot and would leave £101,400 other VCS grant giving. In year 4, the scheme would be withdrawn with all VCS groups paying full market rent. The whole £125k would be available for the VCS Grants Pot. When step down decreases do occur, the VCS groups affected can then bid into the main VCS Grants pot. Applications for rent would 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The groups would be able to sign for a 3 year lease on the understanding that they then have 3 years to make a decision about their future in those units and plan for when the rent rises to full market rent. The Council could utilise this time (3 years) to assess the stock and formulate a plan for potential loss of funding if groups do relinquish their units i.e. market assessment of who might let them, how much to demolish and sell land for building etc. More funding would be available for the wider grants pot than in previous options. The VCS Grants Co-ordinator would focus on helping to build capacity in the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is still less money available for the wider VCS in the main grants pot although this will increase over the 3 years as the level of concession paid by concessionary rent holders rises. The VCS feels that funding is being cut twice from them – once from the concessionary rent pot and then again from the wider VCS grant pot. It is still possible that groups could close after the transition period is over if they are not able to cover their rent from other sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will save £45k from the wider VCS Grants budget. There will no longer be the need to allocate any budget for the Concessionary Rents scheme so a saving of £63k will be made. This will make a total saving of £108k.

OPTIONS	DETAILS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
	<p>be accepted as they are losing the support for rent over the three years so the wider fund could be used to top this up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any current or future arrears in the scheme will need to be addressed within the 3 year transition period. Those groups deemed to be in properties which could be let to commercial tenants be placed on a meanwhile type lease and under notice that if a commercial tenant was interested in their property they would be asked to relocate. Make available £50k for a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant. 			
<p>Option 6 - End the Concessionary Rents Scheme but provide a transition over a 3 year period. Maintain the current Council budget in order to do this. Reduce the VCS Grant pot to £175k of which £50k is allocated to a Financial</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End the scheme over a period of 3 years but continue to subsidise the scheme as per the current arrangement. As with option 4 and 5, wind down the scheme by using a series of stepped decreases each year. Those organisations that receive the transitional concessionary rent can only bid into the £125k for rent after year 1 once their rent concession decreases and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option supports the VCS the most and maintains almost the same level of funding except a reduction in £45k for the wider VCS grants pot. There are no reductions in the wider VCS grants pot to subsidise the concessionary rent holders unlike in some of the other options. This will enable current concessionary rent holders to plan for the end of the scheme in 3 years' time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is the most costly option to the Council as there would be the need to maintain the pressure for the Concessionary Rents scheme and also find the £175k for the VCS Grants Scheme and the Financial Advice and Problem Solving Grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will save £45k from the wider VCS Grants budget. A continuing budget and pressure would still need to be made for the wind down of the Concessionary Rents scheme over the 3 year period of the transition. The savings for the Council in each year of the step down would be as follows: Year 1- no savings from the concessionary rent budget but a £19K pressure required, Year 2 – saving of £4k from the

OPTIONS	DETAILS	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
Advice and Problem Solving grant	<p>they have to pay more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any arrears will need to be addressed within the transition period. Those groups deemed to be in properties which could be let to commercial tenants be placed on a meanwhile type lease and under notice that if a commercial tenant was interested in their property they would be asked to relocate. Make available £50k for a Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The £125k can fully be utilised to support the wider VCS in Redditch. The VCS Grants Co-ordinator would focus on helping to build capacity in the sector. 		<p>concessionary rents budget, Year 3 - £40k from the concessionary rents budget.</p>

Notes:

- Any VCS Grant Pot would be capped at £5k as the maximum grant to be awarded to any one organisation, with the exception of the Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant.
- No organisation will be able to apply for a concession or grant to cover above 70% of their rent costs.
- When referencing the £82k concessionary rents funding, this currently comprises of a budget of £63k already set for the scheme with an additional pressure required of £19k to ensure the full cost of the scheme to the Council is covered.



Council Support to the Redditch Voluntary and Community Sector - Consultation Questionnaire

Q1. If the Council has £100k available to fund the VCS in Redditch, thinking about what barriers you face what would you most like the funding for?

Table 1 - The group felt that the ability to attain core funding was crucial – this could include overheads, wages, staffing, rent, administrative costs, insurance etc. They felt that it was important to have as little restrictions and funding conditions as possible so would welcome a very open flexible pot. If VCS groups were receiving a good level of funding from one funder it often helped them to bring in match funding from other funders. The Council pot was a good starting point to get core funding in which could act as a gateway to receiving other funding from elsewhere.

One aspect they felt strongly about was developing the sector. Some suggestions were made that the funding should be available for training for groups. Development of VCS groups was seen as being extremely important – some participants thought that the funding should be put into more infrastructure support and ways to help smaller, less developed groups become sustainable. Issues such as the bigger groups being able to pay bid writers and have the capacity to pull in larger amounts of money meant that smaller groups without this would struggle. The idea of more infrastructure support would go some way to address these issues.

Participants discussed the fact that demonstrating outcomes and impact of projects and an organisations work was difficult but becoming more crucial to do in order to show what difference is made by their work especially to funders. It was suggested that some of the funding could be utilised to help the sector demonstrate need for VCS organisations and projects.

Table 2 –

- Rent
- Core costs (Rent, salaries, overheads/running costs). It's easier to find funding for new projects and equipment.

The group initially felt that the consultation event was 'pointless' as the decisions had already been made e.g. Cllrs steer that the VCS pot would be £100k. They also felt that the questions were 'contrived'. The group only wanted to discuss concessionary rents as they felt this was more important than any other VCS grant funding.

Table 3 - Concessionary Rent Scheme (CRS):

- The group felt that continuing the CRS is more important than any other funding.
- If CRS is scrapped, 'Community House' would need to pass the rent increase on to groups, organisations. Some groups would fold which would impact on other organisations, public services and especially service users. Community House has approx. 2,500 using this place per week and this does not include outreach work delivered from there.
- 'Redditch Hale and Hearties Group' is a part of Community House and feel the group will fold if concessionary rents are removed. Huge impact on the NHS and Accident & Emergency services!

- Groups cannot get their rent covered from anywhere else. Grants can be sourced for projects etc. but not rents.
- Need CRS as this is the 'stable foundation' for many VCS groups
- The group felt they could argue this was just a 'balance sheet' issue as it's not a grant saving.
- Concessionary Rents should be considered building by building e.g.
 - 'real' commercial value
 - Cost of bringing them back in use – making the building fit for purpose so someone/businesses would be interested in renting it. VCS have all the 'dregs' buildings
 - Location
- If VCS group leave/fold and then units can't be rented out it will cost more – holding rates, loss of any rent, repairs, vandalism, particularly in the neighbourhood centres. Redditch Boxing Academy and REACH CIC did joint costings of impact to the Council - £23k in the 1st year; £47k in year two.
- 'Disadvantage' will escalate if groups go due to the CRS being removed.
- £100k to be used to employ staff to raise funds for groups e.g. bid writers/community development. Some group members disagreed – they want RBC to write bids and bring in funds to then distribute to groups. Bring in more funding, ring-fence for the VCS
- £100k to be used for rent concessions.
- Social Impact Assessment by RBC to see true worth of VCS and what they do.
- £100k to be used to facilitate the bringing together of VCS, sharing joint bid applications - 'grant funding consortiums'. Reinforce VCS infrastructure and strengthen groups — both £100k and the officer post.

Other respondents –

Core funding in order to assist in maintaining existing service to the children and families of the community remains the essential requirement – given that Touchstones needs around \$35k each and every year – and all service is free to everyone that asks for it – and so we are utterly dependent upon grants, and individual and local group fundraising and free-will donations/ fundraising

I think a ratio of 80% to core costs and 20 % to projects would be a balanced approach although either way will not meet every one's needs. A contribution to core costs is most appropriate as our main tasks are not project based.

We currently do not have premises to pay for so running costs too physically support the most vulnerable by means of practical assistance would be essential for us.

Ensuring the sustainability of core essential services and activities (and funding the core costs of these services) is a key priority for us. Although we do not currently receive any 'direct funding' for the core costs associated with key services, such as our Information & Advice service, the preferential business rates applied to our Redditch Retail Shops (which are our main source of income) and the reduced rental charges for the hire of community facilities (such as Community House) do have a positive impact on our operating costs. Removal of these 'concessions' would necessitate a re-evaluation of our support, services and activities for older people in Redditch and may result in the cessation of services due to rising core costs

As charity, a key barrier to piloting/ progressing new initiatives/ new ways of working is the fact that we do not have the available 'start-up-funds' to initiate new projects. We are currently benefiting from such funding being available to pilot initiatives such as its 'Pop Up I&A

Surgeries', which we hope will enable us to develop an approach which will help increase our support and reach across the district

Q2. If it is felt there should be a mixture of uses what proportion of the funding should be allocated for each use (e.g. 80% for core costs, 20% project funding).

Table 1 - The group felt that the criteria should be so relaxed that the bids for funding should be open for anything with no parameters around how many bids could be made for projects and how many for core costs. Again it was felt that a proportion of the money should be ring-fenced for infrastructure support which could be given to BARN.

Table 2 –

- Case by case per organisation and their needs.

Table 3 – Nothing specific suggested.

Other respondents -

From our perspective and for the reasons explained above we would advocate for the largest possible proportion / allocation to core / ongoing operations funding

I agree the example figures quoted as being a reasonable split – with some discretion to the awarding panel, perhaps a 10% margin.

Personally, I think as each group has a specific reason for doing what they do it varies on an individual basis so perhaps a little flexibility.

We support the suggestion that a key proportion of the funding should be allocated for core costs, but that a percentage should also be available to support project funding.

Q3. What should be the maximum and minimum level of funding available to apply for?

Table 1 - The group again were quite flexible about this. There should be no minimum or maximum amount but groups should be able to bid for what they needed. If there was a maximum amount stipulated then it should be made clear to groups that they did not have to always bid for the maximum. The group felt that perhaps to make it fair, there should be a cap for large core cost bids at £5k and then the spread would go further. This had been raised in previous consultation about the old Grants scheme by members of BARN and the group agreed this would be sensible.

Table 2 -

- £500 – ring-fenced e.g. New Road Parents on income of less than £25k. Have £10k - £15k in this pot. Minimal form, bank account and signatories.
- £25k plus organisations – locally delivered and funded organisations (see Awards4All Form). £500+ to £5,000. Produce final accounts and link to RBC strategic purposes.

Table 3 – Nothing specific suggested.

Other respondents –

We've previously relied on grants of £1000, per year but if the pot is being constrained to £100k, then I guess you will have to impose some logic for maximum allocations, based on likely number of applications and community impact.

We would say that there are many 'local' organisations that are large, and have well established fundraising capabilities, that can end up 'sucking' resources from all sorts of sources. We would argue that your funding should be for smaller, organisations, that are more critically dependant of just a few possible funding routes, and because like us they work with some of the most vulnerable and deprived parts of our community – can't and don't get any significant funding from service users / beneficiaries.

There will never be enough available; perhaps a cap of 5K per proposal, done in two rounds each year, with the 2nd round prioritising new applicants.

This should be determined on achievable impact to community and the amount of people benefitting.

Having key levels of 'available funding' is helpful (and to help ensure a parity in allocation of funding across the VCS in Redditch) however other key determining factors, such as 'need' and 'benefit', should be taken into consideration (hence if a service/ project exceeds a 'maximum' but has a significant long-term impact, it should still be considered)

Q4. Any other thoughts about the £100k 'general pot' model?

Table 1 - It was obviously felt that the proposed level of funding was not enough and that consultation on the amount on offer would have been welcomed.

The amount of money being brought into the town by the VCS was not recognised by the Council. Not only did VCS bring in money from other funders into the town but also the money they did bring in was made to go much further from the added value VCS organisations could bring to delivery e.g. volunteers, more flexible ways of working etc. It was questioned how best to evidence this. In real terms the Council may fund the sector to the level of £100k but in reality this was actually worth more.

The group felt that joint working was important between the Council and the VCS and were positive about future arrangements where VCS could co-design projects and services and have a role to play in the implementation of this. However, this would need to be resourced – capacity is an issue for the VCS sector engaging in this type of work and would not be possible on top of their main delivery.

The group touched on the need for the sector to work together to help each other and to share models of sustainability.

There was a question about any future role which might be focussed on enabling and helping the VCS to undertake some of the long term aspirational work – should this person come from the VCS rather than a Council background?

The group discussed the need to have a steady income stream – not all groups were looking to the Council to provide this and they were very able to go elsewhere to find funding. However this cut was seen as deep and it was generally felt that some groups would fold as a result of this. There was concern about who would pick up the most needy and vulnerable if groups did fold.

Table 2 -

- Needs to be a 'proper' assessment of 'NEED' across the VCS Organisations and their service users. Assessment of 'social impact' especially when VCS cannot be sustained or fails.

Table 3 – Nothing specific suggested.

Other respondents –

Given the limited amounts available the process needs to be simple to allocate and transparent in its outcomes.

Perhaps the council taking the decision annually on where to allocate its funds. It may be more practical and be divided up between all the groups and not just some. This would reduce paperwork and administration too.

It would be interesting to understand how the Council plans to evaluate and monitor the impact of a £100k 'General Pot'

Q5. What process should be used to allocate the £100k? E.g. Application forms? The time of year? Different rounds throughout the year? Around the Councils Strategic Purposes?

Table 1 - Participants liked the form currently used for the CCGS, however they generally disliked the new way of approaching their councillors for funding. They felt it was time consuming and the timeframe of the process of negotiating with councillors to then receiving the money could take a long time. Conversations with Councillors could be difficult as there could be conflicts of interest.

It was felt that the money should be allocated in time for the beginning of the new financial year so that groups could plan properly for that year ahead. The question was raised about how the RBC pot of funding aligned with other funding from the stator sector e.g. public health funding. Was there a way of better utilising the RBC pot alongside other funding pots? The example of Positive Activities was used – could some of the RBC pot be used to match fund the WCC /PH pot? Would this be a better use of public funding and create a bigger pot to achieve more?

Table 2 –

Whatever process was put in place it needed to be fair and equitable with all groups enabled to bid into the pot.

- See points listed in response to question 3.
- Not online.
- First round decision by 31st March for £25k+ organisations. £500 pot throughout the year until spent.
- Not only online - applications need to be paper copies as well.

Table 3 – Nothing specific suggested.

Other respondents –

Application form, centralised decision making, - aligned to strategic purposes and community need / inability to self-provide

Two rounds a year. Any links to the "Strategic Purposes" need to be explicit and broadly interpreted. An on-line application form with a paper edition available for community-based organisations if needed. Monitoring reports should be simple and not too onerous; both financial and descriptive information linked to the grant application objectives to be collected.

Annually ready for funds to be received for the new tax year, then groups would know what amount they had and not have to wait for decisions which is difficult to budget.

The council's strategic purposes should be the priority and grants perhaps decided by the council as opposed to groups applying themselves.

An initial application form is probably the most effective means of the VCS submitting their requests but perhaps for Applications Requests over a specified amount, VCS representatives have the opportunity to discuss their application with a 'review panel'

Restricting funding applications to once a year does present a 'barrier', however, if members of the VCS are seeking support for core costs then they will want to know whether or not funding has been secured ASAP at the beginning of the Financial Year. Perhaps a proportion of the 'Pot' (20%?) could be held for a second round of funding applications (in September?)

In terms of the Council's Strategic Purposes, then we would expect there to be a link between the 'Purposes' and this funding in order to support the return on investment.

Q6. How can the Grants Officer (18 hour post) best support the VCS?

Table 1 - It was felt that the officer should not be duplicating any work which would be undertaken by BARN. The officer could help with how to access government funding. It was also felt that in the future they would have a role to play in any co-commissioning work.

One participant felt that the officer could be utilised to look at the impact of the roll out of social prescribing on the local VCS.

It was suggested that some of the £100k might be better spent in funding a full time post to support the VCS. Possibly could work with BARN more closely.

Table 2 -

- Help and guidance for non-successful applications
- Case by case basis.

Table 3 -

- More of a support role to guide, advise and help when applying for money.
- Bring organisations together and to look at joint funding bids. Co-ordinate though not just turning up to a meeting.
- Bring in large pots of funding / national level.
- Use other RBC officer hours e.g. accountants / solicitors / Grants officer etc. to support groups set up, run or develop.
- RBC to work in partnership with groups to lever in more funding e.g. Redditch Boxing Academy are looking at a piece of land and possibly £150k+ application to build a new community hub building. RBC officer to support/project manage.

Other respondents -

As now – advice, processing and monitoring grant applications / grants - understanding the detail conditions that under-pin . justify why funds should be directed to certain organisations above others.

The postholder perhaps can help smaller organisations to source other funding opportunities to bring the amount of support available from outside of the Borough eg Lottery, to add to and compliment the Borough Council's financial contribution. Corporate objectives could be enhanced with a closer partnership working with the VCS.

Obviously listening to what's important to keep them all functioning but knowing about all the existing groups and then the new groups incorporated each year to try and assist the new ones too.

Support with the funding application process (to ensure that proposals meet the criteria prior to submission, as very few of the VCS organisations supporting people in Redditch have dedicated Fundraisers/ Bid Writers)

Identification of any similar requests/ opportunities across the VCS to see if there might be opportunities for a joint funding request

Support with identify other sources of funding that might be available (e.g. County Funding)

Q7. Any other comments not captured above?

Table 1 - It was noted that a lot of the groups felt that some of the language and statements made by politicians during the handling of the concessionary rent report was patronising and rude. They felt it belied the fact that many councillors did not know the VCS in Redditch well at all and what it did. They felt that they were not respected.

Table 2 -

Issues:

- Rent and CAB
- Wouldn't pay full rent for properties for the current state they are in.
- Members don't seem to be clear about what they can fund and more importantly what the VCS do.
- Section 24 letter clearly states that member decisions about council tax and members allowance have an impact of approx. 0.5millions over the next 5 years.
- Charity Commission states that for every £1 in the VCS equates to £10 in social value.
- Cost to RBC of administration to the scheme.
- Redditch Partnership needs to be involved in all medium and long-term collaborative and co-design.

Table 3 -

- Can we use section 106 monies? Working in partnership (groups and RBC to lead) to bring in new funding to build new (1-3) community hubs.
- Can it be introduced that all new developments/building projects need to contribute to the VCS and the VCS infrastructure?
- Councillors needed to be here – PURDAH excuse is nonsense.

- Regular consultation is needed. More dialogue between VCS and the Council, working together to achieve what we all want to achieve.
- Social Capital – BSG / Community house / Homestart etc. – If measured, Volunteers time etc. would show that VCS providing services for people in Redditch saves Council services and other statutory services.
- The group didn't feel the Council was interested in 'social capital just hard cash!
- Homestart have successfully used evidence / previous RBC funding as leverage to bring in large amount of other grant funding in the past. Helps groups to be 'credible', help with 'credibility'. This would struggle if VCS grants were to go or be reduced.
- Community , people joining together will be lost.
- The VCS deliver against RBC strategic purposes, Worcestershire's response to tackling loneliness, health and wellbeing agenda.
- VCS services are 'prevention' – will spiral out of control and spill over to public services
- Local Ward Councillors need to take a deeper interesting in what's happening
- Long-term value of the VCS is huge – this is short-term decision making which will impact longer term. Very costly and once VCS groups have gone you won't get them back.

Other respondents

In our 8 years serving over 1000 bereaved children and young people in the local communities of Redditch we have been blown away by RBC's investment to organisations that work to transform the lives of people in the most needing parts of the local community. We have been and continue to be so, so grateful for the immense support we have received from RBC – support without which we couldn't and won't be able to come alongside and then transform the lives of some the town's most traumatised and vulnerable children, young people and their families – thank you, and in all the changes, long may it be able to continue.

I'm pleased that RBC is retaining its Grant Scheme and appreciates the 1+1=3 contribution to the Borough by the VCS.

As a new CIC it is like taking a gamble that your group is going to be able to sustain itself or get any funding at all. Perhaps a little more individual support at all levels would be good.

Whilst we understand the drivers for the recent changes to the 'Councillor Community Grants Scheme' it does impact organisations such as ourselves that are providing support and services across the District and who want to ensure a parity of support and services for residents throughout the Borough.

Notes from Meeting with VCS Concessionary Rent Holders – 10th December 2019

In attendance:

Officers – Judith Willis, Helen Broughton and Jeremy Williams

VCS Representatives – Lynn Hancock – Bromsgrove and District Citizens Advice, Sarah Lee – Redditch Boxing Club, Gary Roskell – Bromsgrove and Redditch Network, Robin Baker – Oasis Christian Centre, Liz Williams – REACH CIC, John Witherspoon – Batchley Support Group, Mark Baron - Batchley Support Group, Lee MacKenzie – Sandycroft Centre, Jordan Cooke – Your Ideas.

Judith opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. She started by explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss with VCS organisations that currently were part of the VCS Concessionary Rents scheme their views about the possible removal of the scheme and also how any future funding may be utilised to support them. Judith confirmed that the level of funding available to cover any future concessionary rent scheme and wider VCS Grants pot was £175k. There would be £50k available for the Financial Advice and Problem Solving service.

Points raised by VCS representatives at the meeting included:

- the fact that the £82k quoted as the Council's budget for the remaining 70% rent they do not receive from the VCS tenants was not an actual loss for the Council, it was just income not collected;
- if the Council removed the concessionary rent scheme some organisations would not be able to pay for their rent and would therefore close. Groups explained that it was very difficult to find funders who would fund core costs like rent. Rent could be put into funding bids as part of full cost recovery but this would not be enough to help maintain paying the rent. One organisation representative said they were due to make a decision about the future of their units in the New Year with a view to closing by the new financial year if the Council were to stop the scheme;
- the Council were cutting from the VCS twice (both concessionary rent scheme and the main VCS Grants pot). Representatives felt that Councillors did not understand what they did and what the impact would be if VCS organisations had to close because of the proposed changes;
- the costs to the Council of dealing with empty units would be far greater than if the Council continued to subsidise the current groups renting them;
- the Council was at risk of being financially worse off if the VCS withdrew from the units and they were then to remain vacant. A report had been written by the tenants affected which pointed out that along with the loss of income from rent, there would be a large amount of money to pay in business rates on the units which would actually cost the Council more than subsidising the current tenants and keeping the scheme;
- in some units, the Council paid to rent space on a sessional basis for various health and leisure activities – the rise in costs for the VCS organisations would mean a rise in cost for the Council to rent space for these activities;

- the Council needed to be clear about the level of rent that could be charged for these units given that many of them were and still are in poor condition and were unlettable. They questioned whether there really was any commercial organisations wishing to let the units;
- the Council sets the value of the units at market rate but it was felt the commercial value of the units is likely to be less than that;
- it was questioned if the market value of units in Matchborough and Winyates could be made when they were potentially going to be knocked down as part of the District Centre redevelopment plans;
- groups had invested a lot of money in maintaining and improving the units, one organisation quoted that they had spent £18000 on refurbishment costs. It was questioned how groups who had spent money on refurbishment would get this back if they were forced to close or move;
- it was felt by the concessionary rent holders that each unit and VCS organisation should be considered individually taking into consideration all factors about the unit they rent and the services they provide and impact on the community. It was felt that if organisations did make a profit then they could be expected to pay more towards their rent; and
- it was suggested that the Council could continue the Concessionary Rents scheme but for those units which were lettable, put the VCS organisations which were inhabiting those units onto a meanwhile lease. If commercial organisations were then interested in letting these units, the VCS organisations in them would be given notice to leave.

Groups were asked if they thought that the funding available should be prioritised for the concessionary rent holders. There were mixed view on this, some groups were not as direct about confirming this but it was generally felt that available funding should be diverted to support the Concessionary Rents scheme with the remaining left for the general VCS grants pot.

Equality Assessment - Guidance and Recording Form

1. Introduction

Redditch Borough Council is committed to providing equality of access and recognises that discrimination does not need to be intentional for unfair treatment or adverse impact to occur. Our approach to equality recognises that the range of different groups in our society may have different needs and we seek to ensure that our services are fairly and equitably provided to all sections of the community.

We are **legally required** (The Equality Duty, The Equality Act 2010) to demonstrate that we have given 'due regard' to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This means that equality considerations need to be evidenced in our decision-making processes and policies. This template will support you to evidence how the Duty has been taken into account. The Equality duty is to meet 'needs', rather than any desires or preferences for a particular treatment or service. Complying with the General Duty may involve treating some people better than others, as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve making use of an exception or the positive actions provisions in order to provide a service in a way which is appropriate for a particular group. The General Duty also explicitly recognises that disabled people's needs are different from those of non-disabled people. In considering the requirements to meet the needs of disabled people, public bodies should therefore take account of disabled people's disabilities. This might mean making reasonable adjustments for them or treating them better than other people.

2. When is Equality Assessment required?

Any potential impact on equality should be considered **before any key decisions are made** and should be integrated into day-to-day policy-making, business planning and other decision-making arrangements. This is particularly relevant when making difficult financial decisions; if we are proposing to **stop, reduce or change a service** then we must have relevant equalities evidence to justify this.

Due regard means consciously thinking about the three aims of the General Duty as a part of the process of decision-making. This means that consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions we make, when:

- Developing, evaluating and reviewing policy
- Designing, delivering and changing services
- Commissioning and procuring from others

You must consider what evidence is available and whether any more information is needed. You cannot assume that a policy will benefit all service users without evidence to support that conclusion. It is not necessary in every instance, to have hard statistical data. We can also use more qualitative sources such as service user feedback or external sources, for example, information available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, local or national representative groups etc. Local, regional or national statistical information and research may also be used if relevant.

3. How is the Equality Assessment to be carried out?

To assess a service or policy, consider and use any or all of the following options:

- Walk through the processes as a customer would, or as a member of staff and test it from their point of view - this can be done by the service manager or jointly with the team. Record this experience and make a record of any actions required as a result.
- Set up a customer test with volunteers from community or staff groups. Get them to access the service from start to finish, assess their experience and feedback. Make a record of what was discovered, who the group members were and any actions required as a result.
- Conduct statistical analysis from any service usage information available or customer satisfaction surveys looking for patterns of usage by defined equality groups and obvious gaps in usage.

If further evidence comes to light after the initial completion of this assessment, if possible, go back to the original assessment and update it. Equality Assessment should be seen as a living, on-going process rather than a one off exercise.

4. Who carries out the assessment?

The manager of the service is responsible for ensuring that the assessment is carried out and recorded on this form.

A list of every completed Equality Assessment will be published on the relevant Council's website. Any Elected Member or member of the public can ask for copies of the assessment and any information that has been used in the completion of the assessment.

For further information or assistance please contact:

Policy Team on 01527 548284 or 01527 881616 or equalities@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Useful documents:

[Redditch](#) Equality Strategy

Quick start guidance to the Equality Duty can be found [here](#)

Please ensure the following:

- That the document is understandable to a reader who has not read any other documents, and explains (on its own) how the Public Sector Equality Duty is met. This does not need to be lengthy, but must be complete.
- That available support information and data is identified and where it can be found. Also be clear about highlighting gaps in existing data or evidence that you hold, and how you have sought to address these knowledge gaps.
- That the equality impacts are capable of aggregation with those of other EIAs to identify the cumulative impact of all service changes made by the council on different groups of people.

Title of service/policy/procedure/spending review being proposed				Support to the voluntary and community sector 2020/21			
Name of service area				Community Services			
Name of Officer completing this assessment				Helen Broughton/Rebecca Green			
Date assessment completed				December 2019			
Name of decision maker (in relation to the change)				HOS- Judith Willis, Head of Community and Housing Services Executive Committee			
Date decision made				14th January 2020			
Sign off on completion		Name		Signature		Date	
Lead officer completing assessment		Helen Broughton					
Equalities Officer		Rebecca Green					

Overview – Set the context

Provide a clear overview of the aims of the service/policy/procedure and the proposed changes being made. Will current service users’ needs continue to be met? Why is the change being proposed? What needs or duties is it designed to meet?

The Council has been required by auditors to make significant financial savings in order to balance the budget; as a result, it must consider options to change some of the support which the Council provides to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Both the Concessionary Rents Scheme and the VCS Grants Pot (including the Councillor Community Grants Scheme) have been reviewed and details of options for future delivery of these schemes and financial changes considered:

- Option 1 - Cease all funding to the VCS including concessionary rents, VCS Grants Pot and Financial Advice and Problem Solving grant
- Option 2 – End the concessionary rents scheme and reduce the VCS Grants Pot to £175k
- Option 3 – Maintain the concessionary rents scheme but withdraw the wider VCS Grants scheme completely
- Option 4 - Close the Concessionary Rents scheme but maintain the scheme for existing organisations only with a reduction of support for the wider VCS Grants Pot (Note: As and when existing VCS organisations vacant premises they are re-let on a commercial basis).
- Option 5 - End the concessionary rents scheme but provide a stepped down transition over a 2 or 3 year period paid for out of the £125K.
- Option 6 - End the concessionary rents scheme but provide a transition over a 2 or 3 year period. Maintain the current Council budget in order to do this. Fund the £125k on top of this.

Redditch Borough Council does not fund any organisation in their entirety; concessionary rents and grants are a contribution to these organisations, all of whom do access other funding streams. The grants are also reviewed every year and no organisation is guaranteed to receive them.

9 organisations currently receive concessionary rents at 30% of market value; however, there are other VCS organisations that sublet from them.

Who is the proposal likely to affect?	Yes	No
All residents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific group(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All Council employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific group(s) of employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (identify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Detail- Outline who could be affected, and how they could be affected by the proposal/service change. Include current service users and those who could benefit from but do not currently access the service.

The changes could impact those members of the community who access services and support provided by the voluntary and community sector organisations that are in receipt of concessionary rent or receive a grant from the Council. This impact varies depending on the option selected; it could be that services are reduced, amended or even cease if the organisations are not able to find alternative funding streams.

This impact could particularly affect disadvantaged members of our community who access support.

Potential users of the VCS could also be affected by any reduction in provision and future support.

Evidence and data used to inform your equality impact assessment

What **data, research, or trend analysis** have you used? Describe how you have got your information and what it tells you.

As there are multiple options and the organisations support a wide spectrum of the community (and the grants process could support any diverse VCS organisation that decides to apply and is successful) it is very difficult to gather specific data and information attributable to protected characteristics. Another issue is that the impact of the resulting change could be mitigated entirely by the VCS groups accessing alternative sources of funding. However, funding streams have diminished over recent years, particularly for core costs, which could present a challenge to the groups.

The value of the VCS needs to be considered; the social value of money invested is often difficult to quantify. Recent research by the Charity Commission (September 2019) identified the following:

“The charity sector is seen as an increasingly important part of society and in the delivery of services which have traditionally been provided by the public sector (e.g. in areas like safeguarding, cancer research, homelessness and loneliness). According to NCVO, areas of activity with the greatest involvement of voluntary organisations are social services provision, culture and recreation and religious services”.

“The impact of the charity sector needs to consider the social value created. This includes the value placed on charity by its direct recipients, but also the (indirect) value to others in the community, donors and the benefits to the millions of volunteers who deliver charity services... very little of the value created by the volunteer sector is easily visible to statisticians, to policymakers, to politicians, to companies, indeed to the volunteers themselves”.

Engagement and Consultation

What engagement and consultation have you undertaken about the proposal with current service users, potential users and other stakeholders? What is important to them regarding the current service? How does (or could) the service meet their needs? How will they be affected by the proposal? What potential impacts did they identify because of their protected characteristic(s)? Did they identify any potential barriers they may face in accessing services/other opportunities that meet their needs?

Consultation with the VCS included an open meeting and a meeting with the concessionary rent holders.

Key points raised included:

- the fact that the £82k quoted as the Council's budget for the remaining 70% rent they do not receive from the VCS tenants was not an actual loss for the Council, it was just income not collected;
- if the Council removed the concessionary rent scheme some organisations would not be able to pay for their rent and would therefore close. Groups explained that it was very difficult to find funders who would fund core costs like rent. Rent could be put into funding bids as part of full cost recovery but this would not be enough to help maintain paying the rent. One organisation representative said they were due to make a decision about the future of their units in the New Year with a view to closing by the new financial year if the Council were to stop the scheme;
- the Council were cutting from the VCS twice (both concessionary rent scheme and the main VCS Grants pot). Representatives felt that Councillors did not understand what they did and what the impact would be if VCS organisations had to close because of the proposed changes;
- the costs to the Council of dealing with empty units would be far greater than if the Council continued to subsidise the current groups renting them;
- the Council was at risk of being financially worse off if the VCS withdrew from the units and they were then to remain vacant. A report had been written by the tenants affected which pointed out that along with the loss of income from rent, there would be a large amount of money to pay in business rates on the units which would actually cost the Council more than subsidising the current tenants and keeping the scheme;
- in some units, the Council paid to rent space on a sessional basis for various health and leisure activities – the rise in costs for the VCS organisations would mean a rise in cost for the Council to rent space for these activities;
- the Council needed to be clear about the level of rent that could be charged for these units given that many of them were and still are in poor condition and were unlettable. They questioned whether there really was any commercial

- organisations wishing to let the units;
- the Council sets the value of the units at market rate but it was felt the commercial value of the units is likely to be less than that;
 - it was questioned if the market value of units in Matchborough and Winyates could be made when they were potentially going to be knocked down as part of the District Centre redevelopment plans;
 - groups had invested a lot of money in maintaining and improving the units, one organisation quoted that they had spent £18000 on refurbishment costs. It was questioned how groups who had spent money on refurbishment would get this back if they were forced to close or move;
 - it was felt by the concessionary rent holders that each unit and VCS organisation should be considered individually taking into consideration all factors about the unit they rent and the services they provide and impact on the community. It was felt that if organisations did make a profit then they could be expected to pay more towards their rent; and
 - it was suggested that the Council could continue the Concessionary Rents scheme but for those units which were lettable, put the VCS organisations which were inhabiting those units onto a meanwhile lease. If commercial organisations were then interested in letting these units, the VCS organisations in them would be given notice to leave.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard must be given to the three aims of the Equality Duty. This means that you must consciously think about the three aims as part of the process of decision-making. Consider the current service and any proposed changes, thinking about what issues may arise.

Equality Duty aims	Evidence
<p>Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation How does the proposal/service ensure that there is no barrier or disproportionate impact for anyone with a particular protected</p>	<p>The VCS support many members of the community and add social value; there could be an impact for community members, who could have particular protected characteristics (the Council holds no specific data, however individual VCS organisations may hold this data). Once the chosen option has been selected an action plan for delivery will be developed to reduce any impact.</p>

characteristic	
<p>Advance equality of opportunity between different groups How does the proposal/service ensure that its intended outcomes promote equality of opportunity for users? Identify inequalities faced by those with specific protected characteristic(s).</p>	<p>The VCS support many members of the community; there could be an impact for community members, who could have particular protected characteristics (the Council holds no specific data, however individual VCS organisations may hold this). Once the chosen option has been selected an action plan for delivery will be developed to ensure equality of opportunity</p>
<p>Foster good relations between different groups Does the service contribute to good relations or to broader community cohesion objectives? How does it achieve this aim?</p>	<p>The VCS supports community relations and cohesion; once the chosen option has been selected an action plan for delivery will be developed to promote good relations.</p>

Is there evidence of actual or potential unfairness for the following equality groups?

- Does the proposal target or exclude a specific equality group or community?
 - Does it affect some equality groups or communities differently and can this be justified?
 - Is the proposal likely to be equally accessed by all equality groups and communities? If not, can this be justified?
- (It may be useful to consider other groups, not included in the Equality Act, especially if the proposal is specifically for them e.g. lone parents, refugees, unemployed people, carers)

Impact of proposal- Describe the likely impact of the proposal on people because of their protected characteristic and how they may be affected. How likely is it that people with this protected characteristic will be negatively affected? What are the barriers that might make access difficult or stop different groups or communities accessing the proposal? How great will that impact be on their well-being? Could the proposal promote equality and good relations between different groups? How?

If you have identified any area of actual or potential unfairness that cannot be justified, can you eliminate or minimise this?

What mitigating actions can be taken to reduce or remove this impact? (Include these in the action plan at the end of the assessment) Equal treatment does not always produce equal outcomes; sometimes you will have to take specific steps for particular groups to address an existing disadvantage or to meet differing needs.

Protected Group	Impact of proposal	Justification for any actual or potential unfairness identified	If you have identified any area of actual or potential unfairness that cannot be justified, can you eliminate or minimise this?
Age	Possible to Likely	Required savings	Although the savings are required, there are mitigating actions that can be considered, dependent on the option that is selected. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted support from the Grants Officer • Accessing alternative funding streams • More joint working • Phased approach to any funding reduction
Disability	Possible to Likely	Required savings	
Transgender	Unknown		
Marriage and Civil Partnership	n/a		
Pregnancy and Maternity	n/a		
Race	Possible to Likely	Required savings	
Religion or Belief	Unknown		
Sex (Male/ Female)	Possible to Likely	Required savings	
Sexual Orientation	Unknown		

How will you monitor any changes identified?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the option has been selected an action plan will be developed which will be monitored by officers and Portfolio Holders

The actions required to address these findings are set out below.

Action Required	By Whom	By When	Completion Date
Develop action plan based on selected option	Helen Broughton	March 2020	Ongoing

When you have completed this assessment, retain a copy and send an electronic copy to the Policy Team (Equalities) attaching any supporting evidence used to carry out the assessment.

Glossary

Direct discrimination

- Treating someone less favourably than someone else in the same circumstances, e.g.:
 - In employment, racist or sexist banter, derogatory comments and innuendo
 - Failure to treat grievances seriously or to investigate effectively
 - Unfairly denying access to employment, training or facilities and services

Indirect discrimination

- Where a provision, criterion or practice is applied equally to all but has the effect excluding or reducing the access for a particular group and is not a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. Even if this effect is unintentional, it can still be unlawful, e.g.:
 - Unnecessary height restrictions for access to employment opportunities
 - Refusing training for promotion to people who work part-time
 - Requiring fluency in a language where this is not necessary
 - Relying on word of mouth to recruit to employment or training opportunities
 - Qualification requirements that are not justified for the level of the job.

Policy, Practices and Services

- Refers to any activity the council does, be that a service we provide, an initiative we run, a policy we write or a procedure we observe.
- It may refer to the way we do things which are customary
- It may refer to activities we undertake such as meetings, focus groups or publications we produce.

Protected Characteristics

Age - consider all age groups although legal protection only applies to people aged 18 or over

Disability - consider all types of impairment, physical and mental, sensory, visible and hidden

- Learning disability
- Families and carers of disabled children
- Mobility impairments
- Wheelchair users
- Mental health needs/ disorders and psychological conditions
- HIV/ Aids
- Sensory impairments such as sight and hearing
- Cancer and long term progressive conditions such as MS

Gender – refers to the physiological fact of being male or female

- consider whether something has a different impact on men or women - particularly if it's more of an impact on women, consider the impact if they have caring responsibilities whether its childcare or other types of care

Gender re-assignment - Transgender (Gender Dysphoria)- or the preferred term, Gender Confirmation

- Consider all stages of re-assignment, before, during and after re-assignment treatment or gender confirmation surgery

Marriage and Civil Partnerships –

- It *only* covers those who are married or in a civil partnership (NB single status is not protected in the Equality Act)

Pregnancy and maternity

- Physical state of pregnancy
- On maternity leave or planning maternity leave or returned from maternity leave
- Includes breast feeding

Race – this includes race, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin and caste (caste through case law, not explicitly referenced)

- Race is a generic overall term
- Colour refers to the colour of a person's skin
- Nationality applies to internationally recognised nationalities
- National Origin applies where you have changed your nationality in your life time or there is something about you that indicates that your parents or grandparents' origins were in another part of the world – e.g. name, religion
- Ethnic Origin applies where identifiable groups have established a unique and different ethnicity to the rest of the population – this currently applies to Jews, Gypsies, Sikhs Irish and Scottish Travellers
- Caste is the traditional organisation of South Asian, particularly Hindu, society into a hierarchy of hereditary groups.

Religion or Belief – all established religions and beliefs (and non-belief) including but not limited to the following:

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| • Christianity | • Baha'i | • Rastafarianism |
| • Hinduism | • Buddhism | • Atheism |
| • Islam | • Jainism | • Agnosticism |
| • Judaism | • Paganism | • Humanism |
| • Sikhism | • Parsi or Zoroastrianism | |

Sexual orientation

- Gay – usually refers to men with sexual orientation towards other men although sometime refers to women with sexual orientation towards other women

- Lesbian – refers to women with sexual orientation towards other women
- Bisexual – refers to men and women with sexual orientation to either or both their own gender or the opposite gender
- Heterosexual refers to men and women with sexual orientation towards the opposite gender