



Appendix 1 Voluntary and Community Sector Task Group

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Councillor Andrew Brazier and Roger
Hill

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Introduction

First of all - Please could we take questions at the end!

- The review was launched in October 2013.
- You have our report attached. Anything recorded in the report was based on the evidence we were provided with during the review.
- A key aim of the review was to assess the Council's grants process to ensure that it was transparent and value for money.
- The work of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group was taken into account to help minimise the potential for duplication.
- Members gathered evidence in a variety of ways.
- This included interviews with Council Officers, the relevant Portfolio Holder and the Chair of the Grants Panel.
- We reviewed appropriate documentation both from Redditch and external sources.
- We also consulted with leading, local representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector...

The logo for Redditch Borough Council, featuring the text "REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL" in a bold, sans-serif font above a stylized graphic of horizontal lines and arrows pointing to the right.

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The logo for "making a difference", with the words "making" and "difference" in a white, handwritten-style font on a green background. The word "a" is smaller and positioned between "making" and "difference".

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Consultation

We were keen to consult with representatives of a range of Voluntary and Community Sector Groups. We visited two bodies, BARN and the Sandycroft Wellbeing Centre, which were selected due to their extensive links to other Voluntary and Community Sector Groups...



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Consultation Findings

...and we also issued a survey which was designed to obtain feedback from a greater number of Voluntary and Community Sector groups.

The key findings of this consultation were:

- Alternative sources of funding can be obtained by groups from a range of funding providers including the national lottery and other public sector organisations.
- A number of groups have been or will be affected by the removal of Worcestershire County Council's Supporting People and Future Lives funding.
- Some groups rely on Redditch Borough Council for funding, including a small number of groups that were found to be reliant on Council funding by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group in 2008.
- The Council provides other forms of support to the sector in addition to grants, such as concessionary rents on Council properties.

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Recommendation 1 (a – d) Changes to the Grants Programme

Current arrangements	The group's proposals
Meetings of the Grants Panel take place throughout the year and recommendations are reported to the Executive Committee in early spring, (usually in March).	The Grants Panel's recommendations should be reported to the Executive Committee earlier in the calendar year to enable groups to plan more effectively for the new financial year. We found that in some cases groups were not taking on new clients in the first few months of the calendar year because they couldn't guarantee they would have the funding needed.
Applications for funding are scored by the Grants Panel in line with a particular scoring criteria. The location in which the applicant is based and whether clients living outside the Borough will benefit from the project is not considered as part of the scoring process.	The Grants Panel should take into account in future both the locations where the applicant is based and where the project will be delivered as part of the scoring process. Every attempt should be made to prioritise funding for Redditch based groups that deliver services to Redditch residents.
The template for the application form for project grants is based on the version used by Worcestershire County Council as proposed by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group in 2008.	Whilst recognising that Officers do provide guidance to groups that are struggling to complete their applications we feel that the form could be simplified to encourage a greater number and range of eligible groups to apply for funding.
Informal notes are taken at meetings of the Grants Panel.	Formal minutes in future should be taken during these meetings to ensure that the process remains robust and accountable. Any declarations of interest should also be reported to the Executive Committee.

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Recommendation 2: Members of the Grants Panel

Current arrangement	The group's proposals
<p>Member training – We have received conflicting information on this point. Early in the review they were advised that informal, on-the-job training is provided. At the end of the review Members were informed that formal training is offered. However, the training does not currently form part of the formal Member Development programme.</p>	<p>However, formal training should be consistently provided to members of the Grants Panel. This should form part of the Council's corporate Member Development programme.</p>
<p>Officers visit groups in receipt of grant funding as part of the monitoring process. Members of the Grants Panel have been encouraged to visit groups in the past but this has not happened consistently.</p>	<p>Wherever possible members of the Grants Panel should visit groups in receipt of funding as part of the monitoring process. These visits should take place prior to groups receiving their second instalment of grant funding.</p>

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

- The Local Government Transparency Code 2014 details key points with implications for Council grants programmes.
- It is designed to enable greater transparency within local government.
- This will require Officers to publish detailed information in future years about grants awarded to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations. Greater detail will need to be provided than has been published in previous years.
- Relevant Officers have been provided with a copy of the code.
- These requirements should also be communicated to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations so that they understand the reasons why this amount of information needs to be published.

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.

We believe that there would be a number of benefits to employing an apprentice to support the Grants Officer potentially in partnership with a Voluntary or Community Sector group:

- The apprentice could provide office cover and ensure a consistent point of contact is available in the Grants Officer's absence.
- The apprentice could gain work experience in both local government and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- The apprentice could gain useful transferable skills from working in both the Public and Voluntary and Community Sector.
- The apprentice could help to maintain positive working relationships between the Council and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and address any potential areas for misunderstanding.

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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.

- The framework has already been developed and agreed.
- It has particular relevance to supporting residents who require help managing their finances and debts.
- The support provided in line with the framework could help some of the most vulnerable residents living in Redditch.
- The framework is also important to the Council as it links directly to some of our strategic purposes.
- The group is keen to ensure that the Executive Committee commits to supporting this framework for the foreseeable future.

Recommendation 6: Informal Officer Working Group

Current arrangements	The group's proposals
There are numerous Council services that work with a variety of Voluntary and Community Sector groups as well as volunteers as detailed in the group's final report.	An informal officer working group should be established to provide officers with a chance to communicate about the work they are doing.
There is a section of the Council's intranet dedicated to grants . No information is listed in this area at the moment.	This section of the intranet could be developed further and used by Officers to share information about the work services are doing.

Recommendations 7 and 8: Staff Volunteering Policy and Staff Award for Volunteering

- There has been a Staff Volunteering Policy since 2011.
- Staff can ask to volunteer 16 hours of working time per year. (Approval is required from their manager).
- To date only five employees have volunteered in line with the policy.
- Feedback from staff (and their managers) has been positive.
- The policy is due to be refreshed and this could provide a useful opportunity to promote volunteering.
- We feel that a taster list of volunteering opportunities could be promoted on the “briefcase” section of the intranet.
- We are suggesting that the list should be linked to the Council’s strategic purposes.
- The group also believes that a staff award recognising the work of staff who volunteer would help to promote this policy to staff and demonstrate the Council’s commitment to volunteering.

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.

- Many towns and cities in the country that have developed recognised “hours” on social media.
- This includes Worcester, Droitwich Spa and Malvern in Worcestershire.
- These hours provide Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, businesses and public sector bodies with a local networking platform.
- There is currently no “Redditch hour” on social media.
- Council Officers have indicated that introducing a “Redditch Hour” could be a positive development for Redditch, including for the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- The Council could help by supporting the launch of the Redditch Hour and helping to promote it at the local level.

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Recommendation 10: Voluntary Sector Event

- A number of the witnesses interviewed during the review were enthusiastic about the possibility of an event to help them:
 - network with other groups;
 - promote their services to potential customers; and
 - promote volunteering opportunities to potential volunteers.
- This could be linked to existing events.
- The Council could support the event for example by acting as host or helping with promotions.

Any questions?



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