
Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023/24 – 2025/26

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor M. Dormer -Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnership
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis
Report Author	Job Title: Head of Community and Housing Services Contact email: Judith.willis@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel:
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Aspiration, work & financial independence Living independent, active & healthy lives Communities which are safe, well maintained and green
Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee RECOMMEND that:-

- 1. the funding for the VCS Grants Scheme be agreed for a further three year period with either option 1 or 2 as set out in section 6.12**

The Executive Committee RESOLVE that:-

- 2. delegated authority be given to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnership, to agree a revised VCS Grants Policy in accordance with the proposals within this report.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current VCS Grants Policy was set up following consideration of a report at the Executive Committee and Council meetings in January 2020, when a number of options were put forward. In 2022-23 the final year of the current VCS Grants Policy, £101k was available for the Main Grants Pot and applicants could apply for between £500 and £10k.
- 2.2 It was also agreed that there would be a Financial Advice and Problem Solving Grant which was granted to Bromsgrove and Redditch Citizens Advice (CA). This grant was awarded for three years 2020-23 and quarterly monitoring is required and subject to satisfactory information being provided payment is made to CA quarterly. Data covering the period 2021/22 and the first quarter of 2022/23, is attached at appendix 1.
- 2.3 It was agreed that in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and following consultation with the VCS sector, that two funding rounds would be held per year with £5k from each round being used for a separate Mental Health and Wellbeing pot. This continued for 2021-22, however for 2022-23 the Policy reverted to one round, whilst retaining the £10k for a separate Mental Health and Wellbeing pot.
- 2.4 Appendix 2 shows the grants which have been paid out during the three years that the current Policy has been in place. For 2022-23 a total of 31 applications were received for the Main Grants pot and 3 applications for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Pot, with an overall total of 18 grants being awarded (appendix 3 provides a summary of those grants and projects). It should be noted that only three applications were received for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Pot and that only £5k was paid out, with the remainder returned to the Main Grants Pot for distribution.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Should Members wish to continue to provide a VCS scheme it is proposed that £100k be allocated for each year, together with £50k for the Financial Advice and Problem Solving Grant, giving an annual total of £150k. This would be reviewed in three years. The removal of the concessionary rents element of the policy provides a saving of £25k per year.
- 3.2 See also paragraph 6.6 and 6.7 in respect of savings made to the budget via other sources of income to support the VCS.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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 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.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 Local Authorities must comply with the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code and Best Value duties.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

The Grants to Voluntary Bodies scheme supports work across this 3rd sector that support the following Council Strategic purposes:

- Aspiration, work & financial independence
- Living independent, active & healthy lives
- Communities which are safe, well maintained and green

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 It is proposed that should the scheme continue for 2023/24 an additional question would be included within the application form, although not included within the scoring process, which would ensure that applicants were giving consideration to the impact of Climate Change moving forwards.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 The VCS support many members of the community and add social value, alongside this the sector support community relations and cohesion. In submitting funding applications, organisations are asked “Who is your targeted audience and how do you ensure that your proposed project/service reaches them and will be open and accessible to all?” and the Panel score this element of the applications. Organisations are also asked, where appropriate, to confirm that they have an Equal Opportunities & Diversity Policy in place.

Operational Implications

- 6.2 The current Policy has generally worked well, although a number of recommendations have been put forward following a review by the Internal Audit Team and should the Policy be extended for future years, then those recommendations could be included within the Policy going forwards. The recommendations were:
- Limit how many times an organisation can apply, and review what organisations are being targeted and broaden the advertising. This was due to the funds being distributed in two rounds during 2019/20 and 2020/21. For 2021/22 and following consultation with BARN it was agreed to revert back to one round per year, which would partially address this concern, with an organisation only being able to make one application per funding pot in a 12 month period and the promotion of the scheme will be reviewed to ensure every opportunity is given to VCS organisations to apply for funding.
 - Consider the possibility of having a smaller grants fund with a less onerous application form for smaller organisations – a short online survey has been carried out with the VCS community and from the results it shows that they are in support of this suggestion. A summary of the findings of the survey can be found at appendix 4.
 - Review unsuccessful applications to ascertain if there are any trends that can be used for learning. Officers will carry out a review at the conclusion of each application process.

- 6.3 Due to the pandemic, it was agreed that the policy would set aside funds for projects specifically related to Mental Health. It is suggested that the policy should be amended to include an element of flexibility to allow grants to reflect the changing needs of the local community in the future. For example, the cost of living, suicide prevention, carbon reduction.
- 6.4 It is proposed that the VCS Grants Policy be amended to take account of the removal of the concessionary rents element and the above recommendations. This would include £100k for the main grant pot with a further £50k continuing to be used for the Financial Advice and Problem Solving Grant. Giving a total of £150k to support the VCS community. This would be an annual amount for the next 3 years.
- 6.5 Under the current Policy grants of £3k or less are paid in one instalment with larger grants being paid in 2 instalments, the second of which is subject to satisfactory monitoring.
- 6.6 Following consultation with the VCS community it is suggest that the terms of the policy continue to support both specific projects and the overall core costs for organisations.
- 6.7 In September 2018, the Executive Committee approved the establishment of a local lottery. As part of its commercialism programme, The Council has a contract in place with its External Lottery Manager (ELM), Gatherwell Ltd. who delivers the online lottery on the Council's behalf. On average this generates approximately £10k per annum.
- 6.8 Periodically the Council receives community donations through the procurement process, where a not-for-profit organisation it uses, chooses to distribute all operating surplus to its membership in the form of Community Donations. These donations are split proportionately between members based on their spend through the organisations' frameworks. On average this generates £8k.
- 6.9 The new UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda as presented to this Committee on 26 July 2022, contains two interventions that could support the VCS: E9: Impactful volunteering and/or social action projects and E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups. The process for any funding allocated to the VCS could be through the Grants Policy and offset against the Council's Grant budget.
- 6.10 To support commercialisation and the Council's financial position, it is proposed that funds received from the above three sources are put into

the following years Voluntary Sector Grants Budget. An associated savings is then made to the Council's VCS grant scheme.

- 6.11 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. The Grants Panel reviews the applications received and makes its recommendation to the ICCM, who make the final decision on whether to award the grant. The average annual funding is approximately £15k.

6.12 Options

Option 1 - Continue with current scheme (removing the element in respect of the concessionary rents) for a 3 year period. With a total grant pot of £150k, which would include £50k being available for a Financial Advice and Problem Solving Grant.

Option 2 – As detailed in option 1 above, but also to update the current policy and break down into 2 types of application – smaller £500 to £2k and larger over £2k up to £10k.

Option 3 - Something completely different.

Option 4 – As this is not a statutory service, it is determined that the Council no longer funds and operates a scheme.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 By reducing the amount available in the 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.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – CAB Monitoring Data 2021/22

Appendix 1a – CAB Monitoring Quarter 1 2022/23

Appendix 2 – Summary of grants paid 2020-2023

Appendix 3 – VCS Grants Awarded 2022-23

Appendix 4 – Results of VCS Online Survey

Background Papers

- VCS Grants Policy 2020-2023
- Financial Advice and Problem Solving Contract Quarterly Monitoring Reports submitted by Bromsgrove and District Citizens Advice 2020-2022.
- Various Executive Committee and Council agendas/minutes

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Matthew Dormer	
Lead Director / Head of Service	Judith Willis, Head of Community & Housing Services	21.09.22
Financial Services		
Legal Services	Mike Rowan, Interim Legal Services Manager	21.09.22
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)		
Climate Change Officer (if climate change implications apply)	Judith Willis, Head of Community & Housing Services	21.09.22