

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22 AUGUST 2019**

### **VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR**

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director, Children and Adults

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#### **Summary**

The Voluntary and Community Sector actively contributes to the strategic priorities of Medway Council and play a crucial role in improving the lives of Medway residents. Following a range of commissioning activities from Medway Council, the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested to hear directly from the sector about the current state of play for organisations in Medway.

This paper outlines the questions that have been asked of the sector, with the feedback scheduled to be circulated in advance of the Committee meeting, in order to inform the discussion.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is relevant to a number of Council policies and supports the Council to achieve its strategic priorities that underpin its work in the delivery of services to the people of Medway.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 At the Health and Wellbeing Board on 27 June 2017 a suggestion was made that, given the increasing reliance on the voluntary sector to provide services, the viability of this should be investigated. The possibility of this being discussed at the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been mentioned although no conclusion had been reached as to the most appropriate committee.

2.2 It was agreed at the Business Support Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 26 October 2017 that research to establish how other Unitary Councils manage their relationship with the voluntary sector would take place.

2.3 At the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 April 2018, a report provided the Committee with an overview of the research carried out in respect of other Councils, particularly Unitary Authorities, relationships with

the Voluntary and Community Sector. A future report was requested that updated on the implementation of a pilot reported in April 2018 to redirect existing funding for statutory services into the community.

- 2.4 At the last meeting of this Committee Members considered a report which provided an update on the recent commissioning activity for the Voluntary and Community Sector. The paper outlined the specific objectives of each provider delivering against one of five 'lots' and importantly how they have come together to form the VCS 'Better Together' Consortium. This newly established group have shared strategic aims and objectives, that seek to benefit the whole voluntary and community sector and all residents of Medway.
  - 2.5 The Committee agreed to further consider the issue of the voluntary sector again at its August meeting, including hearing directly from representatives of Medway Voluntary Action.
  - 2.6 In order to get a true reflection of views from the sector, Medway Voluntary and Action and the Public Health team have contacted all members of the VCS Better Together Consortium and the VCS Leaders Network to contribute their feedback. The VCS Leaders Network is a partnership of VCS organisations, that was created in 2015 to provide leaders of Medway's charity and voluntary sector organisations - large and small - with a stronger voice. The group is fully independent of Medway Council or any other public sector body, with an independent rotating chair person and currently has representation from 80 VCS organisations.
  - 2.7 The network representatives have been asked to provide feedback on the following questions:
    - How do you view the current financial sustainability of the voluntary and community sector in Medway as a whole?
    - How would you assess volunteering levels within the sector?
    - What is the relationship like between the sector and Medway Council?
    - What can Medway Council and other public agencies do, to better support the sector to deliver its objectives?
  - 2.8 The feedback from these two networks will be themed and the most commonly cited issues will be discussed at the committee meeting on August 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- 3. Risk management**
- 3.1 This report is for information only, however there is a risk that failing to engage more strategically with the VCS and to develop their capacity to further support community resilience, could result in a fragmented sector that is unable to respond to meet Medway's needs.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
Fragmented VCS that does not have capacity or resilience to meet the needs of Medway's population.	Failure to build capacity and take future opportunities to enhance the capacity and resilience of the sector	Council officers, members and health partners continue to work strategically through commissioning and other processes	C2

#### **4. Financial implications**

4.1 There are no financial implications to Medway Council directly arising from this report.

#### **5. Legal implications**

5.1 There are no legal implications arising as a direct result of this report.

#### **6. Recommendation**

6.1 The Committee is asked to note this report

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#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Feedback from VCS Better Together Consortium and the VCS Leaders Network (to follow)

#### **Background papers**

None