

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2021

VOLUNTARY SECTOR TASK GROUP

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Summary

At the 4 August 2020 Cabinet meeting, the Voluntary Sector Task Group recommendations, recommended for approval by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee, were presented for the sustainability and future relationship of the voluntary sector in Medway. The Cabinet noted these recommendations and in light of the impacts of COVID-19, instructed officers to undertake a full assessment of the recommendations and report back on the effect the pandemic has had on the needs of the sector (decision no. 91/2020 refers).

As part of the Voluntary Sector Recovery Cell, the strategy group has completed an impact assessment to assess the effect that COVID-19 has had to date on the third sector in Medway.

Taking into consideration the COVID-19 impact and the recommendations of the Task Group, the revised recommendations to Cabinet focused on developing a local lottery programme to provide a much needed new income generation stream for the voluntary sector, develop a written commitment that the Council, NHS and voluntary sector will work collaboratively on shared ambitions, look to develop a single point of contact for the third sector to contact the Council and to review the options for a Social Value Policy that allows the third sector to benefit from the Council's supply chain, which also factors in the climate change ambitions of the Authority.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1. The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) includes local community and voluntary groups, registered charities, foundations, trusts, social enterprises, and co-operatives. They may also be referred to as 'third sector' or 'civil society' organisations. The sector provides a range of services to different groups of service users. VCSE organisations share characteristics in the aims they pursue and are independent of government. They also reinvest any profit they make to continue to support their aims.

- 1.2. The VCSE support important social services that are vital to the local community, many of which would otherwise either have to be met by the Council or cause great hardship to many hard-pressed individuals and families. This often means that residents get help and support at an earlier stage that in turn delays or stops the need for residents to receive statutory services.

2. Background

- 2.1. At the 4 August 2020 Cabinet meeting, the Voluntary Sector Task Group recommendations, recommended for approval by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny (BSD O&S) Committee were presented for the sustainability and future relationship of the voluntary sector in Medway. The recommendations of the Task Group are set out in its report (Appendix 1). Cabinet noted these recommendations and in light of the impacts of COVID-19, instructed officers to undertake a full assessment of the recommendations and report back on the effect the pandemic has had on the needs of the sector (decision no. 91/2020 refers).
- 2.2. The Task Group recommendations focused on developing a compact between the Council and the sector, working with the Integrated Care Partnership to recruit local NHS support for the sector, explore the possibilities of section 106 funding to support the third sector, establish a single point of contact at the Council for the sector and develop a Social Value Policy as part of the commissioning process.

3. Revised COVID-19 voluntary sector impacts

- 3.1. The VCS is one of the Council's four strategic recovery cells alongside economy and infrastructure, health and social care and children and young people in respect of responding to the pandemic. Medway Council have also created a strategy group of Council, NHS and Voluntary Sector organisations, to build on success of the collective response effort throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and to recognise the important role the sector has played in supporting residents and communities.
- 3.2. An impact assessment has been completed (Appendix 2 to the report) by the strategy group which cited the following issues:
 - There has been a large financial impact on the sector due to a significant drop in income with a reduction in charitable and other funds to local organisations.
 - A large number of community organisations have had to change delivery models due to social distancing.
 - Many charities and voluntary sector groups have experienced a very high demand for their services since the COVID-19 outbreak, due to many residents needs changing and more support required.
 - The voluntary sector workforce (both paid and volunteers) have faced significant pressure and often their mental wellbeing has been affected.
 - Many older and experienced volunteers have had to cease volunteering because of the need to self-isolate and some may not return to the sector. This in numerical terms has been offset by many new volunteers coming forward but it is uncertain how many will be

able to continue volunteering once the present crisis is over. Volunteers also require vetting and many have training needs all of which place greater strain on the Sector's diminishing resources.

The impact assessment is regularly revisited and updated by the strategy group.

- 3.3. Based on these impacts the strategy group has developed an action plan that focuses on the following priorities:
- Collaborative working between the local authority, NHS and VCS on shared projects and agendas.
 - Reviewing NHS and Local Authority commissioning and contracts with the VCS.
 - Mapping third sector organisations that are at risk of failing.
 - Ensuring VCS and members of the public are represented as a key stakeholder in NHS and Council decisions.
 - Working in partnership with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity (BAME) communities to understand and reduce the negative impacts of COVID-19.
 - Collaboration on the digital inclusion agenda to support both residents and VCS organisations who may be digitally excluded.

4. Voluntary sector support options

- 4.1. Recognising the need for a range of sustainable funding sources and the uncertain financial position of local authorities, at the 17 November 2020 Cabinet meeting, Medway agreed to establish an online Medway Community Lottery to help fund discretionary support for the local voluntary and community sector and to enable such organisations to raise funds which will directly benefit local people and communities.
- 4.2. In order to maintain the excellent close working with a wide range of sector partners during the initial COVID-19 response and subsequent recovery phase, developing a voluntary sector liaison role that sits within the Public Health Team will help maintain a consistent dialogue. This role would then act as a go between for the sector and specific Council teams and departments, in addition to facilitating dialogue with relevant NHS partners. This post would also include giving practical advice to voluntary sector partners on negotiating the system, as well as identifying opportunities for future funding, some of which are not fully exploited at the present time. It would also develop and report to the Council a strategic overview of the sector and identify opportunities for greater collaboration between VCS organisations.
- 4.3. Experience elsewhere strongly suggests that a social compact should be developed between the NHS, Council and VCS to demonstrate our shared commitment to work in partnership. This will give confidence to the sector that we value their contributions, acknowledge the shared ambitions we have for residents and allow ongoing dialogue between the public and third sector. This document is not intended to be a contract that sector partners must sign up to work with the Council, or a financial document that details commissioning processes or services, but a formal written document acknowledging the shared benefit to residents of partnership working.

- 4.4. The new post would enable a review of options to establish a social value and climate change framework that encourages providers to support the Council's climate change aspirations and focuses on the opportunities to use the Council and NHS supply chain to benefit community organisations.

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Unsustainable local VCS	Medway Council can play an important role in supporting the VCS despite its own financial pressures. Failure to support the sector may result in organisations ceasing to exist, that has a detrimental impact on often vulnerable residents.	Use the VCS recovery cell to work with VCS partners to co-design a range of ways the system can be supported by the authority and NHS	B2

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. There are no direct finance implications as a result of this report. Any future requests for additional funding will be taken through the appropriate decision making process.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. Medway Council has a legal obligation under section 149 Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality, and foster good relations between those with a protected characteristic (pregnancy and maternity, age discrimination, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it.
- 7.2. There are no other legal implications arising from the recommendations. However, officers may need to consider the legal implications of some recommendations as the proposals are developed. These proposals have the potential to result in actions which may require approval of the Cabinet under the key decision rules or Full Council where there are resource implications.

8. Recommendations approved by Cabinet

- 8.1. At the 16 December meeting Cabinet agreed the revised priority action areas to support the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) as set out in section 4 of the report, including:
- i) Agreeing the development of a business case to create a voluntary sector liaison post.
 - ii) Agreeing the development of a written document between the Council, NHS and VCS that signifies its commitment to work in partnership.
 - iii) Agreeing the development of a social value policy and climate change partnership with the NHS and the VCS.

- 8.2. The Cabinet agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services and Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services to progress the priority action areas specified in paragraph 8.1 of the report, reporting back to the Cabinet to obtain any necessary approvals.
- 8.3. At the 17 November meeting Cabinet also agreed to the establishment of the Medway Community Lottery for the purpose of raising funds to support good causes, benefitting the residents of Medway.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 The Committee is asked to note this report.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Task Group Report
Appendix B – Medway VCS Impact Assessment

Background papers

None.