

Appendix A

Voluntary and Community Infrastructure Organisations Funding Review Phase One



Chairman's Introduction

This Task Force review is being undertaken in two phases:-

- Phase 1 covers VCS infrastructure challenges - October/November 2018
- Phase 2 is a broader review of CBC's relationship with the VCS sector – and will follow in early 2019.

Therefore, this initial report covers the review and findings for Phase 1

At the Corporate Resources OSC held on 20th September the meeting received presentations and supporting reports from three VCS organisations:-

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC)
Community and Voluntary Services (CVS)
Community Action Bedfordshire (CAB)

Central Bedfordshire Council have always valued the services from the many Central Bedfordshire charities and their volunteers. In 2016 it was agreed that the CBC continue supporting the VCS infrastructure organisations helping to achieve key outcomes in our towns and villages where:-

- People are supported to help themselves and others
- People of all ages be encouraged to volunteer
- Residents, community groups and town and parish councils have opportunities to do more in and for their communities.

This infrastructure grant funding was agreed for a period of three years, ending in March 2019

It was felt in 2016 that these organisations should become self-supporting at the end of the agreement.

These VCS organisations continue to provide individuals and other community groups with networking opportunities, training, specialist advice and information that becomes a vital bridge between residents, organisations and with Central Bedfordshire Council.

They reported that their work within communities had increased during the past three years and would face serious challenges if further funding was not sourced to cover infrastructure.

It was therefore agreed at Corporate Resources OSC to set up a task force to look at the relationship between CBC and the VCS organisations and ways of assisting and supporting these organisations in the future.

Cllr John Chatterley
Task Force Chairman

Table of contents

Page	Sections
1	Chairman's Introduction
2	Table of Contents
3	Background and purpose of the Review
3	What is the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Infrastructure Organisations
4	What are the Issues
4	Funding Arrangements
5	Outcomes – the role of 'building stronger and resilient communities'
7	What is the national context for supporting VCS Infrastructure?
8	Evidence gathered
9	Grants/contracts to VCS Infrastructure
10	What are the key elements of the Infrastructure role we value most?
11	Impact on not supporting the VCS Infrastructure organisations
12	Options considered for supporting VCS Infrastructure within the MTFP
13	Conclusions and recommendations.
	Attached Appendices pack.

Background to the Task Force Review

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CR OSC) commissioned the review following presentations at their meetings held July and September 2018 from Citizens Advice organisations in Central Bedfordshire and the Voluntary and Community sector Infrastructure organisations (VCS). The presentations and supporting statements are attached (**appendices 1-3**) The current funding agreement with the VCS Infrastructure organisations ends in March 2019, see appendix 4 and a reduction in funding for Citizen Advice (CA) starts in 2020. In view of this the Committee felt urgent consideration of the situation was needed and agreed a task force review.

Purpose of the Task Force Review

The purpose of the VCS review is to look at Central Bedfordshire Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector, the role and contribution of the infrastructure support organisations and whether funding can be found from within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), explore the nature and characteristics of the relationship with the wider voluntary and community sector, how it is supported, its relevance and importance in the context of our corporate priorities, government policy and community outcomes. The review is to be completed in two phases.

Phase 1 of the review looks specifically at the future funding of the three Infrastructure Organisations and deliver a report to Corporate Resources OSC at its meeting on 29 November 2018 and subsequently to Executive on 04 December 2018.

Phase 2 will be a bigger review that will look at CBC's relationship with the wider voluntary and community sector including the role of Citizen's Advice in that relationship and how the relationship helps the Council to deliver against its corporate priorities and the biggest risks to community cohesion.

The Task Force, comprising two Corporate Resources Members, were appointed to undertake the first phase of the review.

What is the role of Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Organisations?

Infrastructure organisations support and encourage the wider voluntary and community sector (vcs) on a range of capacity building needs helping the sector to develop and thrive. Their services comprise the provision of advice and information including funding searches, constitutions, policies, charity registration, community buildings, insurance and charity bank accounts, management and governance. Training on a range of issues including

safeguarding; GDPR, volunteer recruitment, placement and support; sector representation and brokerage; and community development activity.

There are 3 infrastructure organisations operating in Central Bedfordshire

- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
- Community Action Bedfordshire
- Community and Voluntary Services.

What are the issues?

The challenge for Phase 1 of the review was to explore the impact and implications of ending the funding agreement with the Infrastructure organisations and whether this could be mitigated within the current MTFP. Members of the OSC felt that an 'invest to save' approach should be explored following the presentations from the VCS Infrastructure organisations which explained their role and contribution to build strong and resilient communities through supporting community and voluntary sector organisations and volunteer effort. Citizens Advice informed Members of their contribution to supporting vulnerable adults and families with a range of advice and support and their contribution to the public purse. Phase 2 of the review will explore the nature of the relationship between CBC and the voluntary and community sector for example where it assists the Council to meet its statutory obligations, corporate objectives and tackle the risks to community cohesion and consider what needs to be in place to sustain the relationship.

Funding arrangements - how CBC is supporting this role.

The core funding to the 3 infrastructure organisations is administered through a single grant agreement which was set up in 2016 and is worth £213,400 over 3 years (it averages at £23,000 to each organisation per annum). The grant funding contributes to their core and overall running costs and enables them to secure other funding from the delivery of contracts.

The VCS Infrastructure organisations knew the funding agreement would end in March 2019 and were allowed flexibility to flatline the funding over the 3 years to maintain a consistent service over the 3 years.

The funding agreement (below) ends in March 2019.

Year	£Value
Year One 2016 / 17	£98,133.79
Year Two 2017 / 18	£71,133.79
Year Three 2018 / 19	£44,133.79

Outcomes – the role in supporting ‘Building Strong and Resilient Communities.

The three infrastructure organisations attend quarterly review meetings and supply a written report every 6 months against outcomes described in their Funding Agreement (**appendix 4**).

The grant funding supports the three organisations to deliver services to other organisations and/or the public. The Grant helps the Council to achieve the key outcomes in the Council’s Five Year Plan ensuring Towns and Villages are sustainable places where:-

- Residents are supported to help themselves and others
- Residents of all ages will be encouraged to volunteer and
- Residents, community organisations and town and parish councils have the opportunity to do more in and for their communities.

The table below demonstrates the ‘immediate’ outcomes achieved by the infrastructure organisations over 2 years of their grant, whilst the ‘ultimate’ impact and true value of the outcomes is felt by the vcs and volunteer organisations they have supported.

Outcome	Performance 2016/17 17/18
O 1 - Increase the number of people volunteering	1497 enquiries brokered and 241 volunteers placed
O 2 - Increase the amount of volunteering individuals do	
O 3 - Communities doing more for themselves	12 new groups set up, 229 groups supported with advice and technical assistance
O 4 - Communities delivering local services	600 households supported through online social platform Community led planning, local greenspace enhancement,
O 5 - Community enablers and active citizens	56 community building committees given advice
O 6 - Maximise the use of physical assets to support local communities	

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charities (BRCC) delivers community development across Bedfordshire. They support town and villages in Central Bedfordshire and help to run schemes to build local communities and create resilient and self-sustaining areas. They are affiliated to the national Action with Communities in Rural England network and provide a range of advice

and support to villages to manage their community buildings on a sustainable footing.

The additional schemes currently run by BRCC on behalf of the Council include:-

- 38 Good Neighbour/village care schemes. £46,880 grant payment has been allocated to Good Neighbour Schemes, volunteers and staff community connectors by Adult Social Care.
- Green infrastructure projects such as Biggleswade Greenwheel funded by S106 (circa £176,000 In 2017/18)
- Support to parishes preparing Neighbourhood Plans and Housing Needs Assessments (£4,000 and which levers additional support from parish councils)
- A new social prescribing project- supported by Adult Social Care and NHS

Community Action Bedfordshire provides a volunteer engagement, placement and support service, community development, advice and information to the voluntary / community sector.

Community Action has developed new areas of expertise that include the management of a community facility on Sandhills new estate in Leighton Buzzard and associated community mobilisation as well as supporting long term unemployed and those struggling to access the labour market. More recently Community Action have secured a contract with Leighton-Linslade Town Council to manage a community café and are seeking investment (S106) or loan finance to equip and refurbish the community facility.

Other contracted work on behalf of CBC includes:

- support to unemployed to access training and employment funded by CBC's Bedfordshire Employment and Skills Service).
- Timebanking project supported by £15,000 grant from CBC SCHH

Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) supports the sector in Central Bedfordshire and Bedford. This support includes a bi – monthly newsletter to over 1,000 local organisations and contacts with funding updates, forthcoming training, events and meetings, partnership information and news relevant to local vcs organisations such as employment opportunities or local campaigns. They deliver outreach sessions to promote volunteering and volunteer campaigns e.g. the recent Volunteer into Care campaign. They provide Impartial advice and information on tendering, legal agreements, commissioning and procurement support and represent the sector in partnership arenas.

CVS and CA working collaboratively, recently supported vcs organisations to access the Councils community grant scheme funded by the Better Care Fund. It was effective by enabling smaller groups to come forward with innovative ideas to support vulnerable people.

What is the national context for supporting VCS Infrastructure?

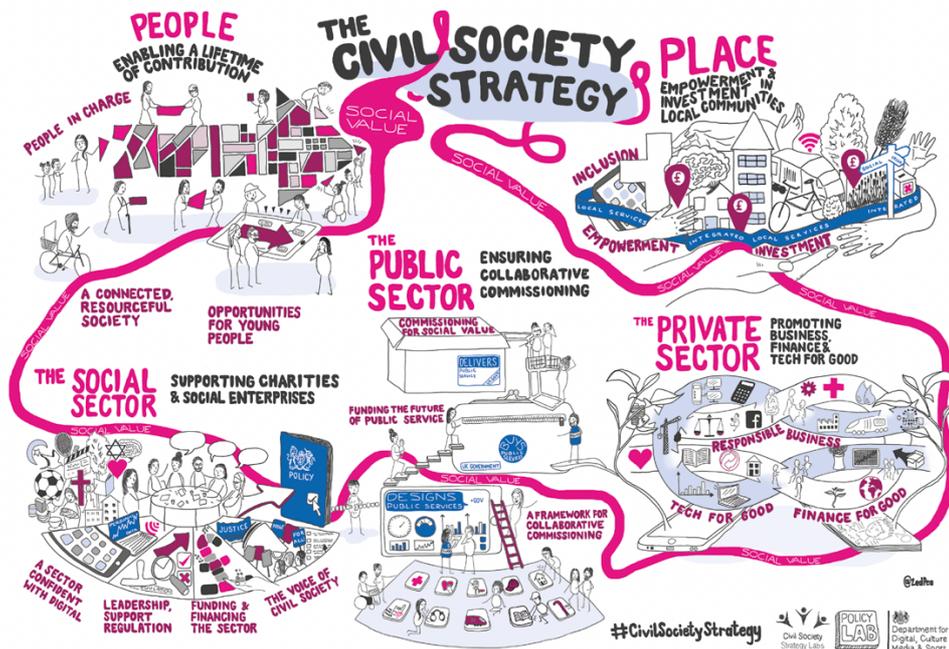
The Government published its Civil Society Strategy ¹ – Building a Future that works for everyone, in the summer of 2018.

The Government defines Civil Society as *referring to individuals and organisations when they act with the primary purpose of creating social value, independent of state control. Enriched lives and a fairer society for all.*

The government are beginning an ambitious, evolving work programme to help build a strong society based on Five Foundations

- People
- Places
- Social sector
- Private sector
- Public sector

More time is needed to review the 123 page strategy and the task force recommend that it should be referred to phase 2 of this review and explore the impact of the Strategy and the role for infrastructure organisations to assist in developing or delivering the work programme at the local level.



¹ Civil Society Strategy

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732765/Civil_Society_Strategy_-_building_a_future_that_works_for_everyone.pdf

What are other Local Authorities doing to support VCS Infrastructure

Task Force undertook a web based review of those Authorities that lead the way in their support of the voluntary sector and reviews undertaken to support Infrastructure organisations.

Cornwall's [voluntary sector forum](#) embraces all aspects of voluntary and community work.

Warwickshire are set up in a similarly way to Cornwall and details are available on their [website](#).

North Yorkshire have completed a [Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure support review](#) .

[The King's Fund's](#) advice on the role of the voluntary and community sector in health and care.

An approach adopted by [Manchester](#) and the [consultation](#) work undertaken on funding for the voluntary and community sector.

Evidence gathering

Voluntary and Community Infrastructure organisations were visited by the Task Force on the following occasions: -

Date	Occasion	
04 October 2017	Task Force Meeting	
15 October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tracy Cowan and Cliff Andrew Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	Visit
16 October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Martin Trinder and Jane Owens Community and Voluntary Service	Visit
16 October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">John Gelder Community Action Bedfordshire	Visit
30 October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Task Force Meeting with Officers	
06 November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Task Force Meeting	

At each visit the task force posed a series of questions (**appendix 5**) to better understand their role and contribution to CBC priorities in particular building stronger and resilient communities and the implications of the ending of the funding agreement and the implications of ending the funding agreement. The summary findings of each interview are set out below:

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

- Collaborates with other infrastructure organisations and prevents duplication and enables clear roles and expertise
- Receives core grant funding and enables it to access to other funding sources (Parish Councils, charges, S106 funded projects, CBC contracts e.g. Good Neighbour Scheme and Social Prescribing)
- Nurtures and supports significant volunteer effort circa 1000+ across Central Beds.
- Community / Village Hall advice service at risk

Community and Voluntary Service

- There is no national funding for infrastructure organisations.
- Is the result of 4 mergers between 2006-2009.
- Receives core grant funding from BBC, Harper Trust, LBC and rent income from building
- Does not compete for vcs contracts to maintain their support role.
- Provides Volunteer brokerage service (recruitment and placement)
- Provides key service area - Funding and Governance advice and information to VCS.
- Provides leverage helping the VCS to attract some £200,000 of external funding per annum.

Community Action Bedfordshire

- Other funding sources under contract include BESS/LBC but end in March 2018/2019
- CA will face significant financial challenges and possible closure
- Provides a Volunteer brokerage role
- Delivers specific projects – Timebanking , Café Connect
- Won tender to deliver Kiosk in the park £110,000 capital investment needed
- CBC will lose volunteer brokerage, advice and information to safeguard the community / voluntary sector and risk reputational damage
- Need £23,000 core funding to maintain a service

Grants / Contracts to VCS Infrastructure

As part of the review the Task force undertook an analysis of grants and contracts held by CBC with the VCS Infrastructure organisations in 2017/18 and 2018/19

Directorate	Infrastructure organisation	Contract / Grant	Amount 2017/18
Business and Regeneration	Community Action	Work Club	£41,025 (completed)
Business and Regeneration (S106)	BRCC	Cycleways and Green Infrastructure	£175,816.92 (Ongoing)
Business and Regeneration	CVS	Youth Volunteering contract	£55,800 (completed)

Business and Regeneration	BRCC	Neighbourhood Planning support	£5,000
SCHH	Community Action	Time-banking	£15,000
SCHH	BRCC	Good Neighbour scheme	£46,880
SCHH	Community Action	VCS support	£7,500 (completed)
SCHH	CVS	VCS Support	£3,000 (completed)

Directorate	Infrastructure organisation	Contract / Grant	Amount 2018/19
Business and Regeneration	Community Action	Café Connect	£62,000
Business and Regeneration (S106)	BRCC	Cycleways and Green Infrastructure	On going
Business and Regeneration	BRCC	Neighbourhood Planning support	£5,000
SCHH	BRCC	Good Neighbour scheme & pilot Social Prescribing	£106,880
SCHH	Community Action	Timebanking	£15,000

What are the key elements of the Infrastructure role we value most?

The core funding which contributes to core running costs, enables each organisation to bid for other pieces of work

- **Market place**

CBC relies significantly on the infrastructure organisations as demonstrated by the table above. Furthermore, the Directorates commission a range of services from the wider voluntary and community sector and this market place of voluntary and community organisations and micro enterprises is supported by the Infrastructure organisations that is well connected to and can respond to requests, tenders, grants for work. Importantly Council officers and Councillors make referrals to these organisations when contacted for advice and guidance by vcs organisations.

- Volunteering**

The Infrastructure organisations maintain banks of volunteers and ongoing contact connecting them to volunteering activities in local communities and within local groups as well as within Central Bedfordshire Council. Volunteers are engaged in our Libraries and Country Parks, Community Transport providers.

This is very much consistent with the Councils desire to support and celebrate more volunteering e.g. through the annual Cheering Volunteering Awards and celebration event.
- Brokerage and representation**

VCS Infrastructure acts as a broker with the rest of the sector helping to create and sustain collaborative working, networks, relationships, connections between organisations, groups and communities.
- Setting up /Training / Management and Governance**

VCS Infrastructure help organisations respond to local needs and issues by supporting how to set up a group, legal status, if required - DBS checks, governance and accountability and funding advice. Training is provided for example on compliance with GDPR and safeguarding , therefore helping the sector to stay safe in how it operates.

Central point for wider sector, trusted by sector.
- Added Value and skills**

VCS infrastructure is supporting the wider sector of community groups, voluntary organisations and micro- enterprises which are essential to the wellbeing of our communities helping to ensure ongoing cohesion, resilience and self reliance within our communities.

Impact of not supporting the Infrastructure role

The impact of CBC not supporting the infrastructure role through core grant funding was described by the organisations in their presentations to the OSC. The lack of a strategic infrastructure role would have implications for delivery of the Councils priorities, in particular reduced capacity of communities in Central Bedfordshire to be resilient and to do things for themselves, stability for the contracted services supporting vulnerable groups in our communities, the leverage of external funding and volunteer effort. Specifically, the impact of no VCS Infrastructure in Central Bedfordshire may result in the following scenarios;

- Negative impact on Good Neighbour Schemes and support to community building committees
- CVS will stop coverage in Central Bedfordshire
- CA will face significant financial challenges and possible closure.
- Overall a loss of skills, expertise, community insight and local knowledge

- Up to £145,000 of local funding over three years not secured by Central Bedfordshire based VCS organisations.
- A weakened voluntary and community sector forced to access support outside of Central Bedfordshire, incurring greater costs.
- No local support to advise on correct legal structures for the services that groups wish to provide.
- Groups and volunteers would perhaps default to CBC and other statutory services for support and volunteer brokerage
- VCSE organisations will find it harder to recruit, train, support and manage volunteers if they do not have good practice systems and processes in place.
- Loss of interface with the voluntary and community sector.
- Loss of voice for the voluntary sector and representation.
- Reputational damage
- CBC will see a rise in enquiries for funding which CBC staff will have to resource and manage, more than 50 organisations are supported each year.
- Barriers to smaller organisations and groups from engaging with the public service commissioning process
- Fewer VCSE organisations will be aware of local adult and children safeguarding arrangements. Greater risk of appropriate safeguarding alerts not being made.
- CBC staff will need to increase the level of outreach they provide in order to fulfil their duty (Children's Act 2004) to 'promote cooperation' with relevant organisations 'that are engaged in activities in relation to children in the authority's area.'
- Loss of oversight of capabilities and needs of local groups to promote high quality services driven by good governance and strategic change management e.g. when funding models change from grant to personalisation
- More challenging for Central Bedfordshire residents to be aware of and access the range of formal volunteering opportunities and get support to volunteer and choose the right opportunity.
- Central Bedfordshire Council will likely find it harder to engage and consult with the local VCSE sector when they are required to do so. Additional staff time will be required in order to undertake any engagement or consultation.

Options considered for supporting VCS Infrastructure within the MTFP

As a result of the review a number of options emerged that could help to maintain the relationship with VCS Infrastructure in the short and longer term and these are listed below.

If agreed these should be carried forward and researched in Phase 2 of the VCS Review.

- Merger of the three organisations to save on overheads and running costs is unrealistic given their individual uniqueness and specialisations. However further specialisation in and commissioning of service delivery should be explored to avoid duplication and to ensure the biggest risks to community cohesion are addressed.
- An Asset led approach such as rent holidays or asset transfer should be explored to maximise social value.
- An efficient means of securing contributions from other organisations e.g. Parishes/ NHS should be explored
- Other 'in kind' assistance from CBC such as collecting funds from parishes enabling them and groups in their areas to access Infrastructure and Citizens Advice support at any time.
- In recognition of government aspirations in the Civil Society strategy explore Spacehive / Crowd funding as a means to engage the private sector in VCS activity.

Conclusion

Phase 1

- The VCS Infrastructure organisations help to ensure a local thriving and robust voluntary sector without which could have a significant impact on the viability and performance of the wider community and voluntary sector, potentially putting at risk community cohesion as well as contracts and arrangements CBC and other organisations have with VCS organisations.
- As a result of their investigations the Task Force were able to identify that £69,000 per annum (based on current financial arrangement of £23,000 per organisation per annum) would provide sufficient funds to maintain the current level of infrastructure support to VCS groups in Central Bedfordshire, for 12 months only for the period April 2019 – March 2020 whilst Phase 2 is undertaken.
- S106- Welcome Packs / Community Facility funding could support community development activity in new communities.
- Therefore, the Phase 2 review is required to look at the relationship between CBC and the voluntary and community sector, how it is supported, its relevance and importance in the context of our corporate priorities, government policy, community cohesion and community outcomes to create a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy.

Phase 2

- Identify the services delivered by the VCS that ensure the Council meets its statutory obligations and costs attached.
- Consider opportunities to move towards a commissioning arrangement
- Explore the role of Town and Parish Councils in community cohesion
- Investigate the support the voluntary sector receives from the NHS, Police Fire and Ambulance services.

- Continue its work to benchmark and learn about ‘good practice’ nationally.

Enquiry Recommendations

Recommendations	
1.	The Task Force fully support financial payment to the Infrastructure Organisations for 2019/20 at a total of £69,000.
2.	Subject to the support of Executive, Phase 2 be undertaken by the Task Force.

Appendices	
1.	Combined VCS Presentations
2.	2(a) BRCC supporting papers 2(b) CVS supporting papers 2(c) CA supporting papers
3.	VCS Terms and Conditions of Grant
4.	Questions put to VCS organisations.

Enquiry Team membership: -

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