

Meeting Community Select Committee
Portfolio Area Equalities and Community Safety
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REVIEW OF VCS STRATEGY 2012-2015

Authors Neil Baker | 2247
Contributor Rob Gregory | 2749
Lead Officers Rob Gregory | 2749
Contact Officer Neil Baker | 2247

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The report summarises the effectiveness of the Voluntary Community Sector Strategy 2012-2015, and the subsequent related objectives.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the committee note the outcome of the review and the effectiveness of the strategy during the period 2012-2015.
- 2.2 That the committee consider some of the opportunities in developing local VCS support moving forward in relation to recommissioning, grant delivery and service level agreements.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The VCS strategy originated from the 2011-12 Scrutiny Topic Group review into developing a strategy for the Third Sector (see appendix D).
- 3.2 This initial review built upon the work undertaken by a voluntary sector summit and topic group where a number of VCS representatives were

interviewed. This work aimed to build a clear VCS strategy where the ethos of cooperative working was integral to the councils work as an enabler of community action.

- 3.3 The VCS strategy was envisioned to be an active document and not another strategy that 'sits on a shelf'
- 3.4 The work was handed over to officers by the topic group in 2011 due to restructures in scrutiny work.
- 3.5 The completed VCS strategy encompassed the strategic and operational delivery of VCS partnership and development from 2012 -2015, setting four clear priorities to be measured via objectives. These aims were as follows:
 - 1. Voice and Representation
 - 2. Sustainability
 - 3. Harnessing Corporate giving
 - 4. Volunteering
- 3.6 The VCS strategy currently lacks clear ownership, but has sat as a core document on our website under 'Invest in Stevenage'
- 3.7 The VCS strategy included bold ambitions for the council's relationship with the voluntary sector, with some actions taken forward, however the strategy has lacked clear action planning to realise its full potential
- 3.8 In the period of the strategy 2012-2015 the voluntary sector has continued to adapt to national challenges in sustainable funding. These challenges have increased competition between VCS providers, and led to mergers, charity closure and a large reduction in medium sized organisations, in favour of micro and national charities.
- 3.9 Within Stevenage tapered funding has been introduced in community centre and local charity funding, with many grants ending in 2020. This reduction in grants will lead to further discussions on sustainability of current VCS involvement. In addition to grants we also have a number of local charities benefiting from rent in kind policies, allowing secure tenancy of Stevenage Borough Council buildings
- 3.10 Swingate house development will lead to the displacement of a range of VCS services while development takes place, this process will lead to concerns and uncertainty in the sector which will need to be closely managed and supported
- 3.11 As a cooperative council Stevenage is committed to ensuring a positive and vibrant VCS sector that works in cooperation with the council in achieving the best results for our local communities

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The review found that that VCS support needs renewing and refreshing in light of changes in the sector and the opportunities present within FTFC planning.
- 4.2 Opportunities and challenges in the development of future VCS support need full consideration to ensure the council enables VCS growth and development while protecting reducing public resources and ensuring value for money in partnerships

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The review enables the council to explore fully the current support offered to the VCS sector in Stevenage, including current grants offered and larger scale advice service contracts worth 160k per year. Tapered funding and the potential impact on current VCS delivery will also need full exploration

Legal Implications

- 5.2 At this stage there are no legal implications, however the sustainability of the current VCS offer in light of funding reductions will need to be explored against our current contracts, and where contracts do not exist full consideration should be given to ensure legal arrangements are in place that measure the effectiveness of our partnerships

Risk Implications

- 5.3 At this stage risk is low, further risk assessment will be required dependant on outcomes, and the council will need to fully consider the potential effect on the local VCS sector of any changes in funding

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.4 At this stage there are no direct equality and diversity implications, however the importance of the sector in ensuring a diversity of activity that directly supports many of our community members who hold a protected characteristic cannot be under estimated. The sector also clearly supports the social economic development of the town, these factors must be given full consideration in planning how the council supports the VCS sector and commissions services moving forward.

Service Delivery Implications

- 5.5 Service Delivery implications have been considered with work undertaken on VCS strategy, at this stage service delivery will not be directly affected, however recommissioning and development of a more robust VCS support offer will need further work in identifying potential impact.

Safeguarding Children Implications

- 5.6 Safeguarding implications of VCS engagement and partnership will need full assessment in line with contracts and grant offers, this should be completed in line with council and national safeguarding policies and procedures

APPENDICES

- A VCS Strategy 2012-2015
- B VCS review presentation July 2018
- C Hertfordshire Compact
- D Emerging recommendations of the Support for the Third Sector 2011 Topic Group