

Report to: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 6 February 2020

Title: Voluntary Sector Support

Report of: Ian Fitzpatrick, Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Regeneration and Planning).

Cabinet member: Councillor Johnny Denis, Cabinet Member for Communities and Customers

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: To provide the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how funding provided by the Council in 2019/20 has been spent by funded organisations, note the proposed review to policy and to note the planned grant allocation for 2020/21.

Decision type: Key

Officer recommendation(s): That the committee:

- (1) Note the planned allocation of funding to voluntary organisations for 2020/21, as set out in paragraph 3.19.
- (2) Note the proposed review of the Council's grant policy in line with the new corporate plan, with recommendations for potential options being reported to a future meeting of the Cabinet.
- (3) Note that any alteration to the grants policy will not impact on current 3 year funding plan, so as to minimise impacts on planned activities by Council's funded partners.

Reasons for recommendations:

- (1) To allow continuation of funds to key voluntary organisations to enable the programmed delivery of services in the district.
- (2) To enable Members to consider whether they wish any changes to be made in the way that grants are allocated in the future.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The council makes funding available to voluntary organisations each year in line with its Voluntary Sector Grants Policy (appendix 1). The council recognises and highly values the significant contributions that the community and voluntary sector play in delivering services to our residents. Partnership working is a key priority for Lewes District, and the council is committed to funding and supporting voluntary and community organisations across Lewes District. This provides a cost effective way of delivering some aspects of the council's objectives.
- 1.2 The grants proposed at paragraph 3.19 are a continuation of those agreed by Cabinet in 2019. These were awarded as part of a three year grant agreement (running from 2019/ 20 to 2021/ 22), subject to compliance with the terms of the agreement and satisfactory delivery of the services.
- 1.3 All voluntary organisation grants are subject to individual grant agreements that cover the specific services funded and specify the outcomes to be delivered. These provide a mechanism for the council to monitor the organisations' performance and delivery through written reporting and review meetings. The agreements specify the amount of funding, what activities the grant can be used for, minimum legal and service requirements, monitoring and evaluation processes. All grant agreements contain clauses enabling review, termination and/or renegotiation of terms, should the need for the service change or to address any performance issues encountered.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to agree the funding recommendations outlined in paragraph 3.19. As noted above, 2020/21 marks the second year of the three year grant cycle, and will sustain the positive relationships the Council enjoys with its grant recipients who will continue to provide these important services.
- 2.2 Cabinet members have expressed a wish to revisit the process by which the Council awards grants. At its meeting in February 2019, Cabinet agreed in principle to fund a three year programme of grants, subject to available funds and satisfactory performance. 2020/21 marks the second of the three years, in which case any review and change to current policy would need to be agreed ahead of the third year, so as not to delay the grants process. If Cabinet wishes

such a review to be undertaken, a report on this subject will be prepared for a future meeting.

3 Outcome expected and performance management

3.1 Monitoring data is provided by funded organisations on a quarterly basis, and received within a month after the quarter is completed. All figures below are for the year to date, at the point of writing this report.

Lewes District Citizens Advice Bureau

3.2 The Lewes District Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) helps people resolve their legal, financial and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice. The CAB has reported that the types of issues being presented by clients are becoming more complex. Figures to date show that 1,910 residents used the service with at least 20% being council tenants. Of these, the largest proportion of enquiries related to welfare benefits including Universal Credit.

3.3 Over half of clients are recorded as having a disability and/ or long term health condition. 525 clients have been supported with issues relating to Personal Independence Payments to date.

3.4 The service also reported that many people seeking debt advice are living with a 'negative balance sheet'. This means that despite support to budget and manage finances, their essential outgoings are not covered by income.

3VA

3.5 3VA provides support for voluntary and community organisations across the Eastbourne, Lewes District and Wealden areas of East Sussex. They provide a range of practical support to charities and community groups including start-up support, funding advice, help with governance and training. Their services help to inform, sustain and develop the voluntary and community sector in the area.

3.6 This year so far, 3VA has provided information, advice, guidance and extended support to 42 groups based in the district including Lewes Open Door and Lewes District Dementia Action Alliance. 3VA continue to publish a weekly e-news to subscribers which updates on current funding opportunities, consultations, training, events and jobs within the sector. Ongoing work includes training provision and the development and support of networks, as they continue to organise and facilitate quarterly Community Network meetings in the Lewes & Havens and Seaford localities.

3.7 Following the council's commitment to address the climate emergency, 3VA has

been asked to support organisations making bids for funding relating to sustainability projects. It is expected that work supporting such groups will continue to form an important part of 3VA's work in the coming year.

- 3.8 As part of their monitoring reports, 3VA highlight current trends and needs. There has been a focus on reducing social isolation, addressing hate crime and supporting people to manage their health independently.

Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS)

- 3.9 AiRS is the Rural Community Council for Sussex. The organisation's purpose is to provide practical help and support to rural communities across both East and West Sussex, enabling them to be vibrant living and working places. The funding provided by the council is specifically to support the organisation's work with the village halls and community buildings within Lewes district.
- 3.10 The council awards a grant of £3,500 each year and receives a mid-year and annual monitoring report. Currently AiRS provides information and support to seven subscriber groups managing village halls in Barcombe, Cooksbridge, Ditchling, Kingston, Newick, Ringmer and Wivelsfield, all of whom can expect to receive 12 monthly newsletters across the year. AiRS will be repeating the county conference for village halls and community buildings, the last of which included workshops and talks around Managing Risk, Quality Assurance and Overcoming Loneliness & Social Isolation, plus training on Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) which took place in February this year. They continue to act as secretariat for the Sussex Community Buildings Advisory Group which meets three times a year, and will be facilitating local participation in the National Village Halls Survey and Village Halls Week in January 2020.

Sompriti

- 3.11 Sompriti aims to 'build strength through diversity' by supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals and communities across the Lewes District. They focus on community development through engagement and events, and are able to provide some individual support through, for example, bi-lingual advocacy and increased employability.
- 3.12 To date, Sompriti has supported 20 individual BAME residents in the Lewes district to access a range of employability, advice, health and wellbeing, and social activities including the International Food Fair and translator training. They continued with the project to increase voter registration within BAME communities, encouraging individuals to take part in the democratic process. Additionally there has been community development support with the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme, a Gypsy Traveller Women's Group, and the Budget Bites cookery course from which a book of recipes was produced.

- 3.13 The remaining quarter will see Sompriti continue with the 'Grub Club', its information and advice service through the Community Hub in Newhaven and a World Music event within the district.

Lewes District Churches Homelink

- 3.14 Homelink provides housing deposits and rent in advance to homeless households and those at risk of homelessness referred by the council's housing needs officers. LDC's grant is supplemented by a grant of £13,200 from East Sussex County Council to administer the Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme (DESSS) fund for the district. The service is a key part of the council's work to prevent and relieve homelessness; officers routinely refer those households who are not covered by the council's own statutory duties for rehousing, such as those who do not have a priority need for rehousing under the terms of the Housing Act 1996. Under the terms of the grant agreement, this funding may only be used for essential costs, such as rent deposits.
- 3.15 Homelink has provided this service to 44 households so far this year, equating to £67,816. In addition to the funding provided by the council, loans are financed by repayments of existing and previous loans, and from the organisations own fundraising.

Funding to meet the needs of Universal Credit claimants – update

- 3.16 At its meeting in February 2019, Cabinet agreed to allocate a second year's fund of £30,000 to allow Brighton Housing Trust (BHT) to continue with the work started the previous year. This service will continue until 31 August 2020 (as the project has not run concurrently with the financial year).
- 3.17 Given the slow start to the Universal Credit roll-out and the number of people seeking support specifically for help with this, BHT has worked with council officers to seek out those with wider needs, including tenants at risk of losing their homes because of rent arrears, which overall is 10 to date.
- 3.18 BHT report that they received 26 referrals in September 2019 compared to just 2 referrals in September the previous year. 70 direct referrals to the service were made by the council and there were also 27 self-referrals. BHT estimate that through their involvement an additional £371,373 UC has been secured for their clients through the year.
- 3.19 **Proposed Grant Allocations for April 2020 to March 2021**

Organisation	2019/ 20 grant (£)	2020/ 21 proposed (£)
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Lewes District Citizens Advice	Core Grant 140,340 (HRA benefits advice) 17,500 (HRA money advice) <u>17,500</u> <u>175,340</u>	Core Grant 140,340 (HRA benefits advice) 17,500 (HRA money advice) <u>17,500</u> <u>175,340</u>
3VA	28,000	28,000
Action in Rural Sussex	3,500	3,500
SCDA – Sompriti	10,000	10,000
Lewes District Churches Homelink	11,800	11,800
BHT Advice – Universal Credit service	30,000	15,000

4 Consultation

- 4.1 This report is due for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee on 6 February 2020, and their views will be reported as a verbal update to Cabinet on 10 February.

5 Corporate plan and council policies

- 5.1 The proposed allocations comply with the council's Voluntary Sector Grants Policy and will contribute to the Corporate Plan strategic outcomes for resilient, healthy and engaged communities underpinning our work with our voluntary sector partners delivering key advice and support services.

6 Business case and alternative option(s) considered

- 6.1 Grant aid to voluntary and community organisations enables the council to meet the needs of residents whilst maximising the contributions of voluntary activity. This approach provides excellent value for money and reduces the demand on the council's own services and resources.
- 6.2 Regular monitoring and reviews are carried out to ensure best use is made of council funds, and that only those organisations which provide high quality services and value for money are awarded funding.

7 Financial appraisal

- 7.1 In line with the three year grant agreement previously approved by Cabinet, the 2020/21 budget includes funding for the Voluntary Sector Grant proposals set out in 3.19 above.

8 Legal implications

8.1 Under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 and section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council has power to make community grants to the voluntary sector.

8.2 Consideration must be given to the rules on state aid, which is support in any form (financial or in kind) from any level of government – central, regional or local – which gives a business or another entity a benefit in the single European market that could not be obtained during the normal course of business.

The legal position on state aid, in the context of grants to voluntary sector bodies, is set out in the policy document appended to this report.

Subject to the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill being enacted, the UK is scheduled to leave the EU on 31 January 2020, followed by a transition period lasting until 31 December 2020, although the joint EU-UK Committee may, before 1 July 2020, adopt a single, one-off decision to extend the transition period by up to one or two years.

During transition, the State Aid rules will continue to apply as now and will be subject to control by the EU Commission as at present. After transition, it is anticipated that EU State Aid rules will transpose into UK domestic legislation, with only technical modifications to correct deficiencies with the transposed EU law, to ensure the regime continues to operate effectively in a domestic context.

Lawyer consulted 07.01.20

Legal ref: 008859-LDC-OD

9 Risk management implications

9.1 If Cabinet does not allocate the funding it has budgeted for grants there are risks both to the council's reputation in relation to this high profile activity and to the council's own services which could experience increased demand from customers who would normally use those services provided by voluntary organisations.

9.2 Reviewing the council's policies and performance on a regular basis provides an assurance that the council is fulfilling its functions in a way that complies with current legislation.

10 Equality analysis

10.1 An Equality & Fairness analysis has been completed and is available from the report author. It surmised that although current policy seeks to support protected groups who may face barriers to services or community facilities, the conclusion of the Universal Credit advice funding to BHT, as described in paragraph 3.16, may disproportionately impact those facing financial hardship. This may, however, be mitigated by officers signposting residents in need of support around UC to Lewes District Citizens Advice, although this is capacity dependant.

In addition the analysis acknowledged that the recommendations in this report seek to:

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a characteristic and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who do not share it.

11 Environmental sustainability implications

11.1 The recommendations in this report will not impact on sustainability.

12 Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Voluntary Sector Grants Policy

13 Background papers

None