

Harborough District Council

Report to the Cabinet Meeting of 10 October 2022



Title:	Voluntary Sector Strategy Review
Status:	Public
Key Decision:	Yes
Report Author:	Jacqui Evans – Director of Communities and Wellbeing
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Simon Whelband, Wellbeing, Communities & Housing
Appendices:	Appendix A – Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-2027

Executive Summary

The Voluntary Sector Strategy 2015-2020 is due for review, it has been delayed due to Covid-19 and the pressure that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) were experiencing.

This report presents the new Voluntary Sector Strategy for 2022-2027, the purpose of which is to recognise the important contribution that the VCS makes to communities across the Harborough District as well as outlining the key priorities for the Council to guide support and engagement with the sector.

Recommendations

- **To approve the Voluntary Sector Strategy which sets the strategic objectives for working alongside the Community and Voluntary Sector across the district for the next 5 years.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Approval of the Voluntary Sector Strategy will ensure;

- That the Community and Voluntary Sector understand the key priorities and principles for the Council and will work alongside the Council to deliver these.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To agree the refreshed Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-2027, which aligns to the Council's key Corporate Priorities, as outlined in the Corporate Plan, as well as outlining key principles for support the Community and Voluntary Sector.

2. Background

Voluntary Sector Strategy 2015-2020

- 2.1 In 2015 the Council agreed its first Voluntary Sector Strategy to guide the Councils engagement and relationship with the sector and provide a strengthened policy framework. The aim was to ensure a variety of support mechanisms are available from



the Council to help build capacity and sustainability in the voluntary and community sector and to ensure that the sector, as well as communities are resilient and robust.

- 2.2 Two key outcomes of the first strategy were;
 - 2.2.1 The development of a voluntary and community sector accommodation policy which ensured a consistent approach to charities and groups that wanted to lease council assets or rent space. This included an element of subsidy for rent charges if the group supported Council services and key priorities.
 - 2.2.2 The development of the Harborough Lotto, which was launched in May 2018 and has been an additional fundraising tool for VCS groups in the district.

Review of the VCS Strategy Post Covid-19

- 2.3 The review of the VCS Strategy in 2020 was postponed due to Covid-19 but restarted in summer 2021. A survey in December 2021 and January 2022 identified that almost 32% of residents have volunteered in some capacity. New and established volunteers and groups stepped up across the district to ensure that the most vulnerable in society could access food, medicines and stayed connected with the outside world. This work has been supported by the Council through providing emergency grants and coordination of support through the Councils Community Hub and has created closer partnerships with foodbanks and groups that can support residents.
- 2.4 As part of the recovery from Covid-19 the Council has undertaken a further transformation programme to realign services (BC25), via a systematic programme of service reviews, to enable the Council to deliver its services in a cost effective and financially sustainable way. One of the actions specific to this sector from BC25 was to review the Community Grants, with a 30% reduction in the Community Grants, which equates to a target saving of £30,000 for 2022/23. This will be achieved as outlined in the Finance section below.
- 2.5 The [draft Strategy](#) was considered by Communities Scrutiny Panel on 24th March 2022. The Panel noted the work of the VCS and praised the work of the organisations affected by the reduction in funding. A breakdown of VCS organisations in each ward was requested to support Ward Members in their community leadership role. The Panel also recommended several small amendments to the Strategy to clarify areas. The attached strategy has been updated to include these.
- 2.6 The Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-2027, Appendix A has been developed around the financial framework of BC25, as well as understanding the wider Community and Voluntary sector across the district. External challenges have also been taken into consider, such as the need to support communities and residents to recover from Covid and the potential impact of the cost of living.

3. Details

- 3.1. The Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-27 has 4 key Priorities: -
 - i. To build effective partnerships with the VCS to support community leadership and place shaping at the district and community level.
 - ii. To learn from the community response to Covid and embrace new ways of working with the VCS.

- iii. To work with the VCS to meet the needs of the most vulnerable through prevention and early intervention.
- iv. To extend Council's services by building capacity through specialist partners.

3.2 The Strategy also outlines how the Council will support the VCS, and this will be with 5 key principles: -

- i. If there is evidence a local need – linked to a Council priority
- ii. If no other support is practically available
- iii. If they can evidence sustainability or a short-term projects necessity
- iv. If they can evidence value for money – cost, quality, or wider social impact
- v. If they can use Council support to secure match funding from another source

3.3 These principles will be used to devise and adopt a new grants regime from 1 April 2023. The objective will be to prioritise budgets and support the VCS organisations that align with the priorities in the Strategy, as well as meet identified needs in the community.

4. Implications of Decisions

4.1. Corporate Priorities

4.1.1. The strategy will contribute towards the delivery of 2 of the 4 key Corporate Priorities: -

- i. Promoting health & wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices.
- ii. Community Leadership to create a sense of pride in our place.

4.2. Financial

4.2.1. The agreed BC25 financial savings of £30,000, will be met by a reduction in the Community grants for the last 2 quarters of 2022/23. Due to the continued demand on the organisations' services, such as the potential impact of the Cost of Living for residents, a reduction of only 15% in the Community Grants will be implemented over 2022/23. This will produce £15,000 savings.

4.2.2. The remaining £15,000 will be met within the current service with no impact on delivery of service.

4.2.3. For next year, 2023/24 and subsequent years, the total amount for Community Grants will stay at the reduced amount.

4.3. Legal

4.3.1. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 gives the local authority the power to give support to organisation(s) which promote the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of their area, which includes incurring expenditure.

4.4. Policy

4.4.1 No policy issues arise directly from this report.

4.5. **Environmental Implications including contributions to achieving a net zero carbon Council by 2030**

4.5.1 No environmental issues arise directly from this report.

4.6. **Risk Management**

4.6.1 No risk management issues arise directly from this report.

4.7. **Equalities Impact**

4.7.1 No equalities issues arise directly from this report.

4.8. **Data Protection**

4.8.1 No data protection issues arise directly from this report.

5. **Summary of Consultation and Outcome**

5.1. Core funded organisations were written to in November 2021 giving notice regarding the reduction in grant for 2022/23. These organisations were also consulted by Voluntary Action Leicestershire in Spring/Summer 2022 with regards to the reduction in funding.

6. **Alternative Options Considered**

6.1 To not have an approved Voluntary Sector Strategy was considered but following the evidence of the work from this sector during the Covid-19 pandemic, this was considered not beneficial.

7. **Background papers**

Scrutiny Report 24 March 2022 - [Meetings and Events \(harborough.gov.uk\)](https://www.harborough.gov.uk).