

Harborough District Council

Report to Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panel 11 April 2024



Title:	Voluntary Sector Strategy Review
Status:	Public
Key Decision:	N/A
Report Author:	Rachael Felts, Head of Community Partnerships
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Jim Knight – Wellbeing Portfolio
Appendices:	Appendix A – Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-2027

Executive Summary

This report presents an update on the 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.

This report provides Members with an update on the actions undertaken since the Voluntary Sector Strategy for 2022-2027 was approved by Cabinet at their meeting in October 2022.

Recommendations

- **To note the actions undertaken which supports the aims of 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

The Voluntary Sector Strategy ensures the Council works alongside the Community and Voluntary Sector to help them understand the key priorities and principles for the Council and work in partnership to deliver these.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To note the work the council has undertaken to support the Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-2027, which aligns to the Council's key Corporate Priorities, as outlined in the Corporate Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2015 the Council agreed its first Voluntary Sector Strategy (VCS) to guide the Council's 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 The review of the VCS Strategy in 2020 was postponed due to Covid-19 but restarted in summer 2021. The outcome of this review was the development of the Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-2027 which was approved by the Cabinet at their meeting in October 2022.
- 2.3 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.

3. Details

- 3.1. The Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-27 has four 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 through five 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 The below tables, split into each Strategy Priority, outlines the work undertaken by officers to support the delivery of the Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-27.

<p>Priority 1 - To build effective partnerships with the VCS to support community leadership and place shaping at the district and community level.</p>
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<p>The Council's Cabinet Sub-Committee (Grants) continues to award grants to communities through Section 106 to enable improvements to existing or new facilities for the community. Since 2022, £2,341,329.00 has been allocated to projects across the district.</p>

<p>The Harborough Lotto provides an income source with 60% of money raised to local good causes should they sign-up to 'Support Our Cause!' Currently there are 70 community groups and voluntary sector organisations signed-up with many of them on the way to meeting their target goal for funding. Although communities/organisation are encouraged to promote their good causes through their networks, further work will be undertaken by the council to promote Harborough Lotto and the good causes it supports.</p>
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<p>Over the next year the council will continue to build partnerships with VCS especially with the new Community Engagement Officer agreed by Council at its meeting in February 2024. The Council will also look to enable more effective partnerships with VCS through the Council of the HDC staff volunteering policy to ensure it compliments this strategy.</p>

Priority 2 - To learn from the community response to Covid and embrace new ways of working with the VCS.

As people started to 'live with Covid' the Community Hub which was established to help our communities during the pandemic closed when the demand for the service dropped and services resumed.

The Community Hub provided a valuable service for those residents who were vulnerable or struggling to access food or medicine or had no access to online services.

Although the Community Hub closed, the processes and systems remain to ensure they can be 'picked-up' again as needed. For example, when we welcomed Ukraine families to our district, the process was re-established to enable easy access to food and support. Again, as our Ukraine guests have established themselves in their communities the service is no longer required and has been stood down.

When or where required, the Council does continue to maintain working relationship with VCS organisation, and other community networks to ensure district wide support.

Priority 3 - To work with the VCS to meet the needs of the most vulnerable through prevention and early intervention

Harborough District Council's Active Together team have work regularly with Community Groups and Voluntary organisations including:

- Harborough's Integrated Network Team – working at a strategic level across Harborough District to ensure health and care services are right for our communities and supporting the development of the Community Health and Wellbeing Plan for Harborough District
- Active Families Programme - Roll out of the Sport England funded programme alongside HomeStart and LCC Children and Family Wellbeing Services. Targeting around 15 families each year.
- Disability groups - including Freedom Support enabling them to gain access to local provision, such as the Learning Disability Gym session, Inclusive Tennis for Adults and Children
- Sourcing suitable venues for organisations such as Wheels for All.
- VASL (Voluntary Action South Leicestershire) Workshops - Working to deliver health and well-being workshops for the community. These workshops have taken place at the Cube in Harborough and have been well attended making use of our Golden Games activities, play Boccia, take part in Yoga, and play New Age Curling.

Through the volunteer programme supported by UKSPF E9 Volunteering, work had been undertaken by volunteers to develop the Harborough Community Garden based at Harborough Leisure Centre. This included training/support, volunteer expenses and DBS checks etc for x10 volunteers.

Working with these specialist organisations that support disadvantaged people within our communities is a golden thread to the targeted intervention that we provide across Harborough District it improves people's health and wellbeing, resilience, and quality of life. Where this is not possible, we work with individuals to find Health, Wellbeing and Physical Activity sessions that do suit their needs.

An outcome of the Voluntary Sector Strategy 2022-27 was to devise and adopt a new grants regime from 1 April 2023. Along with this the Council was to also implement a reduction of 30% of the core funding allocated to the four voluntary organisation.

The 30% reduction was implemented in consultation with the voluntary organisation concerned during 2023. Although it has not been possible to introduce a new grants scheme due to officer resource and due to the increased demands on these organisations resulting from the cost of living and energy

crisis. The voluntary organisations are supporting the needs of the most vulnerable with prevention and early intervention where possible.

Priority 4 - To extend Council's services by building capacity through specialist partners.

The Council works in partnership with other organisations to support specialist services such as support for Rough Sleepers with a countywide scheme in place. The Council has also supported and worked in partnership to provide support and specialist advice to our Ukraine families.

Working in partnership the Council has enabled the introduction of Crisis Cafes which supports people who feel they would benefit from mental health support, whether they are feeling lonely, anxious, or finding it hard to manage difficult feelings. Through partnership working these facilities are providing essential help and support through specialist advice and support.

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 reduction in core grants gave a financial savings of £30,000 in 2023/24.
- 4.2.2. At their meeting in February 2024 Council agreed £92k for the development of a Community Engagement Officer and Grants Officer who will work with communities and parishes to strengthen our work with and in partnership with voluntary organisations.

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 The Equality Analysis was completed to support the Voluntary Sector Strategy and formed part of the report papers to Cabinet in October 2022.

4.8. **Data Protection**

4.8.1 No data protection issues arise directly from this report.

5 Alternative Options Considered

5.1 This report is to note the actions undertaken to support the delivery of the Voluntary Sector Strategy. As there are no decisions, no alternative options have been considered.

6. Recommendation

6.1 To note the actions undertaken outlined above in this report which supports the Voluntary Sector Strategy.

7. Background papers

- Scrutiny Report 24 March 2022 - [Meetings and Events \(harborough.gov.uk\)](https://www.harborough.gov.uk/Meetings-and-Events).
- Cabinet Report 10 October 2022 - [Meetings and Events \(harborough.gov.uk\)](https://www.harborough.gov.uk/Meetings-and-Events)