

Support for Infrastructure Organisations

Service owner:	<i>Partnerships and Communities</i>
Policy owner:	<i>Kirstie Hercules, Principal Manager Partnerships and Communities</i> Kirstie.hercules@cheshireeast.gov.uk Tel (01270) 686632
Status:	<i>V0.8</i>
Date:	<i>26th March 2012</i>
Consultation:	<i>None</i>
Revision/review/renew date:	<i>30th April 2012 for approval</i> <i>9th April 2013 for approval</i> <i>21st July 2014 for approval</i> <i>27th July 2015 for approval</i> <i>Revised August 2015</i>
Key words:	<i>Summarises Cheshire East Council's approach to supporting infrastructure organisations that provide assistance to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Town and Parish Councils (Local Councils) in the Borough.</i>
Links:	<i>Community Grants Policy</i> <i>Cross Sector Working Group Good Practice Guidelines</i>

1. Summary

This Policy details how Cheshire East Council intends to support infrastructure organisations, which in turn assist the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) and Local Councils across Cheshire East, to achieve their aims and objectives during 2015/16.

Previous grant funding has enabled organisations to deliver a wide range of actions for the benefit of local communities. For example :-

Community and Voluntary Services Cheshire East (CVSCE) has been able to;

- Support 352 existing and 11 new organisations with their development
- Carry out over 1690 advice sessions
- Deliver 24 separate training sessions
- Hold a good practice conference with 90 attendees from a range of agencies and organisations

- Develop and implement the GRIPP good practice toolkit to help benchmark performance within organisations, identify areas for improvement, and focus help and support. Support 44 organisations with 51 funding bids worth £2.4 million
- Facilitate the Cross Sector Working Group and develop a stronger voice for the sector
- Email the fortnightly 'Voice News' to over 2200
- Support volunteering good practice and encourage volunteering, advertise volunteering opportunities and handle over 1000 applications from interested volunteers

Cheshire Community Action (CCA) has been able to;

- Focus work in priority rural areas of Audlem, Brereton Rural, Bunbury, Haslington, Odd Rode, Sutton, Wrenbury and Wybunbury and develop an informed network of support
- 34 registered volunteers have supported over 100 people with issues related to accessing services due to rural isolation
- Recruit volunteers to support delivery of the Community Agent project, and train them in specialist areas such as befriending
- Register 5 volunteers as Digital Learning Champions

Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) has been able to;

- Develop closer partnership working between local town and parish councils and community and voluntary organisations
- Work on the Code of Conduct and keep the ChALC database up to date
- Facilitate the new deal with local councils and support resilient communities through a regular training programme for clerks and councillors
- Encourage Local Councils to consider the take up the General Power of Competence so they are better placed to take on additional assets and services
- Support the parishing of unparished areas– in particular the community governance review in Macclesfield
- Supported newly established councils such as reformed Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths Parish Council
- Promote the new Local Council Award Scheme (formerly Quality Council Scheme)
- Work in partnership with CEC and assist with the Parish Conference in May 2014
- Develop and deliver a comprehensive training programme to local councils such as planning and the countryside, HR and events and volunteers, social media

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

Infrastructure organisations are those organisations that act as an 'umbrella' organisation for a wide membership and are a first point of contact for partner organisations. Organisations have been in receipt of annual grant funding to support their core objectives since at least 2010.

The Partnerships and Communities Manager manages the Council's budget for supporting infrastructure organisations. It should be noted that funding has been reduced by approximately 5% annually.

2.2 Purpose of Grant Funding

Grant funding supports each organisation to deliver a core provision of services, thereby enabling CEC to fulfil its corporate objectives. The funding provided is to increase the capacity and capability of the VCFS and Local Councils across Cheshire East, and help them to understand and meet the needs of their communities for the wider benefit of all residents within Cheshire East. Outcomes are achieved through the provision of advice and guidance, targeted support, outreach services, training and development and other agreed activities. Benefits to date include:-

- Large number of member organisations supported with development advice and funding bids
- Delivery of specialist training sessions on wide range of subjects
- Knowledge sharing across the VCFS and with partner agencies through good practice conferences
- Development and implementation of the GRIPP good practice toolkit
- Facilitation of the Cross Sector Working Group
- Fortnightly 'Voice News' emailed to over 2200
- Support with volunteering good practice , encouraging volunteering and advertising volunteering opportunities with
- Access to skills and expertise relating to rural issues such as community planning, neighbourhood planning, village hall developments, community land trusts
- Developing informal support networks
- Targeted work in priority rural areas
- Closer partnership working developed between local town and parish councils and community and voluntary organisations
- Improved governance of voluntary groups, awareness and working to implement the Local Council Charter and Local Council Award Scheme
- Local Councils encouraged to take up the General Power of Competence so they are better placed to take on additional assets and services
- Support for the parishing of unparished areas and newly established councils
- Promote the new Local Council Award Scheme (formerly Quality Council Scheme)

Infrastructure Organisations are able to support and enhance the valuable grassroots work of their members in local communities, and thereby add significant value to the work of the Partnerships and Communities Team through positive contact and direct action, networking and provision of valuable social assets. Providing infrastructure support for the sectors outlined above is vital to ensuring that the VCFS and Local Councils remain strong and can achieve their aims.

3. Delivery

3.1 Funding Criteria

Funding is only available to infrastructure organisations that can support the VCFS or Local Councils to achieve their aims and outcomes. In order to be successful it is expected that infrastructure organisations will:

- **Identify and fill the gaps** – equipping the VCFS and Local Councils to tailor their services to the changing needs of the community.
- **Raise standards** – by providing access to information, training and quality assurance standards, ensuring the VCFS and Local Councils have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to support the local community.
- **Enable communication and collaboration** - encouraging the VCFS and Local Councils to share resources and to work collaboratively, by providing opportunities to network, and enabling them to share good practice and expertise.
- **Provide a voice** – acting as a conduit and represent the diverse views of the VCFS and Local Councils to the Councils (Borough and Local) and other public bodies. Promote and facilitate two-way communication and consultations so that the VCFS and Local Councils can contribute to discussions and decision-making at a local level.
- **Promote strategic involvement** – encouraging the VCFS and Local Councils to engage in strategic partnerships and actively work with representatives from partner organisations to ensure they are able to identify and seek joint measures to resolve key local issues.
- **Prepare for a commissioning approach** - to ensure that infrastructure organisations can be funded to meet the needs of their members and in the best way using the resources available.

3.2 Funding Process

The budget is managed by the Partnerships and Communities Manager in the budget year 2015/16. Changes to funding have been decided by the Partnerships and Communities Manager as the budget holder, in consultation with the Department's Portfolio Holder.

Grant funding for 2015/16 has been agreed as follows: -

- Community and Voluntary Services Cheshire East (CVSCE) - £146,838;
- Cheshire Community Action (CCA) - £16,323
- Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) - £14,213

Equality Impact Assessment Screening is carried out annually on all funding changes and if necessary full Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in line with the Council's policy.

3.3 Funding Agreement and Monitoring

Organisations in receipt of funding will be required to sign an annual funding agreement, which will set out expected outputs and outcomes and provide clear monitoring and reporting arrangements for the financial year.

Funding is paid half yearly, with 50% of the annual allocation being paid from April (as long as ongoing monitoring reports are up to date) and the remainder paid from October. This is upon receipt of satisfactory half yearly reports, or as soon as possible after the receipt of the necessary reports.

4. Support from 2016

4.1 *Key Issue*

Cheshire East Council needs to determine what we require from the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector in order to meet our corporate objectives and how they can best support us.

There are challenges to be addressed in terms of understanding the varied contracts that these organisations will hold from differing areas of the council, and how Cheshire East Council can take steps to reduce unnecessary duplication, save costs and thereby commission more effective and streamlined services.

This is a long term piece of work that will need scoping out and consideration. It is therefore recommended that this policy is agreed for one year with the proviso that there may be changes made to it in the meantime in order to facilitate changes moving forward.

4.2 *Additional Requirements*

It is proposed to develop and agree a VCF Commissioning Framework that will recognise the skills and expertise provided by infrastructure organisations, and enable a transparent approach that will provide funding over a 3 year period.

In addition, it is proposed to develop and agree a Cheshire East Social Value Strategy that will provide an additional rationale for providing funding to infrastructure organisations and the VCF Sector.

4.3 *Evaluation and Review*

In order to move forward effectively as a first step it will be crucial to consult widely with all stakeholders so we have an understanding of what Cheshire East Council expects from the VCF sector and what in turn they are able to deliver in terms of our ambitions. This can also be built into Infrastructure Organisation monitoring and reporting arrangements for 2015/16 as we seek to understand the achievements of the past 5 years and how they can shape the future.