

Cabinet Paper

Date of Meeting: 22 September 2015

Report of: Steph Cordon, Head of Communities

Subject/Title: Policy for the Support to Infrastructure Organisations for 2015/16

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Les Gilbert

1. Report Summary

1.1 To agree the policy for 2015/16 which sets out how Cheshire East Council will support Infrastructure Organisations to assist the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) and Town and Parish Councils (Local Councils) to develop and thrive, and outlines a recommended approach to providing support from year 2016/17

1.2 Previous grant funding has enabled organisations to achieve the following for the benefit of local communities: -

1.2.1 Community and Voluntary Services Cheshire East (CVSCE)

- Support 352 organisations with their development and carry out over 1690 advice sessions
- Supported the development of 11 new organisations
- Deliver 24 training sessions on a range of subjects
- 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.
- Supported 44 organisations with 51 funding bids worth £2.4 million
- Facilitate the Cross Sector Working Group and develop a stronger voice for the sector thorough attendance at key meetings and representation on the Children's Safeguarding Board
- Email the fortnightly 'Voice News' to over 2200
- Support volunteering good practice and encouraging volunteering, advertise volunteering opportunities and handle over 1000 applications from interested volunteers

1.2.2. Cheshire Community Action (CCA)

- Focus work in priority areas of Audlem, Brereton Rural, Bunbury, Haslington, Odd Rode, Sutton, Wrenbury and Wybunbury and address access to services due to rural isolation
- Recruit volunteers to support delivery of the Community Agent project – such as IT Buddies and volunteer village agents

- Train volunteers in specialist areas such as befriending and develop an informed network of support
- Register 5 volunteers as Digital Learning Champions
- 34 registered volunteers have supported over 100 people with issues related to access to services

1.2.3. Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC)

- 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. Recommendation

- 2.2. To adopt the Policy for the Support to Infrastructure Organisations, and agree to pay the funding grants to the organisations listed below in 4.3

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.2. There are no other options to be considered.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 As a Resident's First Council we want to ensure that infrastructure organisations across the Borough, who offer support to the VCFS and Local Councils, are in a position to be able to develop and grow their services. This in turn ensures that the wide variety of groups and associations who access information, advice and training from these infrastructure organisations can offer better services locally for the benefit of communities across Cheshire East.
- 4.2 Therefore the purpose of the support is to increase the capacity and capability of the VCFS and the Local Councils across Cheshire East in order to help them to achieve the following outcomes:-

- 4.2.1 Individuals undertaking social activities for the benefit of their community feel they have been supported to gain the skills, knowledge and ability they need.
 - 4.2.2 The community has a more positive perception and understanding of volunteering with more people in the community undertaking volunteering
 - 4.2.3 Communities are able to share their views on local issues and achieve a positive impact
 - 4.2.4 Rural communities are more engaged and able to actively shape the delivery of activities and services in their localities
 - 4.2.5 Local Councils have well qualified clerks and councillors, and are actively looking to take on additional services/duties and work collaboratively through the General Power of Competence
- 4.3 Infrastructure Organisations have received grant funding from Cheshire East Council since 2010 and as a legacy to previous arrangements made with the former District Councils of Macclesfield, Congleton and Crewe and Nantwich. Funding has been reduced by 5% year on year.
- 4.4 Taking the 5% reduction from last year into account , it is proposed that for 2015/16 Cheshire East Council directly award funding grants to the following infrastructure organisations.
- 4.4.1 Community and Voluntary Services Cheshire East (CVSCE) circa £147,000;
 - 4.4.2 Cheshire Community Action (CCA) circa £16,000, and
 - 4.4.3 Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) circa £14,000
- giving a total grant award for 2015/16 of some £177,000
- 4.5 However, as we work towards becoming a fully commissioning council, we are working closely with these infrastructure organisations in order to help them grow capacity in the community sector. We want to prepare organisations and enable them to actively advise and inform our proposed commissioning approach to funding from 2016 onwards.
- 4.6 Consideration is being given going forward to develop a VCF Commissioning Framework that will outline approaches and could fund future provision by way of grants, contracts or a mixture of both.
- 4.7 All organisations are aware that in the next financial year, the process will be for a commissioning approach, which could incorporate a mixture of solutions to buying their services, rather than directly awarded grants.

5. Background/Chronology

- 5.2. Support for Infrastructure Organisations has been provided since 2010 through grant funding, thereby enabling Cheshire East Council to fulfil it's corporate objectives.

5.3. Funding amounts have been reduced by 5% each year

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

6.2. The recommendations relate to all wards and ward members within Cheshire East

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.2. Policy Implications

7.2.2. Positive Impact

7.3. Legal Implications

7.2.1 In deciding whether to directly award a grant consideration must be given to the facts and circumstances in which a direct grant award is being proposed as set out in paragraph 3 (as opposed to awarding a grant following a competitive bidding process or going out to tender) together with the identified risks (paragraph 9) and be satisfied that in making a direct award the Council is meeting its public law duties.

7.2.2 The Council has the powers to award a grant to support the organisations using its general power of competence in Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. In exercising the power the Council must satisfy its public law duties. In essence this means that in making the decision the Council must have taken into account only relevant considerations, followed procedural requirements, acted for proper motives and not acted unreasonably.

7.2.3 There is currently no overarching Council policy/framework by which grant funding should be allocated and in principle a direct grant award can be made. The proposed Policy for Support to Infrastructure Organisations sets out the aims and objectives in grant funding infrastructure organisations and it is also noted that the Council is moving to a commissioning approach by the development of a VCF commissioning framework as a tool to determine the best way using the resources available.

7.2.4 In awarding a grant the Council cannot exhibit the same amount of control over the organisation as is commensurate with a contract. Essentially the terms of the grant should set out with what the purpose of the grant is for and only claim claw back provisions in the case of the grant funding being used for other purposes or otherwise improperly. The Council will not be able to assess the quality of the services that are being provided and determine to withdraw grant funding on that basis (except at the end of the period of the grant funding).

7.4. Financial Implications

7.3.1 The recommendations will enable the three grant awards for 2015/2016 to be funded within existing budget provision.

7.5. Equality Implications

7.5.2. Positive impact. Infrastructure organisations provide advice, guidance and examples of good practice.

7.6. Rural Community Implications

7.6.2. Positive Impact. Infrastructure organisations work closely with rural communities to provide support, advice and guidance

7.7. Human Resources Implications

7.7.2. Resources have been provided as part of existing staff job roles

7.8. Public Health Implications

7.8.2. There are no Public Health Implications

7.9. Other Implications (Please Specify)

7.9.2. There are no other implications

8. Risk Management

8.2. The risk of not agreeing an approach to support to Infrastructure Organisations is that the VCS and local councils may not receive the specialised support required in order to both continue and to thrive, resulting in a loss of community benefit.

9. Access to Information/Bibliography

9.2. The Policy to support Infrastructure Organisations is enclosed with this report

10. Contact Information

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