
Voluntary and Community Sector Support

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	14/10/21
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Graham Bridgman
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	01/10/21
Report Author:	Sam Shepherd, Programme Manager, Local Communities
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4148

1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to summarise the outcome of engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and to set out recommendations for VCS support in West Berkshire.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive resolves:

- a) That the Council provides specialist safeguarding support and awareness raising programme to support the VCS in West Berkshire (as set out in paragraphs 6.12 - 6.13 of the Report).
- b) To procure “General VCS Support” in West Berkshire to include support for voluntary organisations and community groups in fund raising, business management, organisational development, sector communication, advocacy and networking.
- c) To provide a contribution to the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire to facilitate volunteer brokerage amongst the VCS in West Berkshire (as set out in paragraph 6.11 of the Report).

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	The budget for investment in VCS support was agreed by the Executive in September 2020 with £100k to be funded from reserves in 2022-23 and then £100k per year for up to four years from 2023-24 to 2026-27.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

	<p>A contribution from the Council's existing budget for VCS support which totals £13,739 will be added to the overall budget for this project, making the Council's commitment a total of £113,739 per annum.</p> <p>Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), has partnered with the Council on this project so will also make a contribution. The contribution from the CCG is £12,000 per annum towards VCS support.</p> <p>This means the total budget for project planning is £125,739 which breaks down as follows against four elements of VCS support:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="608 645 1390 875"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">Support element</th> <th>Budget</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>General VCS support</td> <td>£59,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>Volunteering brokerage</td> <td>£36,739</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>Safeguarding</td> <td rowspan="2">£30k</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td>Raising Awareness</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Total</td> <td>£125,739</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In the event that budgets are reduced in future, any funding will be subject to termination upon providing at least six months' notice.</p> <p>To ensure VCS support is sustainable over the longer term, it is suggested that at least £100k per year is put in the Council's budget plans beyond 2027 for VCS support.</p>	Support element		Budget	A	General VCS support	£59,000	B	Volunteering brokerage	£36,739	C	Safeguarding	£30k	D	Raising Awareness	Total		£125,739
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<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>The provision of VCS support around safeguarding and statutory sector awareness raising has direct implications on the staff providing safeguarding training. The additional costs incurred by the Council for provision of safeguarding training, policy advice and guidance will be met by the project budget, with £30,000 per annum retained by the Council to provide additional capacity or backfill to free capacity.</p>																	
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>In relation to the contributions from the CCG, ensure that there is a binding agreement in place to ensure certainty around the financial level and the term.</p> <p>In relation to General VCS Support a compliant procurement exercise would need to be facilitated. A general specification would need to be developed to enable a robust contractual arrangement.</p> <p>In relation to the grant contribution to Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, we understand a grant funding agreement will need to be put in place.</p>																	

Risk Management:	The risks arising from this report are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Insufficient bids: no Providers willing to provide the services as specified and within budget. b) Resources and capacity to bid may be affected due to Covid. c) Future organisational (Council or CCG) budget reductions 			
Property:	There are no property implications for the Council arising from this report or its proposals.			
Policy:	There are no national policies which relate to this report or its proposals.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:	X			
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			The proposals outlined in this report will have a positive impact on protected characteristic as it seeks to drive greater equality and inclusion.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			The proposals outlined in this report will have a positive impact on protected characteristic as it seeks to drive greater equality and inclusion.
Environmental Impact:		X		There are no direct environmental implications for the Council arising from this report or its proposals.
Health Impact:	X			The proposals outlined in this report will help deliver the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy which seeks to deliver on all aspects of improved health and wellbeing.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

ICT Impact:		X		There are no IT implications for the Council arising from this report or its proposals.
Digital Services Impact:		X		There are no digital implications for the Council arising from this report or its proposals.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			<p>The proposals in this report will help to improve the following Council strategy priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their potential • Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire. <p>The proposals outlined in this report directly deliver an action in the Council's Communications and Engagement Strategy 2020-2023 and in the Recovery and Renewal Plan 2021.</p>
Core Business:	X			The proposals outlined in this report will support a stronger and more innovative VCS. This will help the Council deliver services in partnership or via commissioned services, where a VCS organisation is involved.
Data Impact:			X	There are no data or data protection implications for the Council arising from this report or its proposals.
Consultation and Engagement:	Following two phases of engagement, the views of 161 VCS representatives were captured in quantitative surveys and 27 representatives gave their views in explorative, qualitative interviews or workshops. It is estimated ¹ that more than 20% of the local VCS views have been fed in to this work.			

¹ Estimation based upon a sector size of 700 organisations.

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 In recognition of the valuable contribution that the local VCS makes to local quality of life, West Berkshire Council has committed to deliver improved support for the sector. The Council has committed £100,000 per annum (for up to five years).
- 4.2 The Council makes a £13,739 contribution from its current budget for VCS support which will be added to the overall budget for this project. Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), has partnered with the Council on this project; their contribution is £12,000 which makes the total budget available for VCS support in excess of £125,739.00.
- 4.3 VCS support is a key priority for both West Berkshire Council and Berkshire West CCG. Improved support will help deliver the following strategic strategies and plans:
 - The West Berkshire Vision 2036
 - The Berkshire West Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030
 - The Council Strategy 2019-2023
 - Communications and Engagement Strategy 2020-2023
 - The Council's Recovery and Renewal Plan 2021.
- 4.4 To best shape VCS support for West Berkshire, two phases of engagement were undertaken. One in November 2020 and a further and wider phase commenced in June 2021. The latter phase of engagement was co-designed alongside sector colleagues.
- 4.5 This report first sets out some guiding principles for the VCS support and explores how sector support is currently provided both locally and elsewhere before describing the sector-support needs which have been identified. The report then outlines and appraises options for VCS support and sets out a recommended course of action for the Council and Berkshire West CCG to respond most effectively to local VCS need within the available budget.

5 Supporting Information

Background

- 5.1 Community life and social connections are all factors that have a vital contribution to people's health and wellbeing. These aspects of community build control and resilience and can help buffer against disease and reduce inequalities; this is often referred to as social capital². There is already a wealth of community activity taking place across West Berkshire in neighbourhoods, villages and through clubs, interest groups and community organisations. Many of these activities take place with the support and involvement of local VCS organisations and groups.
- 5.2 The local VCS plays a vital role in supporting and improving our society; the sector also makes a significant contribution to the local economy. VCS organisations and groups are the biggest builders of social capital, and provide crucial support to people and

² What Makes Us Healthy (2012) <http://www.assetbasedconsulting.co.uk/uploads/publications/WMUH.pdf>

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

communities, often to those that are hardest to reach and experience disparities in outcomes (inequalities).

- 5.3 In recognition of the contribution the VCS makes to individuals, local communities and overall local health and wellbeing, West Berkshire Council and Berkshire West CCG have committed to funding improved support for the sector. This commitment supports a number of strategic documents, including the Berkshire West Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and it is an action in the Council's Communications and Engagement Strategy 2020-2023 and Covid Recovery and Renewal Plan 2021.
- 5.1 To best shape VCS support for West Berkshire, two phases of engagement were undertaken. The first phase commenced in November 2020 and was designed to inform a specification for a 'Voluntary Sector Support Organisation' (VCSSO) that the Council had committed to. Sector feedback led the Council to a decision to delay planned commissioning of this VCSSO to allow wider engagement. There was also a shift in focus to understanding sector need and how best to meet that need; the aim of which was to ensure that the solution(s) for sector support were not pre-determined and instead, need-led.

VCS engagement

- 5.2 During Phase I of VCS engagement between November and December 2020, 76 representatives responded to a digital survey, 24 attended a workshop and eight took part in one to one interviews. Phase II of the engagement was carefully co-designed with sector colleagues: 25 VCS organisations participated in online sessions to co-produce an engagement plan that set out the questions for engagement, the methods needed to ensure the engagement was inclusive, who we needed to engage and a sensible timeframe for the engagement.
- 5.3 The following methods were deployed during the co-designed second phase of engagement which took place between June and August 2021:
- A one-stop-shop online engagement webpage, hosting a digital survey (which had 121 responses);
 - One to one interviews (taken up by three organisations);
 - Workshops;
 - Option to send an email;
 - Option to send a video;
 - Frequently Asked Questions;
 - Examples of voluntary sector support from elsewhere.
- 5.4 Invitations to participate were sent far and wide. Thanks are offered to all organisations and representatives that took the time to engage in both phases. Thanks are also recorded to the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, Greenham Trust, Connecting Communities Berkshire and Penny Post for their assistance with sharing information about the engagement with their networks and newsletters.
- 5.1 With 76 survey responses in Phase I, and 121 in Phase II, there was a total of 197 responses; as some respondents took the time to feedback in both phases, we had 161

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

unique responses during the two phases. In addition, 27 representatives gave their views in explorative, qualitative interviews or workshops. It is estimated³ that more than 20% of the local VCS views have been fed in to this work. A full report of the results of the VCS Engagement is attached as Appendix A.

5.2 The remainder of this document draws upon the VCS Engagement Report to set out some guiding principles for improving VCS support. It then describes the services currently in place locally and how support is provided elsewhere before describing the sector-support needs identified through engagement. It moves on to outline and appraise options to meet the identified needs before proposing a recommended course of action.

Principles

5.3 During VCS engagement, local organisations and groups shared some candid and insightful feedback about their organisations, the support they currently access, their support needs for now and the future and what support they would specifically like from the Council and statutory agencies. As a result of this feedback, the following guiding principles for moving forward with VCS support have been identified.



5.4 The following expands on the rationale for each of these principles:

- (a) **Evidence-led.** By applying an evidence-based approach, VCS support for West Berkshire will be based upon established need and proven methods of delivery. Furthermore, because the practical experience of VCS organisations and groups are

³ Estimation based upon a sector size of 700 organisations.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

at the centre, this ensures that the solutions are equally needs-led and are therefore likely to be the most effective solutions.

(b) **Inclusive.** The geography and diversity of West Berkshire's communities means that inclusivity is a corner stone of ensuring that not only do all parts of the VCS thrive; its essential to enable those the VCS supports to thrive too. Regardless of organisation size, location, longevity or focus; we need to ensure sector support is fully inclusive; with the appropriate capacity to be so.

(c) **Sustainable.** In this context, sustainability refers to a need to make sure that the models of VCS support which are pursued at this time are sustainable for the future. There is a need to learn from the past cycles of investment and disinvestment to invest wisely. This will ensure that sector support is not only sustainable in the long term, but also empowers the sector to strengthen and innovate for the future.

(d) **Collaborative.** There is enormous strength in collaboration; no person has all the answers, but by working together, we can better understand, generate more solutions and share the skills, knowledge and resources we have available. The local VCS are already making use of the strengths which exist in their sector peers; by making collaboration a key principle, there is recognition of these strengths from which to build.

Current VCS Support in West Berkshire

- 5.5 There has been a history of investment and disinvestment in the local VCS support which, was identified by local groups and organisations as being unhelpful for the sector which has had a significant negative impact on the trust and relationships between the Council and the VCS.
- 5.6 The Council currently provides £13,739 (per annum) of funding to the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire (VCWB) for support for *initiatives to develop their services and for premises for developing volunteering and running the community transport schemes*. Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group also fund some VCS support with VCWB totalling £12,000 per annum. Neither the Council nor CCG provide any other funding for the support of local VCS organisations or groups in West Berkshire.
- 5.7 From April 2015 the Council changed the way that it commissioned services from the voluntary sector through the introduction of the Voluntary Sector Prospectus (VSP) which facilitated the transfer to a model of commissioning preventative services based on outcomes to promote transparency, stimulate innovation and collaboration in the VCS. A total of eight organisations are involved in the delivery of the VSP priority outcomes including: promote independence in old age, support self-management, reduce loneliness, access employment, support carers and give a voice to vulnerable adults. None of these organisations offer support services to the VCS.
- 5.8 The engagement identified that VCS support services are being accessed by the sector in a variety of ways for a variety of things, these include:
- **Peer networks.** These are key for many different aspects of support. They are used by more than a quarter of respondents in the sector for:
 - Demonstrating the impact of funding

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

- Managing the 'business' side of their group or organisation (e.g. finance, risk, performance and future planning)
- Talking to and meeting with other groups or organisations with similar interests.
- Outcome report writing
- Talking to parts of the community who are less well heard
- Knowing about, talking to and meeting with other groups or organisations in general
- Safeguarding
- Representing the interests of a group, organisation or sector as a whole (advocacy)
- Providing information in other formats, e.g. braille/other languages.
- **Volunteer Centre West Berkshire (VCWB).** VCWB services are used by a third of VCS respondents for volunteer recruitment, by 20% for funding sources and availability and almost 20% for talking to and meeting other groups or organisations.
- **West Berkshire Council.** Almost 60% of sector respondents use the Council for having discussions and a relationship with local authorities. 27% of respondents to represent the interests of a group, organisation or sector as a whole (advocacy).
- **Online support** is accessed by 43% of respondents for support with legislative changes and for 25% of respondents in providing information in other formats, e.g. braille/other languages.
- Other support routes are identified in the table below

Sources of support	% of respondents
Local businesses/community	34%
National organisation	31%
Connecting Communities Berkshire	6.25%
Basingstoke Voluntary Action / Basingstoke and Deane BC	6.25%
Greenham Trust/ Good Exchange funding	6.25%
Berkshire Association of local councils	3.1%
Health bodies	3.1%

Table 1. Other sources of support identified by VCS

- 5.9 Despite most VCS organisations not currently accessing support services; they are highly valued by those that do use them with 100% of those responding to engagement reporting that support services were responsive to their needs.
- 5.10 A key message was that existing support services have significant skills, knowledge and experience but are restricted by capacity. This feedback was particularly true of VCWB who were noted to have picked up support services following historical disinvestment. Where services were said to need improvements, capacity was an issue, as was a need for services to more inclusive and help more with fundraising (sources

of funding and advice on applications). There was also an identified need for those in the statutory sector to have a better understanding of the VCS sector.

VCS support elsewhere

- 5.11 There is a commitment in this work to take an evidence-based approach, to ensure VCS support for West Berkshire is based upon established need and proven methods of delivery. Alongside the feedback from engagement, it is therefore vital to consider models used elsewhere. The following highlights some examples:
- 5.12 *Community Base, Brighton.* This organisation is a home for community and voluntary groups in Brighton and Hove, supporting charities and community groups to work together and share expertise. Income from services, including the provision of office space and meeting rooms is used to fund their accessible building close to the station which also includes a reception team to greet visitors and provide information about local services and volunteering and community job opportunities.
- 5.13 *Action Together, Oldham.* This is a free membership-based organisation supporting community action in Oldham, Rochdale & Tameside. Action Together advocates for the work that the sector contributes and facilitates opportunities to be involved in decision making about things that matter to partners. They enable networking between organisations and the promotion of groups and their services or activities in a community activities directory.
- 5.14 *Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) / Doing Good Leeds website.* VAL is a free membership organisation supporting groups and organisations in local communities of place and interest to develop and achieve positive social change from within. VAL Essentials is an optional annual subscriber package to organisations working in line with the VAL's values. The cost is tiered to organisational income and offers discounts on training courses, meeting room hire, job adverts etc. Any profits are used to help organisations do good in Leeds
- 5.15 The Doing Good Leeds website is managed by VAL but draws together the combined experience of organisations that give support to the third sector and advocate on their behalf. Voluntary Action Leeds hosts the Young Lives Leeds Forum, a strategy and development partnership for third sector organisations working with children, young people and their families.
- 5.16 *Gloucestershire VCS Alliance.* A free membership, open to all Alliance whose mission is to be the independent voice that informs, strengthens and develops the voluntary and community sector in Gloucestershire. Their strategic aims include a communications strategy to build trust and reputation, an information strategy focusing on what is valuable to stakeholders, a "better together" strategy to improve sector resilience and increase influence and a continuous learning strategy to build expertise.
- 5.17 *Voscur, Bristol.* Voscur is an agency that supports, develops and represents the VCS in Bristol. It supports collaboration between local groups to improve the quality and impact of services for local people, and to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of local organisations. They work with the investors who commission and fund the work of the VCSE sector, to ensure they make informed decisions and design effective services.

Identified need

- 5.18 When we asked VCS respondents about their support needs now and in the future, the sector told us that the biggest support need for the sector is related to funding; two thirds found funding difficult now and almost 40% said funding was a barrier to them achieving a long term vision. Aside from help with promoting a group's activity, it was the most significant support need (71%).
- 5.19 At least 50% of the VCS organisations that responded have at least one support need for now or the future. Top needs for now are promoting a group or organisation, funding sources and availability and training. Top needs for the future are outcome report writing, governance advice, safeguarding and understanding changes to legislation.
- 5.20 Preferred routes for receiving support included the following:
- **Peer support.** This was seen as important for getting support with shared resources or back office functions and managing the 'business' side of a group (e.g. finance, risk, performance and future planning) and for knowing about, talking to and meeting with other groups or organisations in general.
 - **VCWB.** Almost 60% of respondents wanted to receive support for volunteering from VCWB and a third of respondents wanted to receive support from VCWB for a) demonstrating impact of funding b) talking to and meeting with other groups or organisations with similar interests c) funding sources and availability and d) knowing about, talking to and meeting with other groups or organisations in general and e) talking to parts of the community who are less well heard.
 - **WBC.** More than 55% of respondents would like to receive support for safeguarding from West Berkshire Council. The Council was also seen important as a means of providing governance advice and legislative updates.
 - **Online.** 38% of respondents would like to receive support for new or changes to legislation from online sources.
- 5.21 Although sector feedback demonstrated a preference for different routes to access support, some colleagues shared they would like support services to be in a 'one stop shop'.

6 Proposal

- 6.1 The engagement which has taken place with the West Berkshire VCS has shown that there is a need for additional capacity and some focused support for the local sector. It is therefore proposed that the Council, in partnership with Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group ensure services are engaged to help meet the identified need.
- 6.2 The following outlines the proposed support which would meet the identified need for VCS support.

General VCS Support

- 6.3 It is proposed that general VCS support be commissioned for West Berkshire. This will include a detailed scoping exercise to develop an outcome based service specification based upon the extensive engagement undertaken with the VCS and strategic partners.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

- 6.4 A general support service would build on the strong peer networks within the sector to facilitate greater networking and promotion of groups and their services. These strong peer networks support sustainability for the future, because it uses a 'grow-our-own' approach. A support service would also support collaboration between local groups to improve the quality and impact of the VCS for local people and communities.
- 6.5 Based upon feedback from the local VCS and delivery models from elsewhere, general VCS support in West Berkshire would include the following:

Free membership

- 6.6 Basing a local model on evidence of delivery elsewhere, a free membership-based service is envisaged for West Berkshire as part of the general sector support. Free membership would give organisations access to all support services, resources, networks, information, advice and guidance. This would in turn create a database and map of the VCS organisations that make up the local sector for improved communication and engagement with the sector and between the VCS and statutory organisations.
- 6.7 Membership of the 'West Berkshire Community Network' would encourage and create a sense of an inclusive and collaborative sector which offers opportunities to strengthen peer-to-peer support opportunities, it also encourages sharing and mutual pursuit of VCS-led goals. The 'Community Network' would help enable, support and empower grass-roots initiatives.

Funding and fundraising

- a) Find and share funding sources and availability
- b) Assistance with applying for funding. This includes support with bid writing, advice for applications
- c) Encourage and facilitate local innovation and collaboration in the VCS to attract greater levels of funding to West Berkshire (e.g collaborative pilots to demonstrate impact and then develop opportunities to attract further investment)
- d) Advice and guidance on demonstrating impact of funding
- e) Guidance (hints and tips) on grant monitoring and outcome report writing to demonstrate value for money.

Business management

- a) Support for managing the 'business' side of a group, e.g. legal structures, finance, risk, performance and future planning
- b) Support and signposting for HR e.g. health and safety, payroll, performance management, DBS, remote working
- c) Support and advice for setting up accounting books/systems, record keeping and budgeting; Advice and guidance on developing and checking policies; including understanding legal obligations, governance structures and governance processes

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

- d) Facilitate connections and provide advice for organisations to encourage the sharing of best practice and experience/skills within the sector (for peer support). This may include encouraging the sharing of resources or back office functions.

Organisational development (training, mentoring and skills development)

- a) Find and signpost to training for VCS organisations to improve skills, knowledge and understanding; including on leadership development
- b) Encourage and facilitate collaborative mentoring support amongst VCS networks (this may include a pool of mentors / local expert volunteers to link with projects on and hoc/as required basis)
- c) Broker peer mentoring/coaching to support small/grass roots VCS groups to start up.

Sector communications

- a) Provide and sharing weekly VCS-sector relevant news, funding/training opportunities, stories and celebrating success across the sector
- b) Support to the VCS for sharing messaging, best practice and maximising media coverage
- c) Guidance on website and social media development and management.

Advocacy

- a) Provide representation and feed in sector views to relevant local policies and strategies; ensuring that the sector-view is sought to do so (e.g. to the Council/CCG/other statutory organisations)
- b) Represent the interests of the VCS as a whole at strategic statutory and partnership meetings (e.g. Health and Wellbeing Board) and in negotiations with statutory bodies (e.g. social prescribers)
- c) Represent the interests of the residents, customers and communities that the local VCS is working with to statutory bodies and strategic partners
- d) Advocate for the voice of smaller VCS groups and seldom heard communities through relevant meetings and structures. This includes specific engagement and subsequent representation of the parts of the community who are less well heard.

Sector networks

- a) Create, facilitate and administrate peer network opportunities to help VCS organisations to know about, talking to and meeting with other groups or organisations in general
- b) Create, facilitate and administrate peer forums to help VCS organisations to talk to and meet with other groups or organisations with similar interests
- c) Signpost VCS organisations and groups to services that can provide information in other formats, e.g. braille/other languages
- d) Encourage and facilitate social value brokerage (i.e. connecting business needs with offers and opportunities within the local sector to fulfil social value need).

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

6.8 It is recommended that this element is procured through a competitive process. It is proposed the budget for this should be £59,000 per annum for a period three years with an option to extend for another two years.

Volunteering brokerage

6.9 In addition to general VCS support, sector feedback and delivery models elsewhere demonstrate the need for volunteer brokerage, which will help match local people who wish to volunteer to local opportunities to volunteer. It is therefore recommended that a contribution is provided for specialist volunteer brokerage in West Berkshire of £36,739 per annum for a period of three years with an option to extend for another two years.

6.10 The Council has identified the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire (VCWB), a local charity with over 40 years of experience to be a suitable recipient of the contribution on the following facts:

- VCWB hold and use an extensive database of local people looking to volunteer within the West Berkshire area. Along with strict adherence to GDPR legislation, the creation of such a database requires unique trust and brand loyalty for people to hand over personal details. No other organisation holds this information, or uses this matching methodology in the West Berkshire area; and all of these factors are critical to successful delivery of a local volunteering brokerage service.
- Similarly; in relation to a database of organisations needing volunteers; VCWB holds and uses this database within the West Berkshire area. Again; along with strict adherence to GDPR legislation, the creation of such a database requires unique trust and brand loyalty for organisations to offer details of their needs. Similarly to the database of local volunteers (described above); no other organisation holds information like this, or the matching methodology in the West Berkshire area for organisations seeking volunteers. This underlines the unique factors which are critical to successful delivery of a local volunteering brokerage service.
- VCWB have been driving the local volunteering culture since 1974 and therefore have totally bespoke understanding of West Berkshire's volunteering landscape and how to meet the needs of both local volunteers and organisations. Building such a strong volunteering ethos, and culture requires sustained and consistent effort to ensure local people are matched with local opportunities. It is believed VCWB are the only supplier providing such services.
- VCWB is the local VCS sector's choice of volunteering brokerage services. Feedback from organisations shows almost 60% of local organisations identified a need for volunteering support and wanted to receive this from VCWB.
- The quality of VCWB services, and its trusted position within the local sector has been verified through sector feedback; where 100% of respondents report that services were responsive to their needs.

6.11 The contribution from the Council will assist in VCWB being better equipped to help realise the following outcomes:

- a) Provide a system to match local people to local need for volunteers

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

- b) Work with organisations to develop their needs and specification for volunteer roles
- c) Provide advice and guidance on writing volunteer role descriptions to ensure they are clear and attract the right volunteers
- d) Provide advice and support for organisations and their volunteers needing a DBS check
- e) Create and manage a database of volunteering opportunities available across West Berkshire according to interests, location, volunteer requirements and other relevant information (e.g. length of commitment)
- f) Advertise and promote volunteering opportunities across the area
- g) Create, develop and manage a database of people wishing to volunteer according to their interests and requirements (e.g. time available/accessibility needs)
- h) Provide advice and guidance for organisations on the training and managing volunteers
- i) Promote and encourage volunteering across the whole of West Berkshire; this includes holding an annual volunteer recruitment fair
- j) Introduce schemes to support and encourage those with specific needs (e.g. disability, learning difficulty or mental wellbeing issues) to take up volunteering roles which support their wellbeing. This involves linking to the NHS social prescribing service where relevant.

Safeguarding

6.12 In addition to the above, sector feedback demonstrates the need for support with safeguarding. It is therefore recommended that VCS support contains specialist safeguarding support provided by West Berkshire Council. This would include the following:

- a) Provide general and specialist safeguarding advice and training; including safer recruitment advice and training (including DBS check advice where necessary)
- b) Advice, guidance and standardised templates for VCS groups to develop safeguarding policies and processes
- c) Develop and share best practice hints and tips for VCS organisations and groups on safeguarding
- d) Assurance for VCS organisations and groups on their safeguarding policies, processes and procedures.

6.13 It is recommended that this is provided by the Council utilising its internal expertise.

Statutory sector awareness

6.14 In addition to the above, sector feedback demonstrates the need for support from statutory services to recognise and work with the sector to maximise their potential. It is therefore recommended that VCS support contains an awareness raising programme amongst statutory sector staff.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

- 6.15 Ensuring that the VCS is supported by statutory services, embraces the principles of this work; collaboration and sustainability. With regards to sustainability; if the statutory sector better understands the return on investment with the VCS, future disinvestment may be less likely. In addition; the potential for collaboration is likely to increase as understanding increases; thus making collaborative solutions more likely in future.
- 6.16 An awareness raising campaign for statutory sector colleagues would include the following:
- Outline of the size, diversity and make-up of the local VCS
 - Return on investment in the VCS; including delivery of social value
 - The value of volunteers and volunteering to West Berkshire
 - 'How to' guide for working with VCS organisations; points to consider.
- 6.17 It is recommended that this is provided by the Council utilising its internal expertise.
- 6.18 Investment will be needed by the Council in the safeguarding and awareness raising areas to deliver internally; estimated to be a total of £30,000 to fund safeguarding training and policy/advice/guidance for VCS organisations. Further work is required to determine the most effective and efficient means of delivering this internally (e.g. through back-fill or additional capacity).

7 Estimated Spend

The following funding has been identified:

Support element		Budget (p.a)
A	General VCS support	£59,000
B	Volunteering brokerage	£36,739
C	Safeguarding	£30k
D	Raising Awareness	
Total		£125,739

- 7.1 The budget for VCS support was agreed by the Executive in April 2020 as £100k per year, from April 2022. The budget has been allocated for up to five years, taking it to the end of March 2027. The annual contribution from the Council's current budget for VCS support (£13,739) is added to the overall budget for this project.
- 7.2 Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), has partnered with the Council on this project so will also make a contribution of £12,000 per annum. This makes the total budget available for VCS support in excess of £125,739.00.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 In recognition of the valuable contribution that the local VCS makes to local quality of life, West Berkshire Council and Berkshire West CCG have committed a £125,739 per annum for up to five years for sector support.

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

- 8.2 Following significant engagement with the local VCS sector, this report has set out guiding principles for providing VCS support which will meet the self-identified sector need. Feedback concludes that West Berkshire Council itself needs to provide support for the sector in the form of safeguarding support and awareness-raising training for the statutory sector. Funding to support this activity will be made available from the overall project budget.
- 8.3 The Report recommends that on the basis of evidence regarding sector need, as well as evidence of what works elsewhere, the Council and Berkshire West budget can respond most effectively to local VCS need within the available budget by:
- Putting in place a specialist safeguarding support and awareness raising programme to support the VCS in West Berkshire;
 - Procuring “General VCS Support” to support voluntary organisations and community groups in West Berkshire; and
 - Providing a contribution to Volunteer Centre West Berkshire to facilitate volunteer brokerage in West Berkshire.

9 Appendices

Appendix A – Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Report 2021

Background Papers:

[9. Working with the VCSE Exec 30 4 20.pdf \(westberks.gov.uk\)](#) (Executive Report, 30th April 2020)

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

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