

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Hussain

Question

Local charities, community interest companies, and community organisations offered vital support to people during the pandemic. They have been found to be an excellent partner in our immunizations, testing, community cohesiveness, and assisting people in overcoming depression and loneliness, as well as women's education and empowerment, among other things. What plans does the council have to provide long-term assistance to these organisations?

Reply

The VCSE sector are a vital partner for Staffordshire County Council in helping our communities to prosper and be healthy and happy. This is evident in the crucial and ongoing role of the VCSE sector in supporting and mobilising our communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract, delivered by SCVYS and Support Staffordshire, has been in place since August 2016. Over the past 5 and a half years, this contract has provided support for the VCSE sector to be sustainable and grow. It has also played a vital role in working with the VCSE sector to help the Council deliver our strategic priorities, including Supportive Communities, Earliest Help, the Place Based Approach, and Staffordshire's offer for Young People. The relationships developed with SCVYS and Support Staffordshire through this contract were also vital in helping organise, support, and sustain the mobilisation of our communities across the pandemic.

The support delivered by the current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract will end on 31st July 2022. As set out in the Communities Delivery Plan 2021-22 (agreed by Cabinet in December 2020), work has begun to recommission this contract based on our learning from the past 5 and a half years and the Covid-19 response. These new arrangements will be due for further consideration by Corporate Overview

and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in the coming months, with a view to new arrangements being in place by 1st August 2022.

Through the pandemic we also developed a Community Champions approach in Burton which helped challenge myths around Covid and increased uptake in vaccines. This was a new approach to engagement and communication effectively with local communities. We are now building on this model working with local organisations, groups, individuals and businesses on issues that they identify as important. We are also supporting the Burton Champions to access training, better networking plus access to information advice and guidance. We plan to roll out this model incrementally across Staffordshire and more broadly we want to ensure everyone can find ways to encourage and support community action.

In addition, the County Council continues to ensure funding is available to support Staffordshire's local VCSE sector and help communities recover from Covid-19. Examples include the '2021 Community Fund' and future years of the Members fund, (which sees £2,500 available per year for each local county councillor to allocate towards projects or groups) and the 'Doing Our Bit Covid-19 self-isolator grant scheme' (grants to groups that can support those who have to self-isolate because of Covid-19). Looking further to the future we will also explore additional funding opportunities to continue to help support and grow this vital part of our communities.