

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 15 December 2021

VCSE Capacity Building Recommission



Cllr Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture said,

"A strong, flexible and sustainable VCSE partnership is at the very heart of what makes our communities tick.

"The helping hand that they can offer can make the real difference to people living independently, helping people getting back on their feet and supporting people with their lives.

"This is an opportunity now to build on the excellent value and excellent services offered by our partners as we continue to emerge from the Covid pandemic."

Report Summary:

This report provides Cabinet with the following information regarding Staffordshire County Council's (the "Council") Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise ("VCSE") sector capacity building activity in Staffordshire:

- a. A brief overview of our current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract.
- b. A summary of feedback from key stakeholders, including commissioners, Members, and the local VCSE sector.
- c. Proposals for investing in VCSE capacity building activity once the current arrangements end on 31st July 2022, including commissioning a new VCSE Capacity Building Framework.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Consider the brief update provided on our current approach to VCSE capacity building, including the findings of recent engagement with key stakeholders.
- b. Give Cabinet approval to go out to market to commission a new VCSE Capacity Building Framework.
- c. Delegate to the Director for Corporate Services the authority to award to the VCSE Capacity Building Framework Agreement ("Framework Agreement") to the successful tenderers and authorise the award of any subsequent call-off contracts.
- d. Delegate to the Director for Corporate Services the authority to extend the VCSE Capacity Building Framework Agreement by an additional fourth year, subject to both the Council's annual MTFS process and a review of performance.



Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 15 December 2021

VCSE Capacity Building Recommission

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Consider the brief update provided on our current approach to VCSE capacity building, including the findings of recent engagement with key stakeholders.
- b. Give Cabinet approval to go out to market to commission a new VCSE Capacity Building Framework.
- c. Delegate to the Director for Corporate Services the authority to award the VCSE Capacity Building Framework Agreement (“Framework Agreement”) to the successful tenderers and authorise the award of any subsequent call-off contracts.
- d. Delegate to the Director for Corporate Services the authority to extend the VCSE Capacity Building Framework Agreement by an additional fourth year, subject to both the Council’s annual MTFS process and a review of performance.

Report of the Director for Corporate Services

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. A strong and sustainable VCSE sector is essential to achieving the Council’s priorities and the ongoing recovery of our communities from Covid-19.
2. The Council’s current arrangements for VCSE sector capacity building support are due to end on 31st July 2022. With this in mind, this report makes a series of recommendations for how we can continue to invest in VCSE capacity building activity moving forward.
3. These recommendations have been informed by the work of the previous contract, feedback from key stakeholders, and the lessons learned from the response to Covid-19.

Report

Overview

4. Working with our communities to ensure residents can help themselves and each other is central to everything we do and is a key principle of our Strategic Plan 2018-22.
5. The Council's Communities Delivery Plan 2021/22 was agreed by Cabinet in December 2020. The plan builds on a strong record of working alongside our communities to design and deliver innovative and financially sustainable services that are well used by local communities.
6. An essential part of this success has been how we have worked alongside our local VCSE sector. Through our VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract, the VCSE sector has played a central role in building capacity in our communities and helping us to deliver against a number of our strategic priorities.
7. This was particularly evident in the VCSE sector's crucial role in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The relationships developed through the VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership have helped organise, support, and sustain the mobilisation of our communities to the pandemic.
8. The current contract ends on 31st July 2022. Looking ahead, the VCSE sector will continue to play a vital role in the recovery from Covid-19 and addressing health inequalities resulting from the pandemic. The VCSE sector will also be a central part of delivering our key strategic priorities, including Supportive Communities, the Staffordshire Young People's Offer, the Place Based Approach, and the Communities principle.
9. It is critical that we continue to work alongside our partners and invest in the VCSE sector. This investment will help to ensure the VCSE sector remains strong, sustainable, and has the stability required to continue supporting our communities to recover from the pandemic.

VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership – Overview

10. The Council commissioned its VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership framework in August 2016. In February 2019, Cabinet agreed to extend the call-off contract for a further 3 years, running until 31st July 2022.

11. Since 2016, the contract has focused on delivering the following:
 - a. Building capacity in the local VCSE sector in a targeted way, focusing on prevention, early help, and local need.
 - b. Supporting the local VCSE sector to be sustainable and lead on bringing additional funding into Staffordshire.
 - c. Providing strong leadership, working in partnership with other infrastructure organisations locally, and effectively supporting the Council to deliver its priorities - including Supportive Communities, Early Help, and the Place Based Approach.
 - d. Ensuring the Council can work effectively with the VCSE sector to co-design commissioning strategies and community-based approaches.
12. The contract also enables the Council to evidence how it delivers on its statutory obligations regarding the local offer for young people. This includes ensuring sufficient positive activities are available across the County, engaging with and representing the views of young people, and mapping our local young people's offer.

Stakeholder Feedback

13. Three online surveys took place between May and June 2021, seeking the views of Council officers, Members, and VCSE groups on VCSE capacity building support.
14. The surveys found that VCSE capacity building support is valued. 96% of respondents believed that the Council should continue to invest in VCSE capacity building once the current contract has ended (126 of 131 respondents across the three surveys – 98% of VCSE organisations, 96% of Members, and 90% of officers).
15. The surveys also provided a range of additional views and experiences on the current contract including:
 - a. **VCSE sector feedback on current support** – The support most frequently accessed includes funding / income generation (64%), information, advice, and guidance (IAG) (64%), training (63%), networking (51%), and safeguarding (47%). Many groups said that this support has been vital to keeping their organisations sustainable and working in a safe way. The sector also said that regular guidance, updates, and funding support during Covid-19 was “invaluable”, “very supportive” and key to helping many groups stay financially sustainable during the pandemic.

- b. **VCSE sector feedback on future support** – When asked what future support would help them to work with their local communities, many VCSE groups said they value what they currently receive, in particular support for fundraising, networking, volunteering, IAG, and promotion of VCSE support to communities.
- c. **Member’s feedback** – 83% of Members surveyed were aware of the current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract and 50% had worked with both current providers. Many Members expressed the need for ongoing support for the VCSE sector, particularly the importance of the Staffordshire Young People’s Offer, addressing social isolation, and recovery from Covid-19.
- d. **SCC Officer feedback** – Commissioner feedback highlighted the important role of the current contract in the Communities principle, Supportive Communities, Early Help, digital inclusion, and the response to Covid-19.

Looking Forward

- 16. **Ensuring the VCSE sector is sustainable and has sufficient capacity is essential to Staffordshire’s recovery from Covid-19.** Building and sustaining capacity in the sector will also be vital to addressing the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on our communities, as well as supporting us to deliver our strategic priorities such as Supportive Communities, the Staffordshire Young People’s Offer, the Place Based Approach, and the Communities principle.
- 17. **The end of the current arrangements on the 31st July 2022 presents an opportunity for the Council to refresh its relationship with the VCSE sector.** This will allow the Council to build on the lessons learned since 2016, as well as how we worked differently with partners and communities during our response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 18. **Continuing to invest in VCSE capacity building would provide stability for the VCSE sector at a crucial time,** as well as empowering volunteers and grassroots community organisations to come together and help their local communities.

VCSE Capacity Building Framework

- 19. With this in mind, this report recommends that Cabinet agree to go to market to commission a new Framework Agreement in January 2022, with a view to new arrangements being in place by 1st August 2022.

20. This new Framework Agreement will look to achieve the following:
- a. Ensure the VCSE sector remains sustainable as communities continue to recover from Covid-19.
 - b. Build capacity in communities to support the Council to deliver its priorities. This includes the Supportive Communities programme, the Staffordshire Young People's Offer, and the Place Based Approach.
 - c. Provide a flexible, responsive, and transparent way of commissioning additional work with the VCSE sector and partners, learning the lessons from our response to Covid-19.
 - d. Provide an effective way of contract managing our VCSE capacity building activity that is efficient for both commissioners and providers.
21. It is proposed that the Framework Agreement is put in place for a minimum of three years, with the option to extend for a further fourth year. It is proposed that this extension is a delegated decision by the Director for Corporate Services, subject to both the Council's annual MTFS process and a review of performance.
22. Subject to approval by Cabinet, the commissioning process will go out to market in January 2022. The Framework Agreement and associated call-off contracts will be awarded in Spring 2022, with the new arrangements aiming to go live by 1st August 2022 to ensure there is no gap in provision.
23. In order to ensure this commissioning process is timely and effective, **this report also recommends that delegated authority is given to the Director for Corporate Services (SLT lead) to award to the Framework Agreement and authorise the award of any subsequent call off contracts under the Framework Agreement.**

Legal Implications

24. There are no specific legal implications for the commissioning of the Framework Agreement. The potential value of spend for the services lends the procurement process to strictly follow the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (the "Regulations"). The implications of any process failing to follow these Regulations could lead to serious legal challenges to the Council with the possible halt by a court on any contract award. If Cabinet approves the recommendations of this report, the commissioning process will follow all relevant and appropriate procurement and legal requirements.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

25. The available budget for recommissioning VCSE capacity building support is up to £500,000 per annum. This budget will cover the priorities set out in paragraph 20a and 20b of this report.
26. As discussed in paragraph 20c, the proposed Framework will also allow for additional work to be 'called off' as required. This will enable us to work more flexibly and quickly with the VCSE sector and partners to respond to future community needs.
27. There is currently no confirmed budget for this additional activity and the Framework Agreement will be used as and when additional work and funding becomes available in the future.
28. However, in order to meet the requirements of our commissioning processes and the associated Regulations, a provisional budget for future work has been set at up to £3m for potential additional activity over the lifetime of the Framework Agreement. This results in the **maximum** value of the contract over the lifetime of the Framework being £5m.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Executive Summary Community Impact Assessment (CIA)

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