

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	21 June 2017
Subject:	Voluntary Sector and Community Development Funding and Activities for 2017/18		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	Yes	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To approve the council's proposed approach for the use of the Voluntary and Community Sector grants and activities budget in the financial year to March 2018.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- (1) The proposed allocation and use of the VCS grants and activities budget for the 2017/18 financial year as outlined in paragraph 3.3 be approved.
- (2) Authority be delegated to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods to enter into agreements or other documentation as considered appropriate on terms approved by the Council's Solicitor.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a key priority for the Council and a guiding principle in how we deliver services, engage with our communities and work in partnership with other agencies. We believe that each and every community has assets or strengths that will enable communities to flourish and should, over time, make communities more resilient and self-sufficient. Our role is to support communities to recognise strengths and deliver for themselves, as opposed to be more passive recipients of public services. We have successfully used the approach in a number of communities, including Westgate, Matson, Barton & Tredworth, Kingsway and Podsmead, which has led to sustained activities and community led support that is continuing to improve the lives of local people. Importantly, many of these activities have led to a dynamic and organic growth of

projects, events, activities or support – without any additional intervention from the Council. The deployment of Community Builders has been instrumental in this. At the same time, the Council recognises that there is a need for specific services, including advice and support, to support vulnerable individuals and communities.

3.2 Our vision for Asset Based Community Development is a guiding principle for investing our voluntary and community sector budget. At present we invest in the following activities:

- **Grant Funding to advice agencies** (The Law Centre; CAB; Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS)) – who provide advice and very specific support to vulnerable people and communities.
- A **grant budget for the Voluntary and Community Sector** – where voluntary or community organisations are able to bid for grants against specific criteria which are in line with our investment principles of ABCD.
- **Councillor Community Fund** – a fund to enable councillors to support community led projects
- **Your Gloucester** – a working budget to enable community building activities, and small scale ABCD grants
- **Community Builder** – a ring-fenced fund for a dedicated Community Builder in Westgate ward.

In addition we receive a budget of £50,000 from the County Council for Youth Grants. This budget is allocated on an annual basis and we have confirmation from the County Council that the funding is available for the 2017/18 financial year.

3.3 The Budget Savings Programme, as approved by Council in February, sets out a target saving of £195,000 over two years for the VCS grants and activities budget. This represents a reduction of over 60% from current levels.

The table below shows the breakdown of funding for 2016-17, and the proposed reductions for the next two years.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Service Level Agreement (SLAs) with Advice Agencies	£139,358	£71,000	£71,000
VCS Grants	£47,000	£25,000	0
Councillor Community Fund	£78,000	£39,000	£18,000
Community Building	£30,000	£15,000	£15,000
Your Gloucester	£20,000	£10,000	£10,000
TOTAL	£314,358	£160,000	£115,000
Reduction from 16/17 levels		£154,000	£198,000

4.0 Rationale for proposed reductions in funding

4.1 Advice Agencies

4.1.1 The Council currently has SLAs with three advice agencies:

- Citizens Advice Bureau: £61,801 per annum, for a range of generic and specialist advice in areas such as: Benefits, Debt and Financial, Employment, Housing and Relationships. Advice is provided free of charge through different

channels (with the majority being face to face). The service is open to anyone in need of advice. It tends to be taken up by more vulnerable people in society.

- The Law Centre: £75,522 – provision of free, confidential and impartial legal advice to Gloucester residents in the areas of: Immigration, Asylum, Welfare Benefits, Housing and Family Law. It offers services to people who live within the city boundaries
- GARAS: £2,035 – provision of support and advice to asylum seekers and refugees, including free English classes and support with interview practice, writing CVs and gaining work experience through volunteering

4.1.2 All agencies provide a valuable service to local residents with high customer satisfaction.

The proposed grant allocation for 2017/18 and 2018/19 is:

- Citizens Advice Bureau - £31,000 per annum
- The Law Centre: £38,000 per annum
- GARAS: £2,000 per annum

4.1.3 The proposed reduction in the SLA for Advice Agencies amounts to just over 50%, less than the overall reduction to the grants budget of 66%.

4.1.4 We are in on-going discussion with both advice agencies to understand the impact of the reduced grant and we have been informed by the CAB that there will be a reduction of general advice from 5 days a week to 3 days a week, while opening hours for advice for debt and financial capability will remain unchanged. We understand from conversations with the Law Centre that the current provision of advice will remain unchanged as the Centre will rely on reserves; however we are aware that there is an increasing risk to their long-term financial sustainability.

4.1.5 Officers are having discussions with both agencies and the County Council (who provides funding to the CAB also), exploring how we can support them in reducing accommodation costs, generating other means of income, and redesigning how they deliver their services, including use of IT where appropriate. We will review and simplify our SLAs and reporting requirements. To inform this process, we undertook a face to face consultation with users of the centre over four weeks in April to ascertain what is important to them in accessing the service. We obtained 95 responses of which 28 were from users of the Law Centre, and 66 from the CAB, with one response not indicating which agency they had visited. Although this is a relatively low sample size in relation to the total number of service users around 95% of those using the centre during the days the consultation took place completed the survey.

4.1.6 Key messages were:

- A large proportion of visits to the Law Centre and Citizen's Advice Bureau are repeat visits concerning the same issue, which would indicate the need to look at how issues can be better dealt with at the first point of contact.
- Generally service users find it easy to get an appointment, however during the consultation staff primarily spoke to service users attending drop in sessions. Women generally found it harder to get to the sessions along with carers which would most likely be due to their caring responsibilities

- Concerns raised over seeing an advisor included waiting times, the inability to book an appointment online and the ability to speak to an advisor over the telephone
- People generally find it easy to get to the centres, although this is less so for older people. There were some issues raised about difficulties with travel costs, mobility and the reliability of public transport
- Both centres are seen by customers as key sources of information providing opportunities to provide advice across the two centres, potentially avoiding additional contact
- Friends and family were highlighted as the third highest source of information for those using the centre. This provides further opportunity to upskill the public to deal with low level advice via effective online signposting, which would be particularly effective for supporting our young people
- Word of mouth and other agencies were seen as the best source of communication – with adverts/newspapers being the least favoured channel.
- Doctors Surgeries, Pharmacies and Libraries were services most likely to be used by the service users spoken to. This allows for opportunity to provide advice and services through libraries and to provide appropriate literature in our GP practices and pharmacies
- Overall 77% of respondents use the internet at least once a day, and 62% use it several times a day which would suggest that online support is a real option for some users.
- Overall what matters most to service users is receiving the right answer, receiving a quick response and face to face support.

4.1.7 Cabinet will be aware from discussions at Budget Council that the proposed reduction in funding for the CAB and Law Centre is contested. We received a petition with 406 signatories calling upon Gloucester City Council to reconsider its proposals to reduce their funding by 50% as providers of vital services.

4.2 **VCS Grants Budget:** It is proposed to reduce the VCS Grants budget to £25,000 in the current year and phase this out altogether in 2018/19. In line with our ABCD principles, we propose to provide grants for projects that will support community cohesion, increase social action and share skills. Looking forward, we believe that the introduction of the Gloucester Lottery, which is raising approximately £30,000 per annum for good causes at the time of writing, is creating a sound platform for community projects to fundraise for themselves. At the time of writing, the 'central pot' is at £13,500 which will be available for VCS organisations to bid for. We continue to actively promote the Lottery and are confident that this central pot will increase over time and will offset the proposed grant reduction.

4.3 **Councillor Community Fund:** It is proposed to reduce the Members Allocation Fund to £1,000 per councillor for 2017/18 to spend on community projects within their wards. We have simplified the guidance and application form and process. We propose to reduce this to £500 per councillor in 2018/19. Our evidence shows that it is often very small amounts of funding that unlock effective community action. We will continue to signpost members to other sources of funding for community projects, such as Barnwood Trust.

4.4 It is proposed to continue to fund the **Community Builder for Westgate** until 2018/19, to continue our project with the Police and Barnwood Trust who are deploying a cohort of five community builders, hosted by Barnwood Trust. The

project includes a longitudinal evaluation to identify outcomes and benefits over a two year period. A first evaluation report is expected in before the summer.

- 4.5 It is proposed to retain a small budget of £10,000 for **Your Gloucester** (ABCD Grants) funding for the next two years, enabling officers to support this approach across the City as a whole.

5.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

- 5.1 These grants are instrumental in continuing our ABCD work in the City and we use our budgets to invest in enabling our communities to become more resilient and self-organising.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 Consideration could be given to cease offering grants altogether. However, some groups would not be able to meet and or grow community social action and the council recognises the value grants offer to the voluntary and community sector and the social action this helps to generate.
- 6.2 Grant funding is an investment into communities. These financial investments support associations which reduce social isolation, encourage physical activity and other outcomes. Consideration should be given to aligning the Community Grants with commissioning that also seeks to achieve these outcomes in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council and other partners.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 Community grants offer support to a wide number and range of groups that have a positive impact on the well-being of residents within their neighbourhoods.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 8.1 We will review our SLAs, making them simpler, and will continue to develop our relationships with the CAB and Law Centre supporting them in reducing their reliance on grants. Over the longer term, we are keen to explore the opportunities to creating a public sector hub.
- 8.2 The new Community Wellbeing Team will aim to work with groups and individuals to connect them with additional funding opportunities as well as to other community contacts with mutual aspirations who they can share resources with.
- 8.3 The allocation of grant funding will be kept under constant review. If alternative ways of allocating money to better support the ABCD approach are identified or the sum of money for grants changes significantly then a report will be presented to Cabinet to determine any changes to how the fund is allocated.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 As outlined in section 3.3 of the report. The proposal makes a significant contribution to meeting the savings targets for 2017-18 and 2018-19.

[Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report]

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Council has a wide variety of statutory powers to award grants to voluntary and community groups.
- 10.2 The guidance, criteria and process adopted by the Council demonstrates that decisions to award grants are taken in a fair and transparent manner. Written documentation of the award ensures that a successful organisation understands their obligations and the terms upon which the grant has been awarded.
- 10.3 The Council has undertaken a consultation exercise to comply with its obligations under s 3(2) Local Government Act 1999 (Best Value) and s 149 Equality Act 2010.

[One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report]

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 11.1 Removing or reducing funding could have an impact on the number of projects delivered and the support that communities need to develop and encourage social action.
- 11.2 There are opportunities to use smaller funds that will grow community action through ABCD, for example hiring a venue is relatively low cost but has a high value in assisting groups to meet.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 12.1 The screening stage of the PIA highlighted possible impacts on age, disability and race. In response we carried out additional consultation with service users to understand how they use the service, the outcomes they want to achieve and what matters most to them. The key findings are presented in paragraph 4.1.6 above and the survey results will be used to design the further Service Level Agreement and in our on-going support of and work with the agencies.

13.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 13.1 The work done through community projects can help increase social interactions and add to a feeling of security thus reducing the fear of crime.

Sustainability

- 13.2 Grant funding does not directly encourage sustainability of groups who are dependent on the income. However, if grants are seen as occasional investments and groups have a plan around this concept; this will create opportunities around a skill sharing economy within the voluntary and community sector.

Staffing & Trade Union

- 13.3 Not applicable

Press Release drafted/approved

13.4 A press release will be drafted in readiness for the launch of the 2017-18 grants scheme.

Background Documents:

People Impact Assessment
Petition
Advice Centre Consultation