

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....17th October 2019

1. Title of Item/Report

Support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on the Council's approach to providing ongoing support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in the borough.

The borough was fortunate to benefit from a strong and thriving VCSE sector. There were approximately 800 active VCSE organisations in the borough, delivering huge value and support across a wide range of areas to the residents of the borough.

The Council valued the work of the voluntary, charitable and social enterprise organisations in the borough and the many people who dedicated their time and energy in the sector. The Council had a long track record of supporting the sector in the borough and was committed to helping it thrive and prosper. The approach had always combined both direct financial support with support through collaborative partnership working and strong relationships. As part of this commitment the Council had historically reviewed, and reported through Cabinet, the support it provided on a regular basis in order to ensure it remained fit for purpose in line with the Council Plan objective to "support the continued development of a strong and vibrant VCSE sector". The last report was considered by Cabinet in 2016 and it was considered timely to review the approach as the funding agreement with Catalyst (the key partner in providing support to the sector) comes to an end in 2019.

The Council adopted a comprehensive approach to support for the VCSE sector which was built on a platform of support delivered through the charitable organisation - Catalyst and a small Community Engagement team within the Council. This model had proved to be successful for a number of years and retained strong support from across the sector.

The Council continued to provide core funding to Catalyst to support its work as the strategic infrastructure organisation for the borough. Catalyst was established in 2007 through a partnership project between the VCSE

and the Council. The concept was to create an overarching body that could act to further the impact, reputation and opportunities of the VCSE in the Borough. It did this through providing specialist support on matters such as organisational governance, funding advice (which includes facilitating new strategic funds and opportunities), bespoke training, support catered to the VCSE's needs and networking opportunities for regular and meaningful dialogue with funders and public sector commissioners. Catalyst also managed a number of infrastructure projects such as Stockton Volunteers. The successful Community Programme which was wide range of Forums, networks and meetings that brought together local VCSE organisations and public sector partners offer an opportunity for VCSE organisations and individuals to:

- a. Participate in the sector
  - b. Influence strategic decisions in the borough
  - c. Exchange ideas/information and promote best practice
  - d. Build relationships and partnerships
- And,
- e. Promote their organisations or projects to the wider VCSE Sector

The infrastructure model in place in Stockton had served the sector and the local authority well and was recognised as a model of good practice elsewhere. Locally and regionally the traditional models of voluntary development agencies had continued to decline and, in many instances, had ceased to exist with authorities reducing or ceasing core funding. However, the Council's ongoing support through core funding and close working relationships and regular communication had seen the model continue to thrive. The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety had a role on the Catalyst Board and members of the Catalyst team work closely with Council officers in the Community Engagement team. Further information on Catalyst's work was provided in the Catalyst Annual Review attached to the report.

The decision to provide core funding to Catalyst to support the sector was complemented by the Council's investment in the Community Engagement team. The team worked closely with Catalyst and also facilitated the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). They supported the LSP in its work to deliver the Bright Borough for All Strategy to tackle poverty. They do this through delivery of the annual LSP event to agree priorities and then through support to the four Locality Forums and the two LSP thematic groups (the Infinity Partnership and the Housing, Neighbourhood and Affordable Warmth Partnership). The team also provided support to the network of 36 Community Centres across the borough, working closely with Onsite Building Trust. They oversee the use of the Market Development Fund which could be used support sustainability in the VCSE sector. Facilitate and support the Bright Minds,

Big Futures initiative to engage with young people across the borough. They also maintained strong relationships with individuals and organisations across the sector and work in conjunction with Catalyst to create strong and joined-up working. The team's involvement in the Catalyst-run Forums provided a valuable interface between the sector and the Council.

Whilst the Catalyst / Council partnership outlined above forms the basis of the support to the sector the report detailed the many other ways the Council built on this foundation to provide ongoing support to the sector.

It was proposed that as the current approach served the sector, the Council and enabled joint working for the benefit of the people of the borough that the Council continued to provide support to the VCSE sector with an ongoing commitment to the joint Catalyst / Council model underpinning the range of additional support activities outlined in paragraph 6 of the report.

To support this model, it was proposed that a new 5-year partnership contract be agreed with Catalyst for £97,000 core funding p.a. It was proposed that the current 3-year agreement be replaced with a longer 5-year agreement as this better reflected the long-term partnership relationship between the two organisations and allowed for longer term planning.

It was also proposed that a one-off additional commitment be made for 2019/20 to Catalyst to support the new Stockton Borough Asylum Seeker & Refugee Forum. The new group sought to provide a forum for the co-ordination of the many VCSE organisations who were providing support to asylum seekers and refugees in the borough. It was anticipated that the forum would add great value to the work of the separate organisations and had plans to undertake some joint work on a directory of services and support following the change of asylum housing providers. The additional funding would support the employment of a part-time member of staff for one year to set-up and run the forum and some of the initial activities of the group. It was anticipated that following the initial set-up year the forum could be supported alongside the other Catalyst-run forums through the normal funding arrangements.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The overall approach to VCSE Sector support as outlined in the report be approved.
2. The ongoing financial and partnership commitment to Catalyst to support the organisation in its work to provide the voice, representation and support for Stockton-on-Tees' VCSE sector be approved.

3. The commitment of one-off additional support to Catalyst for the establishment of a new Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum be approved.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The Council has agreed a key objective in the 2019/22 Council Plan to:

Support the continued development of a strong and vibrant voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

The purpose of this report, and the recommendations included within it, is to agree the approach to providing ongoing support to the sector in order to underpin delivery of this important Council Plan objective.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Steve Nelson declared a personal pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 10 - Support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector as he was a member of Catalyst.

Councillor Jim Beall declared a personal pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 10 - Support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector as his wife was a director of Onsite Building Trust.

Councillor Ann McCoy declared a personal pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 10 - Support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector as she was the Chair of SDAIS.

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight, 25 October 2019.

Proper Officer  
21 October 2019