

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17 OCTOBER 2019

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety – Councillor Steve Nelson

SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SECTOR

SUMMARY

To agree the Council's approach to providing ongoing support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in the borough.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cabinet approves the overall approach to VCSE Sector support as outlined in this report.
2. Cabinet approves 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.
3. Cabinet approves the commitment of one-off additional support to Catalyst for the establishment of a new Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum.

DETAIL

1. The borough is fortunate to benefit from a strong and thriving VCSE sector. There are currently 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.
2. The Council values the work of the voluntary, charitable and social enterprise organisations in the borough and the many people who dedicate their time and energy in the sector. The Council has a long track record of supporting the sector in the borough and is committed to helping it thrive and prosper. Our approach has always combined both direct financial support with support through collaborative partnership working and strong relationships. As part of this

commitment we have historically reviewed, and reported through Cabinet, the support we provide on a regular basis in order to ensure it remains 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 is considered timely to review the approach as the current funding agreement with Catalyst (our key partner in providing support to the sector) comes to an end in 2019.

3. The Council adopts a comprehensive approach to support for the VCSE sector which is built on a platform of support delivered through the charitable organisation - Catalyst and a small Community Engagement team within the Council. This model has proved to be successful for a number of years and retains strong support from across the sector.
4. The Council continues 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 does 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 manages a number of infrastructure projects such as Stockton Volunteers. The successful Community Programme which is wide range of Forums, networks and meetings that bring 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 partnershipsAnd,
 - e. Promote their organisations or projects to the wider VCSE Sector

The infrastructure model in place in Stockton has served the sector and the local authority well and is recognised as a model of good practice elsewhere. Locally and regionally the traditional models of voluntary development agencies have continued to decline and, in many instances, have 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 has seen the model continue to thrive. The Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety has 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 is provided in the Catalyst Annual Review at **Appendix 1**.

5. The decision to provide core funding to Catalyst to support the sector is complemented by the Council’s investment in the Community Engagement team. The team works closely with Catalyst and also facilitates the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). They support 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 provide 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 can 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 maintain 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 provides a valuable interface between the sector and the Council.

6. Whilst the Catalyst / Council partnership outlined above forms the basis of the support to the sector it is also important to highlight the many other ways the Council builds on this foundation to provide ongoing support to the sector:
 - a. The relationship between the Council and the VCSE Sector is underpinned by The Stockton-on-Tees Borough Compact 2018-21 <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/strong-communities/support-and-development-for-voluntary-and-community-groups/>. The Compact developed in partnership with the sector, sets out the common principles which underpin how we will work together.
 - b. We have continued to support our Community Asset Transfer Strategy to provide a transparent framework to enable the transfer of building assets to the community, primarily through long-leasehold or in some circumstances freehold arrangements to voluntary or community organisations. The strategy supports local groups to own or manage community buildings, such as community centres or village halls, it can provide them a real asset base to support their development. It can also play a part in improving the skills of the people involved and encourage a stronger community spirit by bringing people together to work towards a shared goal. This provision of community space is further supported by Onsite Building Trust which was formed in in 2014 as part of the Council's transforming infrastructure programme. Onsite now operates eight centres across the borough and encourages and supports community-orientated actions, groups and social enterprises for the needs of the community. The Onsite Board is chaired by the Chief Executive of Catalyst and the two organisations worked together to provide support to VCSE organisations in the borough.
 - c. We maintain strong links across all Directorates to ensure that all VCSE commissioning and joint development opportunities are identified. Senior Catalyst representatives are involved in early discussions to ensure that all VCSE opportunities are considered at the earliest stage of service development discussions. The VCSE sector delivered £13.8m of commissioned services in the borough on behalf of the Council in 2017/18 through contracts across a wide range of services.
 - d. We continue to provide useful data and statistics to VCSE organisations in the borough such as the ward profile data <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/strong-communities/ward-profiles-2019/> . This information helps inform local services and also provides valuable information for organisations when making funding bids.
 - e. We continue to provide some direct financial support to VCSE organisations through the Stockton Borough Community Fund. The Fund which is administered by the Tees Valley Community Foundation makes award to voluntary and community sector organisations in the borough of up to £500.
 - f. Whilst the Council's financial support to the sector is primarily directed through its support to Catalyst it has maintained some direct financial support to Stockton District Advice and Information Service and to Moneywise. These support arrangements have been the subject of separate Cabinet decisions and have been made in support of specific Council Plan commitments and the policy principle of protecting the vulnerable in the borough.
 - g. The Council continues to recognise the great contribution of those working in the VCSE sector through the Mayors Civic Awards. The annual awards which honour local people and organisations that have made a real difference to our communities and officially recognise the achievements that have been made are a formal recognition of the value the Council places on the work in the sector. In particular, the Young Person Award, the Service to Community Award (Individuals) and the Service to Community Award (Groups

& Organisations) provide an ideal opportunity to celebrate the success of those in the VCSE sector.

And finally,

- h. The Council continues to support many organisations across the borough through the individual involvement of many Members and Officers who are involved as volunteers and trustees at a number of organisations.
7. It is proposed that as the current approach serves the sector, the Council and enables us to work together for the benefit of the people of the borough that we continue 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.
8. To support this model, it is proposed that a new 5-year partnership contract is agreed with Catalyst for £97,000 core funding p.a. It is proposed that the current 3-year agreement is replaced with a longer 5-year agreement as this better reflects the long-term partnership relationship between the two organisations and allows for longer term planning.
9. It is also proposed that a one-off additional commitment is made for 2019/20 to Catalyst to support the new Stockton Borough Asylum Seeker & Refugee Forum. The new group seeks to provide a forum for the co-ordination of the many VCSE organisations who are providing support to asylum seekers and refugees in the borough. It is anticipated that the forum will add great value to the work of the separate organisations and has 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 is anticipated that following the initial set-up year the forum can be supported alongside the other Catalyst-run forums through the normal funding arrangements.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

It is not considered that a Community Impact Assessment is required for this decision. The support the VCSE sector is not directed to any particular communities of interest or any specific geographic communities.

A number of the organisations operating in the VCSE sector in the borough work to create equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, therefore it is considered that the Council's ongoing support to the sector helps to meet its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty in this regard.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is provision in the MTFP for this decision in the HR, Legal and Communications budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The agreement between the Council and Catalyst will be set out in a contract prepared by the Council's legal department. The report does not relate to any statutory duties or requirements.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The procurement is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

Not applicable – does not relate directly to specific wards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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