

To: Mike Hill- Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

From: David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance

Decision No: **21/00074**

Subject: **Interim infrastructure support offer for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)**

Classification: **unrestricted**

Date: 25 August 2021

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: Countywide- all divisions affected

Summary:

This report provides an update on the proposed interim infrastructure support we propose to put in place for this financial year (2021-2022) and asks for Cabinet Committee to comment on and endorse this decision.

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services is asked to agree to fund a pilot for Volunteering Infrastructure across the County and the Strategic Recovery Fund to support the voluntary sector in Kent.

1. Background

- 1.1 An update report was brought to Policy and Resources (P&R) Cabinet Committee in January 2021, setting out the support we had put in place for the Voluntary, Community sector (VCS) during the pandemic and our intention to put in place interim support measures whilst we revised the Civil Society Strategy (CSS). This Strategy was consulted on in early 2020 but subsequently paused due to Covid. The CSS, as set out in our report in January, will provide our long-term framework for providing infrastructure support to the VCS and a report is due to come to P&R in November on the final strategy.
- 1.2 However, this report sets out our proposal for funding interim support to the sector through a Strategic Recovery Fund (SRF) and Volunteering infrastructure pilot. Whilst the total value of this support is below the delegation threshold with a combined value of only £500K, this must be approved by the Cabinet Member as set out in the Corporate Grant Procedure within the Financial Regulations and therefore must be considered as a non-key decision by Committee. *Corporate Grant Procedure: Any grants above £15,000 must be approved by the relevant Cabinet Member*

2. Proposed Interim Support Funding

- 2.1 This funding is intended to provide support to the Voluntary Sector over the next 12 months until the adoption of KCC's Civil Society Strategy in December, which will set

out the framework for our longer-term infrastructure support. The Council's Interim Strategic Plan (ISP) set out our commitment to meeting the challenges identified during Recovery and to:

Develop a support offer for the VCSE which responds to the challenges identified during COVID-19 recovery to help maintain the local VCSE network whilst supporting it to be sustainable and revitalised within a post COVID-19 environment.

- 2.2 The proposals set out in this report have been informed by extensive engagement with the Voluntary Sector; prior to Covid this was through engagement forums and the consultation on the draft CSS but more recently through the VCS Recovery Cell as part of the Kent Resilience Forum Architecture. This cell has since been transitioned into a VCS Steering Group made up of VCS representatives and chaired independently to KCC and they have been engaged in the early development of the revised CSS and the support offer.
- 2.3 There are two elements to this infrastructure funding:

The Strategic Recovery Fund:

This Fund was run in 2020 as emergency support to the Voluntary Sector providing small grants to organisations to help them adapt their business plans and organisational model to meet the demands of Covid and was outlined in the P&R report in January. The Fund was run by Kent Community Foundation (KCF) as a recognised, grant making organisation and it is proposed to run this fund again with KCF for 2021 given the success of the Fund. The total value of the funding is £330K. The Fund will open by late September.

We know that organisations will be struggling to adapt post Covid particularly with the ending of Covid emergency grants and an increase in demand for services and therefore will feel it is important to keep access to organisational and business support in place whilst we develop out longer-term strategy. This Fund will enable organisations to access support and expertise to adapt their business model, organisations plan, funding strategies as well as digital skills. It will also look to support relatively new organisations (over 12 months) that may be looking to diversity or need support to develop. We know that to adapt to the funding environment with many traditional fundraising events still not taking place, that revising business plans and financial strategies is vitally important for sector sustainability.

This Fund is demand led so organisations can buy in the support they need from organisations they trust and that understand their organisational needs. This is in recognition that the sector's needs are diverse and that no single organisation can meet those needs. We will therefore use the impact monitoring provided by this Fund, both in terms of who provided the support and the impact this had to inform our future, long term business support to the Voluntary Sector.

Volunteering infrastructure Pilot.

The need for a well-resourced and co-ordinated volunteering network across the County was highlighted in the VCS Recovery Cell action plan developed in response to Covid. The Volunteer Centres provided advice and support to hubs supporting those that are shielding, whilst continuing to co-ordinate those that volunteered within their local communities throughout the pandemic. They also supported volunteers who were not able to volunteer for health reasons; ensuring they remained connected and engaged.

To deliver against the action plan and the ISP we intend to work with the volunteering infrastructure to develop a pilot for county wide volunteering infrastructure, that is sustainable but offers some consistency of resource across the County. This will be run as a grant funded pilot led by Ashford Volunteer Centre so that we can develop the best approach alongside the organisations themselves. The total value of this pilot will be £170K and will be split between the lead organisation, the activity needed to deliver the pilot and locality leads.

By volunteering infrastructure, we mean organisations who focus on supporting and promoting volunteering across the county and provide the support and guidance organisations require to effectively recruit and retain volunteers. The intention is to support a consistent offer of volunteering infrastructure across the County, whereby organisations who deliver this support can work in partnership to ensure that good quality advice and guidance is available to organisations who wish to recruit and retain volunteers. Part of this infrastructure will be the developing the Kent Volunteers digital platform for easier access to volunteer opportunities, advice, guidance, and templates for volunteer recruitment.

Whilst there is a need for local intelligence and a geographical presence for volunteering infrastructure, there is also a need for a consistent offer of support for volunteers and organisations who wish to engage volunteers. It will be for the lead organisation in the pilot to bring others into the partnership, in agreement with KCC and ensure that there is access to volunteer infrastructure support across the County. This will not necessarily mean funding an organisation in each district but there will be a locality lead that covers each district area and the organisations involved will need to provide local networks across organisations providing local volunteering infrastructure support.

The pilot will be evaluated working with KCC analytics, and the findings will inform our future arrangements, however our commitment to supporting volunteering infrastructure and the framework for providing this will be embedded in the Civil Society Strategy (once adopted).

3. Conclusion:

- 3.1 The support outlined in this report is an interim proposal, however given the impact of the last year on the VCS and the likely demand for support delivered by these organisations to our communities, it was felt necessary to act now to put in place support that the sector has identified as a priority.
- 3.2 Once the strategy consultation has taken place and we have the findings of the interim support, our future support offer will be embedded in the strategy framework and set out over the 3-year life of the strategy.

4. Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services is asked to agree to fund a pilot for Volunteering Infrastructure across the County and the Strategic Recovery Fund to support the voluntary sector in Kent.

5. Contact details

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