



PRCC.35 13/14

Prosperous Communities
Committee

17th December 2013

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**Subject: Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector in West Lindsey
– Review Final Report**

Report by:

Head of Localism

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To report on the work of the Voluntary Sector Review Panel who have completed their two year review of the Council's support for a range of voluntary sector organisations.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Members NOTE the contents of the report and thank the Voluntary Sector Review Panel for their work.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

Under the new Best Value Statutory Guidance issued by the Government the Council is required to comply with the requirements of the Voluntary Sector Compact. This details the length of time for adequate consultation with the sector and other measures which clarify support.

The actions and decisions made by the Review Panel comply with these legal requirements.

Financial : FIN/54/14

The new arrangements are within the current budget and Medium Term Financial Plan.

Staffing :

10 organisations have Service Level Agreements as a result of this review. All require the production of performance reports monitored against agreed targets and measures. Management of these contracts will require staff time – a minimum of 4 days per annum per contract.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

Voluntary and community sector organisations support a range of individuals and communities within West Lindsey, often those most vulnerable and in need of assistance. Equality and Diversity is an essential component to this support. Service Level Agreements are required to detail the ways in which organisations ensure adherence to the council's equality and diversity policies.

Risk Assessment :

All Service Level Agreements have the relevant clauses covering Safeguarding, Health and Safety and public liability requirements to ensure minimum risk to the Council.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :

N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

Executive Summary

This report gives the results and findings of a two year review into the support the Council gives to voluntary and community organisations. Its strategic objectives were:

- A review of the Council's individual relationships with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) based on the sector's role in delivering Corporate Plan priorities.
- The Council's partnership work with the County Council in supporting the development of stronger voluntary and social enterprise activity.
- The need for a voluntary sector infrastructure and its benefits to the district in developing communities and support to the voluntary sector.

A cross-party Member Panel was set up with officer support to undertake the review and each organisation was scrutinised using performance reports, existing Service Level Agreements and Annual Accounts. Additionally, some organisations were interviewed by the Panel to ascertain their social impact. One area of work (community conservation) was put out to tender to ensure best value was being achieved.

The review was undertaken in two phases reviewing the organisations first whose financial arrangements were due to expire in March 2013 with phase 2 covering those organisations with longer formal arrangements. This included working with Lincolnshire County Council on the co-design of county-wide infrastructure services.

As a result, 10 organisations are now supported costing a total of £188,200 in the current year falling to £171,200 in future years. This rises to £223,000 and £206,200 respectively when the costs of support for Call Connect Plus are added in. This is a service run by the County Council but was reviewed as part of this process as it mirrors VCS activity.

Any anomalies have been ironed out and all organisations have revised Service Level Agreements (SLA) and all agreements are managed by a named officer. SLAs are for a minimum of 3 years, subject to satisfactory performance and the Council's ability to pay.

The new arrangements are within the current budget and Medium Term Financial Plan and conform to national Best Practice Guidelines and Compact Principles for working with the voluntary sector.

1. Introduction

1.1 On 12th January 2012 Policy and Resources Committee approved a number of recommendations which included the recognition of the voluntary sector in the delivery and support of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and the need to undertake a strategic review of current relationships to ensure value for money and future corporate fit. They were:

- A strategic review of the Council's individual relationships with the voluntary and community sector over the next 2 years based on the strategic framework provided and the sector's role in delivering Corporate Plan priorities.
- The Council's partnership work with the County Council in supporting the development of stronger voluntary and social enterprise activity.
- The need for a voluntary sector infrastructure and its benefits to the district in developing communities and support to the voluntary sector.
- The continuation of the Service Level Agreement to Community Lincs for infrastructure support of £20,000 per annum for two years.
- The continuation of the Service Level Agreement to Voluntary Services (West Lindsey) for infrastructure support of £25,000 per annum for two years.
- The establishment of a Member Panel to oversee and direct the Strategic Review.

1.2 The process has now been completed and this report gives the results of the two years' work .

2 Strategic Review

2.1 It was agreed that Cllrs. Bierley, Howitt-Cowan and Summers should form the Review Panel. Cllr Caine joined at a later stage to ensure cross-party working and Cllr Parry replaced Cllr Summers when he took the position of Leader.

2.3 The Panel Members agreed an operating procedure for the Review which is outlined in Appendix 1 where, on the information presented, they could either:

- Recommend to continue to support;
- Invite the organisation for interview to learn more about their work;
- Put the work out to tender if there was any doubt about performance or;

- Recommend that support ceases.

2.4 In order to do this an initial assessment of each organisation was made by officers to provide the basis for discussion, alongside performance reports, copies of Service Level Agreements and Annual Accounts. The Assessment Form is shown at Appendix 2.

2.5 15 grants covering 14 organisations were listed for review and these were prioritised according to the length of funding agreement with the Council. Those with agreements which ceased at the end of March 2013 were a first priority as, under Compact rules, any significant change in funding needed a 3-month notice period.

VCS Review - In priority order		
Group 1 (Phase 1)	Current arrangements due to cease in March 2013	
	West Lindsey CAB	
	Lincoln & District CAB	
	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	
	Dial-a-Ride Lincoln	
	GAPA	
	Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust	
	Act Now	
Gainsborough Town Council - Riverside Festival		
Group 2 (Phase 2)	Arrangements in place beyond March 2013	
	Community Lincs	Mar-14
	Urban Challenge	Mar-14
	Gainsborough Town Council /Churches Festival	Mar-15
	Gainsborough House	Jan-17
	Lincolnshire Sports Partnership	Mar-14
Group 3	Other	
	YaSiG - separate developments	

2.6 The contribution the Council pays to Lincolnshire County Council towards the Call Connect Plus was also reviewed as part of this process. Although LCC does not form part of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), the service they provide was formerly the Gainsborough and Market Rasen Dial-a-Ride Services, provided by the voluntary sector.

3 Findings from the Review

3.1 The work of the **Citizen's Advice Bureaux**, including social impact and value for money has been the subject of a previous Committee paper and is well understood. Both organisations should continue to be supported, particularly through the impact imposed by the impending benefits changes.

- 3.2 The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now **The Conservation Volunteers – TCV**) specialise in recruiting and training volunteers to work on habitat management and conservation tasks. They have managed two woods in Gainsborough owned by the Council (Pitt Hills Wood and Theaker Avenue Local Nature Reserve) for 20 years and work with community groups and parish councils on their local environmental projects throughout the district. The woodland management is a statutory function for the Council under the National Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 for biodiversity enhancement and climate change mitigation. The organisation was called for interview and, although it was clear that their work had both clear social and environmental outcomes, there was some concern felt by the Panel that they were not meeting some of their targets. Consequently, the work was put out to a full tender process. There was considerable interest but TCV won the contract as none of the other organisations had the range of skills and experience. They now have a new 12 month contract which will be extended for a further 3 years if performance targets are met.
- 3.3 **Lincoln & District Dial-a-Ride (LADAR)** were also called for interview to clarify their role and social impact in West Lindsey. It is clear that their work is important for the people using the service and provides an essential lifeline. The Panel agreed to continue funding and, since then, it has been possible to provide a joint contract between all the council funders i.e. Lincolnshire County Council, Lincoln City Council, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey.
- 3.4 The Review Panel was specifically asked to include the **Gainsborough Adventure Playground Association (GAPA)** in the review. It was felt that the details around GAPA had already been well researched and the social importance of the organisation in one of the Council's Priority Areas could not be overlooked. Consequently, the recommendation was that financial support is restored to GAPA at £15,000 per annum.
- 3.5 **Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust** is paid a small sum each year to administer the Biodiversity Partnership, now the Local Nature Partnership. It was deemed that this was not really within the scope of this review as the monitoring of the Biodiversity Action Plan is a statutory function.
- 3.6 **Act Now!** Is a small community theatre group for disabled adults and has operated from the Trinity Arts Centre for many years. In addition to free facilities at Trinity, the group has enjoyed an annual grant of £2,000 for running costs. They have not always needed all this so, after discussions with the group, support has been reduced by 50%. There is now also a Letter of Agreement in place which covers funding and use of the Trinity Arts Centre.
- 3.7 A payment to Gainsborough Town Council for **The Riverside Festival** has been cut as this was tied into a 3 year agreement which has

finished and the Town Council is currently reviewing the future of the Festival.

- 3.8 This completed Phase 1 of the Review which was reported to, and endorsed by, the Policy and Resources Committee on 21st February 2013. Phase 2 looked at the remaining organisations with longer funding agreements in place and the support for the infrastructure organisations.
- 3.9 **Community Lincs** are a key partner in many community-focussed activities within the Council's Localism programme and hold a number of specific, time-limited contracts in addition to a Service Level Agreement. The review just covered the SLA which funds support for community-led planning, village halls and funding advice and it was agreed that it was important for this service to continue.
- 3.10 **The Churches Festival** is run by a volunteer committee with professional support from Gainsborough Town Council's Events Officer (GTC). The Panel were keen to continue support for this event as it brought considerable tourist interest into the District and local businesses reported an increase in takings on the weekends of the festival. GTC is no longer in a position to support the event so a new contract has been drawn up solely with the Churches Festival Committee.
- 3.11 **Lincolnshire Sports Partnership** are the county co-ordinators for sport and manage a number of sports development programmes and funding pots. The Council has traditionally supported them through a small 'core' grant but there was also a larger contract to provide sports development support and to organise and manage the West Lindsey Run Series. The review of this work was coordinated with the leisure review and, as a result, new arrangements are in place which will increase external funding and reduce the council's commitment into the future. By 'joining up' this work it will be possible to obtain greater coherence and better value for money.
- 3.12 The Panel were also asked to look at the work of **Gainsborough House** as part of the Review. The Council does not directly fund Gainsborough House but the property is owned by the Council and leased at a peppercorn rent. This arrangement is in place until 2017. The organisation responsible for Gainsborough House runs it as a mini voluntary sector hub where a number of voluntary agencies ply their trade. E.g CAB outreach, AgeUK, RVS and the community car scheme. It is well-used and highly regarded by the user groups. Both the Review Panel and Property Services were satisfied that the property was being well looked after and there would be no problem with renewing the lease at the appropriate time. It was also suggested that the work at Gainsborough House is not as well-known as it should be and it would be worth them giving a presentation to Full Council at some time in the future.

- 3.13 **YaSiG** was dealt with separately and did not, in the end, form part of this review. It has now merged with Hill Holt Wood and is operating from the Tollhouse as 'The Bridge'. There is no future funding requirement from the Council.
- 3.14 It is worth noting that, with the exception of the Riverside Festival and Act Now, formal Service Level Agreements were in place with all the organisations and being monitored by the relevant officer. There is a perception among some Members that grants were handed out year on year without any scrutiny and this is not the case. A considerable amount of work had already been done prior to this review to ensure that professional relationships existed with the organisations in receipt of funding.

4 Infrastructure support

- 4.1 Parallel to this review there have been county-wide discussions on how to develop and support a voluntary sector infrastructure that can deliver a universal service across the county. 'Voluntary sector infrastructure' means organisations that support other organisations across a range of general services which include: constitution and governance support; volunteer recruitment and management; funding bid writing; office services; training etc. In effect, these functions are provided by the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS). In West Lindsey these services are provided by Urban Challenge (now trading as Voluntary Centre Services) and VCS West Lindsey operates from the Guildhall.
- 4.2 The county-wide review has established that Lincolnshire County Council will let one central contract for core services and each District will make their own contribution and set any additional targets or performance measures which they require. The County council contract will be for two years.
- 4.3 Like Community Lincs, **VCS West Lindsey** is a key partner in the delivery of the Council's Localism programme and support will continue.

5 Call Connect Plus

- 5.1 This is a commercial service run by LCC but has developed from the old Market Rasen & Gainsborough Dial-a-Rides. It is currently in the 3rd year of a 3 year SLA and at end of this period the cost of the service will be reviewed. There is the possibility of a refund if the Council's contributions over the 3 year period have exceeded 50% of the cost of the service. This will not be known until April 2014.
- 5.2 There are some very robust statistics on how the service is run and the benefits it brings. Unlike a pure Dial-a-Ride scheme, this service is open to anyone but it is clear that this is not widely understood. The service needs much wider publicity and the Council should consider how it can help with this. There was already funding in the forward plan to continue support for the scheme and details will need to be agreed at contract end.

6 Financial profile for future support

- 6.1 During the course of the review, the level of support for each organisation was examined and opportunities were taken to reduce the budget where possible including applying the general principle of no inflationary uplift where new contracts allowed. Previously, payments that were in the forward plan were automatically given an inflationary increase.
- 6.2 The table below shows the results of this and these figures are within the current Medium Term Financial Plan. The Council may choose to look at this further in future years, but the Review has been sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the original objectives have been met and the Council is supporting organisations appropriately and in line with Corporate Plan objectives.

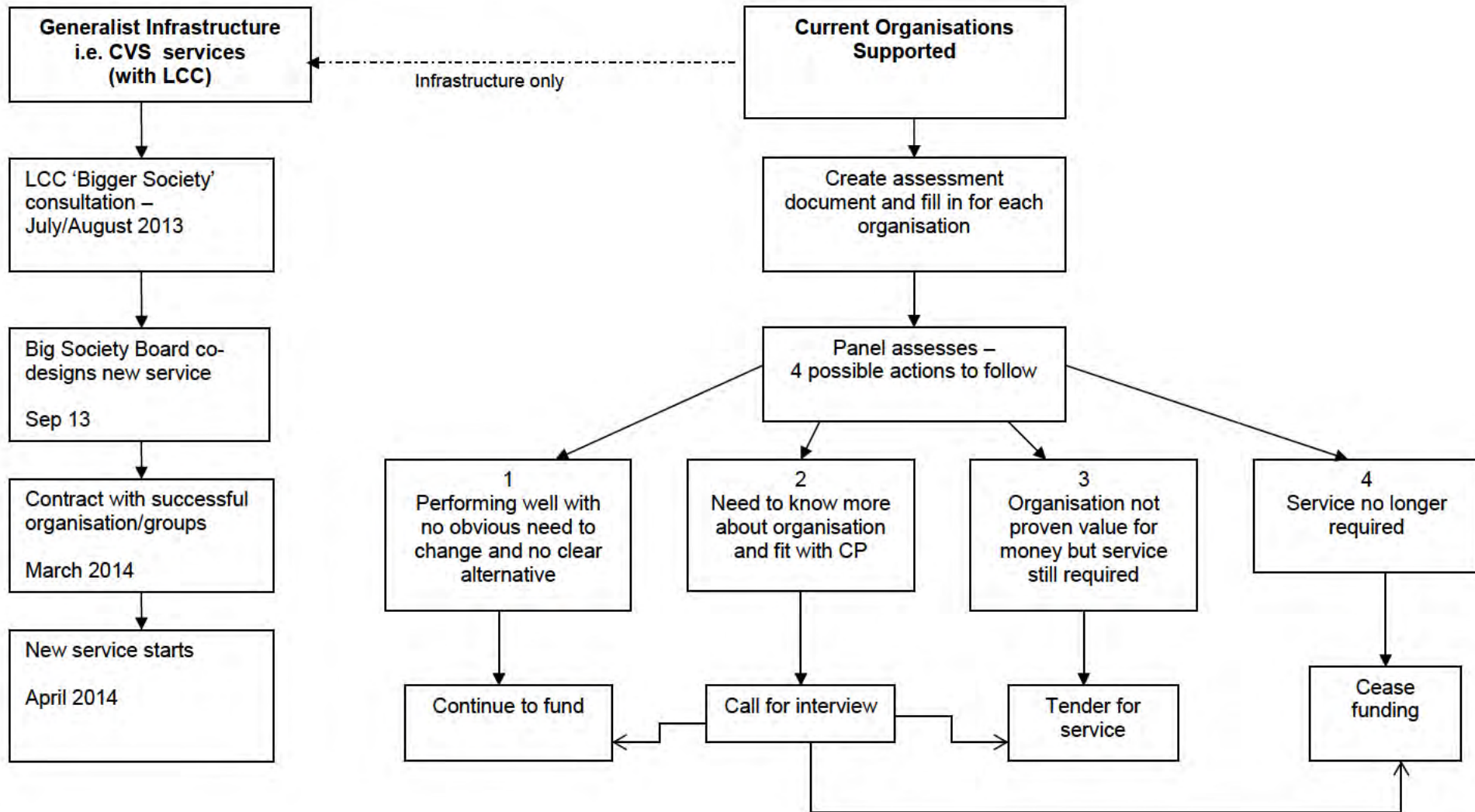
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Dial-a-ride Lincoln	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000
Act Now Project	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
The Conservation Volunteers	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
GAPA	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
Urban Challenge	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Lincs Sports Partnership	21,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
Lincoln CAB	12,700	12,700	12,700	12,700	12,700
Community Lincs	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
West Lindsey CAB	47,500	47,500	47,500	47,500	47,500
Churches Festival	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000
Total VCS support	188,200	171,200	171,200	171,200	171,200
Call Connect Plus (LCC)	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Total all organisations	223,200	206,200	206,200	206,200	206,200

- 6.3 All Service Level Agreements being renewed this time are for 3 years, subject to satisfactory performance and the Council's ability to pay. The TCV contract is for 1 year + 3 with the three years only being agreed if performance is satisfactory in the first 12 months. These arrangements conform to national Best Practice Guidelines and Compact Principles for working with the voluntary sector.


RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Members NOTE the contents of the report and thank the Voluntary Sector Review Panel for their work.

Appendix 1 – Voluntary Sector Review Processes



Appendix 2 – Assessment Form

		Voluntary Sector Review 2012 Organisation Assessment Report	
Name of Organisation:			
Legal/governance Structure:			
Overall purpose of organisation/group:			
Current role with WLDC:			
Current performance measures:			
Current performance against agreed measures:			
Fit with Corporate Plan:			
Are there additional opportunities to explore?			
Impact of not funding/reducing funding:			
Social			
Financial			
Reputational			
Other market possibilities:			
Panel decision on next steps:			
Continue to fund			
Call for interview			
Tender for service			
Cease funding			
Other comments/considerations:			