

Report of:	Head of Housing & Partnerships
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Key Decision:	No
Report Track:	Cabinet: 11/11/21

Cabinet
11 November 2021
Voluntary Sector Community Support

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Members about the work undertaken to support the recovery of the voluntary sector from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic with funding allocated to Support Staffordshire by Cabinet in November 2020.
- 1.2 To obtain Cabinet approval for a further grant allocation to Support Staffordshire to continue their work with voluntary organisations recovering from the impact of the pandemic and explore and recommend options for establishing “anchor” organisation arrangements in the District.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the work of Support Staffordshire with the local voluntary sector over the last 12 months as set out in section 3, using their core funding from Staffordshire County Council and the additional funding provided by the District Council agreed by Cabinet in November 2020.
- 2.2 To recommend that Cabinet approve a grant allocation of £11,150 to Support Staffordshire for a period of 16 months from December 2021 to March 2023 – this to deliver an additional 5 hours per week to undertake local work, over and above that undertaken through the contact Support Staffordshire have in place with Staffordshire County Council:
- (i) to continue to support to the recovery of local voluntary sector organisations from the impact of their operations of the pandemic;
 - (ii) to identify and advise on options for anchor organisation arrangements in the District to signpost people to organisations that can support them.

More details of the proposed activity are set out in section 5.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations

Key Issues

- 3.1 While there was a significant increase in volunteering during the pandemic, much of this was focussed on emergency support to vulnerable and isolating people – typically ensuring access to food and medication and befriending phone calls. Some of the capacity came from people who were furloughed from their jobs and so had time to volunteer. An emergency food response has been maintained for people without access to support and who have to self-isolate due to contracting coronavirus. This has been made possible by Rugeley Community Church and the Hednesford and Cannock Salvation Army churches all working with local foodbanks and local networks.
- 3.2 The voluntary sector faces a number of challenges recovering from the impact of the pandemic and responding to needs such as loneliness and social isolation:
- (i) Some volunteers who ran long standing voluntary activities were themselves isolating due to their age and health conditions and, while some of these organisations continued to function “virtually”, restarting their traditional face to face activities has been challenging.
 - (ii) Some people who had previously attended events and regular activities organised by volunteers had also been isolating due to their age and health conditions and need to be supported to give them confidence to return to face to face participation.
 - (iii) Some of the venues used by volunteers to hold their events and activities are not available due to on-going restrictions on gatherings – indeed some venues (for example community libraries) remain closed to such activities.
- 3.3 Support Staffordshire is funded by Staffordshire County Council to support the voluntary sector across the County and provides services in Cannock through this core funding. Support Staffordshire employ a Senior Locality Officer, with dedicated hours equivalent to two days a week in Cannock, supporting a District wide locality forum of voluntary organisations, advice and development work for the sector and partnership meetings with local public sector organisations. Support Staffordshire also employ a Community Officer, with dedicated hours equivalent to two days a week in Cannock, to deliver neighbourhood level support in areas of need, working with small informal groups and supporting local actions.
- 3.4 At its meeting in November 2020 Cabinet agreed funding for Support Staffordshire for additional hours to work with volunteers and voluntary groups within the District to address these challenges and to encourage and facilitate the formation of new groups to meet local needs. The additional funding agreed in November 2020 allowed these officers to provide an enhanced service locally focussed on helping organisations to re-start their face-to-face activities – supporting volunteers, identifying venues and reaching out to people who would benefit from services provided.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.5 Some other Districts and Boroughs in the County have established “anchor organisation” arrangements which help to co-ordinate voluntary sector activity. This proved especially valuable during period of lockdown and shielding. Other Districts and Boroughs, including Cannock Chase, do not have such anchor organisations. This resulted in signposting having to be undertaken by officers of the District Council based on local knowledge. While this was done during to meet demands of the pandemic, by re-allocating officers to this activity, it is not a sustainable model as, under normal circumstances, there is very limited capacity for this work.
- 3.6 The strength of existing networks is variable across the District. There is a good infrastructure operating across Rugeley and Brereton, including Good Neighbour schemes. There are also close working relationships in Chads Moor, Heath Hayes and Wimblebury and other local communities. The south of the District, around Cannock Town centre and the east, and around Hednesford, have a much more limited infrastructure. If anchor arrangements could be established to cover the District, this would help to signpost people to the support available and give, particularly smaller voluntary sector organisations, an infrastructure to work within.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report supports the Council's Corporate priority Supporting Health and Wellbeing – specifically the objective Supporting Vulnerable People. The delivery plan for this objective includes working with the voluntary sector and working with Support Staffordshire to build on community spirit, volunteering, befriending and advocacy.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The District Council does not currently have the capacity to support the development of groups, nor does the Council have staff in roles to signpost people to support from the voluntary sector. Support Staffordshire can provide on-going support to the recovery of the sector and explore options for the establishment of “Anchor” arrangements across Cannock Chase District. Experience during the pandemic showed that there is not currently a single organisation covering the whole District willing and able to take on this role.
- 5.2 Ideally a single “Anchor” organisation might be formed to co-ordinate volunteer and voluntary organisation activities. This was a strength during periods of lockdown and shielding in those areas of the County that had an arrangement of this type in place, resulting in less pressure being placed on local authorities in those areas. In Cannock Chase, the absence of an Anchor organisation meant redeployment of officers from other duties to perform the signposting function.
- 5.3 Given the variation in voluntary organisation and volunteer capacity across the District, and the different network arrangements that exist, it may be that a model based on more than one anchor organisation might be more suitable. In some localities there may be an option to involve town and parish councils.

- 5.4 Another option would be to commission targeted support from a single specialist organisation, although such an arrangement might be costly and have an impact on established voluntary organisations by “crowding out” volunteer activity.
- 5.5 This report proposes funding for Support Staffordshire to continue with and build on their work on the recovery of the voluntary sector, but focus in particular on options for anchor arrangements. This should result in proposals being brought back to Cabinet during 2022-23.
- 5.6 The additional funding recommended in this report will allow Support Staffordshire to continue to provide an enhanced support service, but with greater emphasis placed on advising on whether the District might benefit from the establishment of “anchor” arrangements. Support Staffordshire will:
- (i) Identify and assess existing “anchor” arrangements that exist across the District and understand how they operate - their strengths and challenges they face.
 - (ii) In areas without established anchor organisations, identify the potential for existing organisations or partnerships to grow and step up into the role of an anchor organisation for their locality, or the need and potential for an anchor organisation to be established.
 - (iii) Support groups to identify and respond to local issues, in particular to be able to prepare for situations which might require a rapid response.
- 5.7 Support Staffordshire will liaise with key officers of the District Council as this work progresses and complete a report of recommendations and options for the District Council to address the need for the development of anchor arrangements across the District. This report should be completed by the end of May 2022, six months after the start of the funding.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

Grant allocation of £11,150 to Support Staffordshire for the period December 2021-March 2023 to fund 5 additional hours per week.

This will draw on government funding received through County to respond to the needs of local people during the pandemic.

6.2 Legal

None.

6.3 Human Resources

None.

6.4 Risk Management

Staffordshire County Council contract with Support Staffordshire ends in July 2022. The County's tendering process for the new contract begins in early 2022. Should Support Staffordshire not secure the contract beyond July 2022 this may impact on their ability to undertake this work. It would be appropriate in the circumstances to make quarterly payments for the work so that this risk can be managed.

6.5 Equality & Diversity

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken on this proposal. If and when options for anchor arrangements are progressed this will need to be assessed. Given the nature of the support we are aiming to facilitate, any improvements to the system for vulnerable people are likely to have a particularly positive effect on older people and people with disabilities, but this will need to be properly assessed in due course.

6.6 Climate Change

None.

7 Appendices to the Report

None.

Previous Consideration

None.

Background Papers

Covid-19: Task Force and Community Hub Response, March to July 2020 – Cabinet – 12 November 2020.