



# Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Report for:</b>	Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Title of report:</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Approach
<b>Date:</b>	6th December 2023
<b>Report on behalf of:</b>	Councillor Sheron Wilkie, Portfolio Holder for Place
<b>Part:</b>	I
<b>If Part II, reason:</b>	N/A
<b>Appendices:</b>	1. Review of Services Findings
<b>Background papers:</b>	None
<b>Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:</b>	VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector

## Report Author / Responsible Officer

Diane Southam – Assistant Director Place Community and Enterprise



<b>Corporate Priorities</b>	Building strong and vibrant communities Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Purpose of the report:</b>	To provide details of the proposed direct grant award approach for the Voluntary and Community Sector
<b>Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):</b>	1. That Members note the report and identify any comments or recommendations to Cabinet
<b>Period for post policy/project review:</b>	N/A

## 1. Background

- 1.1. In 2016 the Council agreed to formalise its relationship with the voluntary sector through contracts rather than grant giving and the Council's standing orders were updated to reflect this change. A procurement process was undertaken to commission Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) providers to deliver a range of services.
- 1.2. Four contracts were commissioned:
  - Information, Advice and Advocacy, delivered by **Citizens Advice Dacorum**
  - Supporting the Voluntary Sector, delivered by **Community Action Dacorum**
  - Reducing Social Isolation for Older People, delivered by **Age UK Dacorum**
  - Promoting Healthy Relationships, delivered by **Relate London North West and Hertfordshire, and Mediation Herts.**
- 1.3. These contracts were awarded in 2016 on a 3 year plus 2 year extension basis and were further extended due to COVID-19.
- 1.4. Following a decision by Commercial Board in March 2023 and a subsequent Portfolio Holder Decision, the contracts will be extended to allow the a review of services to determine the best commissioning approach and subsequently undertake a commissioning process.
- 1.5. A summary of the findings from this review of services is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.6. On 26 July 2023, SLT agreed that a grants based approach should be taken for the commissioning of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) services.
- 1.7. This followed reports to Commercial Board and consultation with VCS partners including at the council facilitated conference in May 2023.
- 1.8. There is a need to ensure a mature, flexible, targeted and sustainable approach to supporting our VCS partners.
- 1.9. The recommended approach applies only to the four main current contracts and does not take into account separate commissions with the VCS partners.
- 1.10. On 11 October 2023, SLT agreed to the direct grant award process as set out in this report

## 2. Issue/Proposal

- 2.1. Following the SLT report on 26 July 2023, and further consultation, research and internal engagement with the AD Housing Operations and Safe Communities, it is recommended that a direct grant is awarded to the four existing contract holders (Citizens Advice Dacorum, Community Action Dacorum, Herts Age UK and Relate/Mediation).
- 2.2. This approach will come with a strict and in depth monitoring process to ensure the funding will support intended target groups and provides desired outcomes.
- 2.3. By implementing a robust monitoring approach, we will also be able to more effectively identify gaps in delivery and through the use of other grant funding, engage (where relevant) other VCS partners to deliver services to meet such gaps. Examples include delivery of activity for Humanitarian Response Programme, targeted skills based development, mental health and empowerment and support to developing social enterprise.

- 2.4. It is recommended that the grant awards are made for a period of 3 years with an option to extend for 2 years upon review.
- 2.5. This provides a mature approach to supporting the sustainability and resilience of our VCS partners, enabling them to plan in a longer term way. These points were raised at the VCS Conference in May 2023.
- 2.6. The council has developed a close working relationship with all four organisations who are experts in their fields and have local knowledge of local needs.
- 2.7. The proposed principles for this approach are as follows:
- Support a wider range of services and groups to ensure all sections of the community benefit from the grants scheme and address the challenges facing Dacorum residents.
  - Support services and activities that are inclusive and promote cohesion
  - Provide long-term funding to VCS organisations in return for efficient and effective services
  - Provide VCS partners with flexibility in the operations of their services, providing agility to respond to changing and emerging priorities and facilitate innovation (which might otherwise be constrained by strict adherence to commissioning based KPIs)
  - Achieve value for money
  - Improve partnership working between local VCS organisations and support the long term sustainability of the sector.
- 2.8. VCS partners will be required to:
- Provide detailed demographic data of clients and identify trends to be able to shift and flex provision
  - This will also support decisions around targeting relevant council services
  - This information will also support local GPs and health providers making decisions around targeted outreach or community based initiatives
  - Work with existing outreach networks across the council and partners to ensure maximum reach and engagement with all residents.
  - Provide strategic governance and policy statements including but not limited to safeguarding policies, engagement policies and annual reports and work programmes.
- 2.9. The council will need to
- Increase engagement with VCS partners and other council services such as Housing, as well as external partners such as local GPs and health providers to ensure a coordinated approach to the delivery of services that will avoid duplication and maximise outcomes
  - Develop a detailed monitoring and engagement plan and procedure to ensure sustainable and effective funding agreements and performance monitoring
  - Provide regular reports to SLT and members
  - Monitor trends and ensure VCS services are targeted accordingly.
- 2.10. The new funding agreements effective from 2024/25 will have outcomes based on the current services provided under the current contracts, allowing for the flex to respond to emerging issues described above.
- 2.11. The four funding agreements proposed are:
- 2.11.1 Information, Advice and Advocacy – Citizens Advice Dacorum
- Citizens Advice Dacorum provide general advice and information to local residents across a variety of areas and issues, and in particular over the last

year in relation to the cost of living (including energy advice) and mental health. In particular there has been an increase in support sought from the 'Just About Managing' group of residents

- Required outcomes:
  - Residents can access information, advice and advocacy to resolve issues
  - People are able to resolve issues in the future
  - The Information, Advice and Advocacy offered has a positive impact on resident's health and wellbeing
  - The Information, Advice and Advocacy offered has a positive impact on resident's financial circumstances
  - Information, Advice and Advocacy can be accessed by all local people
  - People have access to additional support services following the Information, Advice and Advocacy they receive
  - People are satisfied with the service they receive
  - Dacorum Borough Council Housing tenants are supported to maintain their tenancy.

#### 2.11.2 Supporting the Voluntary Sector – Community Action Dacorum

- Community Action Dacorum works closely with local organisations to ensure they are supported and sustainable
- Required outcomes:
  - Funding advice and guidance is provided to partners and local organisations
  - Support is provided to volunteering in the borough including recruitment and training
  - Local DBS checking service provided
  - Governance advice is provided to local charities and organisations
  - Connecting local charities with businesses
  - Helping people back into work or training
  - Giving learning to those who lack opportunities.

#### 2.11.3 Reducing Social Isolation – Herts Age UK

- Target group is older people and funds Centre in the Park to provide day centre services to the elderly such as hot food, hairdressing, chiropody and bathing facilities
- Other required outcomes:
  - Handy man service providing general repair and garden services
  - Outreach services such as coffee and chat mornings at residential care homes and supported housing
  - Information and sign posting in particular in relation to benefits and energy advice.

#### 2.11.4 Promoting Healthy Relationships – Relate Dacorum, Watford and Three Rivers with Mediation Hertfordshire

- Required outcomes:
  - To support residents in Dacorum to develop skills to effectively improve their relationships at home, in the community and in the workplace
  - Services to have a positive impact on people's mental health and drive positive behaviours, creating strong and vibrant communities
  - Also focussed on supporting Dacorum BC tenants and in particular in relation to neighbourhood disputes

➤ Relationship and couple guidance.

2.12. These outcomes will be further refined to align with the demographic data, trend analysis etc. that will be reporting requirements within the funding agreements.

### 3. Options

3.1 An alternative grant approach was considered that provided for an application process to be followed.

3.2 During the consideration to this approach, and in discussion with the AD for Housing Operations and Safe Communities, some challenges to this approach were highlighted

- The amount of budget available for the grant process, and to offer grants to any other VCS groups or services would mean a reduction in the grant funding available for the key services currently provided
- It is considered that any reduction in funding for these four main areas would result in a reduction in support from these four key partners and this would have a negative impact on residents and would likely increase the demand on council's statutory services and staff.
- An application process may raise expectations across VCS partners that cannot be met by allocating grant funding
- The outcomes and services as described in section 10 are still the core services we need the VCS to support, allowing for the flex in target groups or issues as described and the current providers are considered the best local organisations to continue with this service provision

### 4. Risks

As identified in the report

### 5. Financial Implications

5.1 Approval has already been given to include the inflation growth into the new grant payments.

5.2 If the recommended approach is approved, grant payments for 2024/25 will be as shown in the table below. The payments include 2023/24 inflation provision. Payments will be further increased for 2024/25 once inflation growth has been approved as part of the budget setting process.

	General Fund	HRA	Total
Citizens Advice Dacorum	175,400	25,300	200,700
Community Action Dacorum	143,100	0	143,100
Herts Age UK	79,500	28,100	107,600
Relate/Mediation	82,900	11,200	94,100
Total	480,900	64,600	545,500

5.3 These sums are currently included in the council's revenue budget.

- 5.4 Closer working across AD remits, with focussed monitoring and scrutiny will also ensure value for money is more effectively measured for the General Fund and HRS.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 There will be continued engagement with the VCS partners to set the requirements of the grant funding agreement.
- 6.2 A report will be presented to Cabinet in December to agree the proposed approach which will include a recommendation to Council to amend the Constitution as required.
- 6.3 This will provide for an outcome based approach and allow the flexibility to the sector to respond to demand, whilst providing the environment for collaborative working.