

Review of Services - Findings

1. In line with the Commercial Board approval in March 2023, a full review of the current contracts was carried out (Appendix 1). This was followed by a questionnaire to VCS partners asking them to provide feedback on demand and to identify what they consider to be priorities moving forward (Appendix 2). Herts Insight platform was used to provide a statistical evidence background and set the framework for identifying priorities.
2. Having identified headline issues through the survey and research work, the council held a VCS Conference on 25 May 2023 to feedback on the research which had been undertaken, test thinking and explore ideas with sector leaders.
3. The aim of the session was to:
 - a. present key findings from Dacorum Borough Council work in relation to the Community and Voluntary sector, and test and confirm emerging priorities (as set out in 4 below);
 - b. explore the impact and effect these themes might have, and how they might develop over the coming 2-4 year timeframe;
 - c. secure greater commitment from and understanding between the VCS and the Council so that re-commissioning happens in a more targeted and coordinated manner.
4. The conference agreed on a set of key priorities to inform the future funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector;
 - a. Support the development and sustainability of the Voluntary and Community Sector.
 - b. Ensure advice, advocacy and support is easily accessible by all residents.
 - c. Supporting households who are just about managing - Individuals in lower paid employment with no access to benefits.
 - d. Addressing Health Inequalities and in particular mental health issues
 - e. Targeted interventions to support specific groups of residents
5. A number of areas of thinking and recommendations to be developed further, fell out of these key themes. This included the need for the council to develop a commissioning approach that sets out the strategic relationship between the council and the VCS, maximises its investment through an approach which develops the VCS and drives collaboration not competition.
6. At the conference, it was also suggested by a number of VCS partners that improved outcomes would be achieved through providing grants rather than commissioning contracts. It was felt that grants invest in the voluntary sector, allowing for greater agility and responsiveness, whereas commissioning contracts from the sector leading to output driven working practices. This needs to include a balance of core strategic investment to build the sector, and recognising the value of smaller pots to have impact in a more agile way.