

REVIEW OF GRANT PROVIDED TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ACTION EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE (VCAEC)

AIM OF REVIEW

The Council is committed to ensuring that all residents have access to services that meet their needs. It is recognised that the district is evolving as well as dealing with the impacts of Covid-19 therefore it is essential that services are in place to effectively meet the needs of communities, in particular those that are most vulnerable.

This review is to determine whether a future grant to VCAEC is effectively meeting the aims of the Council to deliver these required services and to ensure that the approach taken by the Council is the most cost effective and that best value is being achieved.

BACKGROUND

The Council currently provides grant funding (through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to VCAEC to provide a 'one stop shop' which delivers quality services, through volunteers, to local people; and advice and information to voluntary and community groups and volunteers. It is an umbrella organisation providing generic infrastructure support to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations within East Cambridgeshire.

In 2020/21 a grant of £19,928 was awarded to VCAEC.

This grant is not guaranteed to VCAEC beyond 2020/21. A decision to award a grant is undertaken on an annual basis.

REVIEW SCOPE

This review will:

- Identify the services included in the SLA
- Identify similar or identical services to those listed within the SLA that are delivered by other organisations to East Cambridgeshire communities
- Identify any duplication of services and opportunities to deliver enhanced service to residents
- Assess volume and demand for services outlined in the SLA
- Evaluate performance and the quality of services provided by VCAEC
- Develop an options appraisal to outline the advantages and disadvantages of options available to the Council
- Identify funding to support delivery of best possible service to residents

SERVICES WITHIN THE VCAEC SLA

The SLA includes the following services:

- Providing networking and training opportunities through the delivery of training and networking events
- Supporting voluntary and community groups through assistance with matters such as account management, policies, procedures, governance and safeguarding; and through the sharing of relevant information
- Supporting new groups
- Promotion of VCAEC services and the sector
- Responding to consultations on behalf of the sector and having input into policies on behalf of the sector
- Assisting groups with funding queries, searches and applications

- Responding to volunteer enquiries and seek to find suitable placements for prospective volunteers
- Attending multi-agency meetings representing the voice of the sector
- Conducting surveys of clients to inform service delivery and carry out research into unmet social needs
- Providing volunteering opportunities for local people through the delivery of a social car scheme and gardening programme

SIMILAR SERVICES PROVIDED BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS

In September 2016, CCC began commissioning Support Cambridgeshire to provide CVS infrastructure support throughout the county, including East Cambs. Some of these services overlap with VCAEC's including training and networking; support and advice to CVS organisations; as well as representation and voice. Support Cambridgeshire also provide volunteer services however not in the way VCAEC do (who will seek to match a volunteer up with a role and provide them advice and information). Support Cambridgeshire promote alternative methods of volunteering, such as Time Banks. They provide factsheets, toolkits and training courses. There are also national organisations that advertise volunteering opportunities online such as Reach Volunteering and Charity Job. There are a variety of social car schemes operating locally in East Cambs that cover specific villages that use volunteer drivers and receive a subsidy from CCC, such as The Three Rivers Car Scheme and the Burwell Village Help Scheme, however these are specific to certain parishes and not district wide. Community transport schemes operating in East Cambs such as ESACT are not operated by local volunteers and use paid drivers. Local Time Banks may provide opportunities for individuals to assist others in the community with tasks such as gardening however coverage is limited to the area where schemes are operating.

PERFORMANCE, VOLUME AND DEMAND FOR SERVICES

When comparing 2016/17 and 2019/20's end of year performance monitoring data, there has been some decrease in CVS infrastructure services provided by VCAEC, as illustrated in the table below:

Function	2016/17 Output	2019/20 Output
General CVS enquiries dealt with	122	108
Training courses provided	4	3
Groups that were assisted with development work requiring longer term engagement	43	29

These decreases may be due to the fact that CCC are commissioning other organisations via the Support Cambridgeshire contract to deliver CVS infrastructure support services in East Cambridgeshire. VCAEC have recognised that there has been a decrease in CVS infrastructure related enquiries to assist with and since 2019/20 has been proactively seeking to engage with community groups in other ways, an example of this is through the delivery of parish council surgeries. There are 145 voluntary and community groups that are members of VCAEC which is the same number as in 2016/17. In 2016, VCAEC also stopped receiving funding from CCC and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) (which equated to approximately 50% of VCAEC's core funding received from external agencies). At the time, VCAEC informed ECDC that they would still be able to provide all of the services within the SLA and did not envisage a reduction in service delivery. In 2020, VCAEC advised that while they have been able to continue provide all of the services outlined in the SLA, such a considerable reduction in funding and consequent resources (including staff) has meant a slight decrease in volume of some services.

When comparing 2016/17 and 2019/20's end of year performance monitoring data, there was a decrease in the number of Do-It (volunteering) website enquiries dealt with, however, in 2019/20, VCAEC dealt with 172 volunteer enquiries which may indicate that volunteers are accessing other volunteer information services in other ways; in fact, there was an increase of 14 known volunteer

placements when comparing the two years. In 2020, VCAEC advised that the Do-It website was receiving less traffic than in 2016 which they advise is due to less investment and promotion. They also advised that many, especially larger organisations, are increasingly advertising volunteer opportunities directly through other means, such as via their own websites. VCAEC advised that as less people are using the Do-It website, then their volunteer support services have become more important and valuable to the sector.

Due to VCAEC no longer receiving funding from CCC or the CCG, they have had to focus on ensuring the financial sustainability of all of their services to maintain their existing services and be resilient in the event of any future loss of third party funding. VCAEC is able to generate some income via their projects delivered by local volunteers (CCC provide a 13p for every mile driven by the social car scheme and end users of the Helping Hands gardening scheme are asked to contribute a suggested voluntary donation of £25 per hour). The gardening scheme costs approximately £30,000 per annum to run and without voluntary donations it would not be viable, and although VCAEC suggest that users of the scheme pay a voluntary contribution, they assess all gardening jobs on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the circumstances of the service user thus resulting in some service users not contributing any voluntary donation, some paying a proportion of the suggested amount and others happy to pay the full voluntary donation. In August 2020, VCAEC advised ECDC that larger jobs that require considerable time and resources may not be able to be carried out without any voluntary donation from the recipient of the service, although in these circumstances VCAEC advised that a part job may be able to be arranged. VCAEC advised that it may not be viable for them to do carry out these larger jobs as it could mean that other vulnerable people would miss out if resources were being used up elsewhere taking up considerable time.

Demand for these services continues to increase, as the figures below illustrate:

Scheme	Measure	2016/17 Output	2019/20 Output
Social Car Scheme	Number of car scheme journeys	3,471	7,342
	No of volunteer driver hours	7,409	8,890
Helping Hands Gardening Scheme	No of volunteer hours worked	6,565	7,224
	No of referrals/customers	209	276
	No of tasks completed	303	327

The additional demands for services have meant more volunteer hours being provided, resulting in an increase in social return on investment (£12 x number of volunteer hours provided). In September 2020, VCAEC advised that approximately 25,000 volunteer hours are provided each year through the delivery of their services (through office based volunteers, volunteer drivers, volunteer gardeners and trustees) equating to £300,000 social return on investment.

2019/20's surveys of the car scheme and gardening scheme, also suggest that the services remain in high demand and is valued by end users. The car scheme survey identified that almost all users thought the service was either 'vital' or 'important', and that the scheme provided respite for carers, and that users saw it as a cheaper alternative to other methods of transport. The car scheme is aimed at East Cambs residents that are elderly, frail, disabled, isolated or experiencing financial hardship. The Helping Hands survey stated that more resources were required to expand the scope of the service and increase equipment for the team. All respondents advised that the service was either 'vital' or 'important' and 95% indicated that they would use the service again. The gardening service is aimed at people who are unable to tend to their gardens themselves due to age, illness or disability. The popularity of these schemes is evidenced by the rise in usage of the services. The gardening scheme has the resources to deal with heavy-duty jobs where gardens that may have been left unmaintained long-term over long periods of time.

Not only do the car scheme and gardening scheme benefit the end users, there are many benefits to the volunteers providing these services including enhancing confidence, employability skills, communication skills and giving them a sense of purpose. Many of VCAEC's volunteers are long term unemployed, socially excluded or have mental health issues.

There are other organisations providing similar services in East Cambs as outlined in this report however despite this, demand for VCAEC's services provided by volunteers remain in increasingly high demand and are valued by users.

Due to Covid-19, it is anticipated that these services will continue to remain in high demand as 80% of appointments for the car scheme are medical related, and as appointments that were initially paused restart, demands for cheaper transport is likely to remain. The requirement for gardening services for vulnerable people has been raised as a demand by the East Cambs Covid-19 community support and mutual aid groups therefore it is also anticipated that demand for these services will remain high. In October 2020, VCAEC advised that they could potentially redeploy some of their volunteers to respond to Covid-19 demands if called upon and assist with requests such as medication and shopping. VCAEC advised that are currently exploring longer term opportunities to assist local communities with the coordination of volunteers to assist during Covid-19 and beyond. They advised that they have aspirations to recruit a local bank of volunteers that could be called upon to assist with local initiatives and events. In addition to their regular activities, VCAEC has assisted in local Covid-19 efforts by issuing calls to action to volunteers, provided safeguarding advice to local groups, they are able to assist local mutual aid groups by providing advice and guidance and they assisted in the delivery of the East Cambs Covid-19 Hub magazines using local volunteers.

OPTIONS APPRAISAL

<p>Option 1: Enter into a one year SLA with VCAEC using existing SLA criteria with inclusion of support towards Covid-19 Recovery efforts and Think Communities approaches. The SLA will include new measures for reporting against performance including presentations provided by VCAEC to the Council's Operational Services Committee three times a year</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal disruption to services • Demand for VCAEC services remains high, especially the volunteer car scheme and gardening scheme, and as a result of Covid-19, demand for both CVS infrastructure support and volunteer services could increase • Guarantee that services that are in high demand will continue to be provided • The grant provided allows VCAEC stability to explore other income streams • No reputational damage to ECDC • Fixed cost of £19,928 • No impacts on VCAEC member groups, volunteers and end users reliant on VCAEC services • Currently more than one organisation for East Cambs CVS groups and volunteers to access the support they require 	<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some duplication of services as other organisations are delivering similar services • Rigid performance targets reduce opportunities for flexible and innovative ways of working • Market not tested so unknown if value for money is being received • Over the past 3 years, there has been a decrease in the volume VCAEC's infrastructure support activity. Due to Covid-19, there may be an increase in demand for these services and due to a loss of funding from other organisation's over the past three years, VCAEC may not have the resources available to meet this increased demand (however CCC commission other organisations to provide these services also)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to incorporate support towards Covid-19 recovery efforts and Think communities approaches to add value to efforts in these areas • New reporting measures will provide further opportunities for the Council and VCAEC to work together to understand any matters arising, especially relating to the impacts of Covid-19 on the community and voluntary sector 	
<p>Option 2: Re-tender using existing SLA criteria with inclusion of support towards Covid-19 Recovery efforts and Think Communities approaches</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing the market could provide an opportunity to obtain better value, attract innovative solutions to the criteria and provide opportunity for organisations to develop a consortia to deliver services more effectively • Opportunity to incorporate support towards Covid-19 recovery efforts and Think communities approaches to add value to efforts in these areas 	<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential short-term service disruption which may have an adverse, short-term effect on the local CVS specifically VCAEC member groups, volunteers and end users • Due to the unique CVS and volunteer centre function of VCAEC, another organisation specialising in just one aspect of the operation may not be able to provide the same standard in all service areas • There is a risk that no organisations could tender which could result in a large gap in service provision at a time when it is in high demand
<p>Option 3: Re-tender SLA as lots (Lot 1: CVS infrastructure support. Lot 2: Volunteer services including project work)</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing the market could provide an opportunity to obtain better value, attract innovative solutions to the criteria and provide opportunity for organisations to develop a consortia to deliver services more effectively • Organisations specialising in one of the Lots may be able to provide an enhanced service, as oppose to if they had to provide services for both Lot 1 and 2. 	<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential short-term service disruption which may have an adverse, short-term effect on the local CVS specifically VCAEC member groups, volunteers and end users • There is a risk that no organisations could tender which could result in a large gap in service provision at a time when it is in high demand